THE CHER SHOW
Chronicling the beloved songstress's life Pg.62

BUNNIES ON THE BAYOU
Celebrating 45 Years of philanthropy Pg.26

BLACK QUEER AF
Music festival advancing the community Pg.58

MARCH '24

Out-Smart

OUR 30th YEAR

HOUSTON'S LGBTQ MAGAZINE



WOMEN in POWER

AVERY BELYEU

THE MONTROSE CENTER'S NEW CEO Pg.40

PLUS

RYAN WRIGHT

LAUREN SIMMONS

OLIVIA JULIANA

MEGHAN FAIRBANKS

MO JENKINS

DENISHA MAXEY-ESTES

Houston.hrc.org

We belong.



HRC HOUSTON DINNER

APRIL 6 | 2024

5:30pm Reception | 7pm Dinner Program
Marriot Marquis Hotel Downtown

Celebrate with us and support the fight for LGBTQ+ equality and liberation.

For $25 off tickets, use discount code **OUTSMARTMAG**



Kevin McHale
Celebrity Honoree

HUMAN RIGHTS CAMPAIGN®

Presented by PNC BANK
Member of The PNC Financial Services Group

Bunnies ON THE Bayou 45

presents

MAIN EVENT HEADLINER

TRACY YOUNG

MAIN EVENT OPENER

MARTI FRIESON

MAIN EVENT EMCEE

BLACKBERRI





MARCH 31, 2024

SESQUICENTENNIAL PARK

HOUSTON, TEXAS 1PM - 6PM

REVELRY

EASTER WEEKEND EVENTS

IGNITION | RUMBLE IN THE JUNGLE | REVEL-TEA | THE REVERLY | DNVRMX MAXXIMUS | JACK'D RABBIT

Buy tickets at bunniesonthebayou.org

presented by BUD LIGHT

LEGACY COMMUNITY HEALTH

Hewlett Packard Enterprise

Qcare+

Acadian Ambulance Service

LOVE, Tito's



MONTROSE DDS

GENERAL & COSMETIC DENTISTRY



SAMUEL A. CARRELL, DDS

620 West Alabama | Houston, TX 77006
713.529.4364 | MONTROSEDDS.COM

IN-OFFICE FINANCING AVAILABLE!



AUSTIN T. FAULK, DDS

invisalign PROVIDER CandidPro™


mistr
mistr
mistr
FREE ONLINE PrEP
...and STI testing too.
701
225
mistr.com

FEATURES

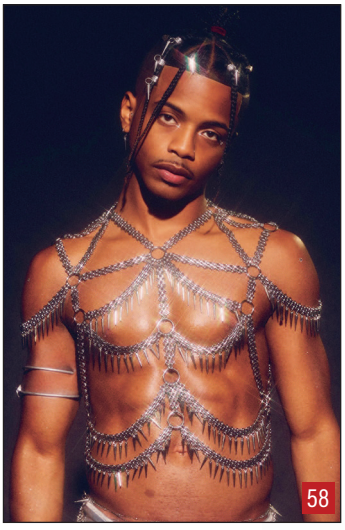


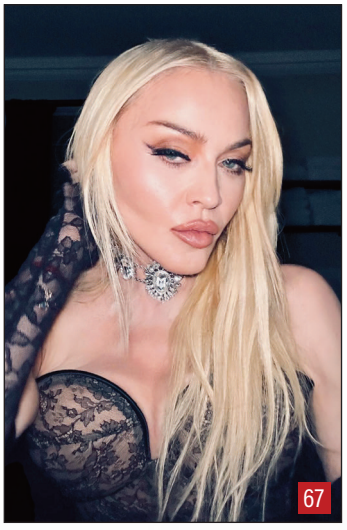












38 COVER STORY
WOMEN IN POWER
OutSmart profiles seven LGBTQ women who are making a difference

- **40** Avery Belyeu
- **44** Ryan Wright
- **46** Lauren Ashley Simmons
- **48** Olivia Julianna
- **50** Meghan Fairbanks
- **52** Mo Jenkins
- **54** Denisha Maxey-Estes

56
FAMILY MEMORIES
Dancer and choreographer Jasmine Hearn explores family lineages

58
BLACK QUEER AF WEEK
The Normal Anomaly Initiative's music festival creates inclusive spaces for Black LGBTQ Houstonians

62
A TRIBUTE TO CHER
Ella Perez stars in TUTS' production of *The Cher Show* next month

64
JIMBO COMES TO TOWN
The *RuPaul's Drag Race All-Stars* champ brings her clown act to Houston's House of Blues

67
MADONNA'S TOUR HITS HOUSTON
Three Houston super-fans share what the pop icon has meant to them

70
WHEEL LOVE
James Hurst reviews three of 2024's hottest new truck and SUV models

82
WIGGING OUT
Nibbles Zon Bits Thorne is the cat's meow





We get tested regularly at Avenue 360 Health and Wellness. It was easy to get started. My doctor explained all the options, and now I'm on PrEP, a single daily pill to protect us against HIV. Now we always know our status and can enjoy life. It can be that easy for you too. Just walk in or schedule an appointment at one of their five clinics today.

Get your free HIV test at **Avenue360.org/HIV**



Project LEAP 2024

Project LEAP has allowed me the chance to stop standing on the sideline of the HIV/AIDS field, now I can start being an actual player.

~ Project LEAP Graduate

Project LEAP (Learning, Empowerment, Advocacy, Participation) is a free 17-week training course for individuals living with or affected by HIV to gain the knowledge and skills they need to effectively help plan HIV prevention and care services in the Houston Area. Topics covered include HIV 101, a history of HIV in the Houston area, local HIV trends, services for people living with HIV and much, much more!

The class takes place one day a week (Wednesdays from 10am to 2pm, lunch is provided) starting at the end of July and ends with a graduation ceremony in early December.

A brief application and personal interview are required.

Project LEAP may be held in a hybrid format (your choice of in person or on Zoom).

If you have questions about the program or would like to receive an application, please contact:
832 927-7926 or diane.beck@harriscountytx.gov

RYAN WHITE PLANNING COUNCIL OFFICE OF SUPPORT
Phone 832 927-7926 Fax 713 431-4880 http://rwpcHouston.org

30 YEARS

MARCH 2024

DEPARTMENTS

NEWS & COMMENT

22 NEWS
With its new outdoor art installation, Bering Church members honor victims of gun violence while demanding legislative reform;

Bunnies on the Bayou celebrates 45 years of philanthropy with its March 31 party in downtown's Sesquicentennial Park (*pg. 26*)

28 SMART HEALTH
Examining legal roadblocks and strategies for resilience.

34 MONEY SMART
Tips for first-time investors looking for effective strategies to achieve future goals

OUT & ABOUT

14 CALENDAR

20 SCENE OUT

75 WEDDING GUIDE

79 BAR GUIDE

80 SIGN OUT



ON the COVER

WOMEN IN POWER

Avery Belyeu, the Montrose Center's new CEO.
Photography by Frank Xavier @the_creativex for OutSmart magazine.
Shot at the Montrose Center, February 26, 2024.

HOUSTON HEALTH DEPARTMENT

HOUSTONHEALTH.ORG

I am LIFE™



I take **PrEP** daily

I am here. I exist. I matter.

One Test Beats a Guess...

Get tested for HIV. Know Your Status.
Take Control of Your Health.

houstonIamLife.com





NOW PUBLISHING IN OUR 30TH YEAR!

Out•Smart
Houston's LGBTQ Magazine

Publisher/Editor-in-Chief Greg Jeu
Creative Director Alex Rosa
Copy Editors Howard Maple, Janice Stensrude

Contributing Writers
Olivia Flores Alvarez, Rich Arenschieldt, Bill Arning, Susan Bankston, Connor Behrens, Jenny Block, Sam Byrd, David Clarke, Blase DiStefano, Andrew Edmonson, Ste7en Foster, Alys Garcia Carrera, Martin Giron, Lillian Hoang, DL Groover, Marene Gustin, Kim Hogstrom, James Hurst, Lisa Keen, Ryan M. Leach, Zachary McKenzie, David Odyssey, Joanna O'Leary, Lilly Roddy, Gregg Shapiro, Janice Stensrude, Terrance Turner, Grace S. Yung

Photographers/Illustrators
Edgardo Aguilar, John-Paul Arreaga, Victor Contreras, Dalton DeHart, Yvonne Feece, Frank Hernandez, Alex Rosa

Operations Manager Michael Gurnas

Sales and Marketing Dept.
Local Advertising Reps 713.520.7237
Tom Fricke, Chris Lew, Gene Mikulenka

National Advertising Representative
Rivendell Media - 212.242.6863

OutSmart Media Company

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

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

E-mail: editor@outsmartmagazine.com
Website: OutSmartMagazine.com

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

Financial support provided by
OutSmart Foundation for Community Media

Support local LGBTQ independent media.
Make a tax-deductible donation at
outsmartmagazine.com/outsmart-foundation

UNCOMPROMISING EXCELLENCE IN DENTISTRY

CELEBRATING DIVERSITY AND MAKING HOUSTON SMILE SINCE 2009!

BAYOU CITY Smiles
Cosmetic & General Dentistry



FREE Whitening- for Life!

Veneers, Implants, Esthetic Fillings & Smile Makeover | In House Financing
Your Dentist is Certified in Oral Conscious Sedation | Most Insurance Accepted

2023 READERS' Out•Smart GAYEST & GREATEST WINNER CHOICE AWARDS

Favorite Dental Hygienist
CHRISZELDA, KATE and TU

OUR SECOND LOCATION AT MONTROSE COLLECTIVE IS NOW OPEN!

BAYOU CITY SMILES
Cosmetic & General Dentistry
713.518.1411

Arts District @ Sawyer Yards
2313 Edwards St., Ste. 150
Houston, TX 77007

Montrose Collective
888 Westheimer Rd. Ste., 212
Houston, TX 77006

BAYOUCITYSMILES.COM

Your support powers our journalism.

As we mark 30 years of LGBTQ storytelling in Houston, we're forging ahead post-pandemic and need your support for our next chapter. Your contributions will fuel impactful journalism, sustain our dedicated team of writers and photographers, and nurture emerging talent through our internship program. We're thankful and thrilled for the support we've already received. This is more than a tax-deductible donation; it's an investment in the voice and visibility of our community. Please join us in this exciting journey into 2024 and beyond.

OutSmart Foundation for Community Media

Use your phone's camera to scan the QR code here.

You can also donate by texting OSF30 to 53-555.

Or visit: givebutter.com/outsmartfoundation



March is Women's History Month, and *OutSmart* is celebrating with an issue that features some of Houston's most prominent female leaders.

Kicking off our Women in Power section is this month's cover star, Avery Belyeu—the Montrose Center's new CEO. Writer Ryan Leach sat down with Belyeu to discuss her vision for Houston's largest LGBTQ resource center, and *OutSmart* photographer Frank Xavier captured exclusive images of Belyeu at the Center during her first week of work. Be on the lookout for a behind-the-scenes video interview with Belyeu presented by Eklektik Interiors, which will be available on all of *OutSmart*'s social-media platforms.

We also introduce you to women who are active in local business, politics, art, and activism. Writer Connor Behrens speaks to transgender advocate Meghan Fairbanks about her new social group for trans and gender-diverse Houstonians. Behrens also chats with influencer Olivia Julianna about how she uses her social-media platform to educate her million-plus followers on election issues. Then State District 146 hopeful Lauren Ashley Simmons tells us about her run against anti-LGBTQ Democrat Shawn Thierry, writer David Clarke talks to Ryan Wright about redefining foster care for LGBTQ youth, and Mo Jenkins talks about her historic campaign for state representative.
Finally, writer Ian Haddock interviews businesswoman and activist Denisha Maxey-Estes about finding her calling while overcoming adversity.

Space City's queer entertainment calendar is buzzing this month. On March 14 through 17, *OutSmart* will proudly sponsor The Normal Anomaly Initiative's third annual Black Queer Advancement Festival at Warehouse Live in Midtown. *OutSmart* writer (and the Initiative's founder and CEO) Ian Haddock previews this year's event that highlights and empowers Black LGBTQ performers. Then Sam Byrd speaks with *Drag Race* superstar Jimbo about her show at Houston's Houston of Blues on March 20. And ahead of Madonna's tour stop at the Toyota Center, Connor Behrens interviews four queer Houstonians about their plans for attending a performance. Then on March 31, Bunnies on the Bayou celebrates 45 years of philanthropy at downtown's Sesquicentennial Park. Writer Zach McKenzie chats with Bunnies president Jacques Bourgeois about their legendary Easter Sunday event.

Save the date for Jasmine Hearn's Memory Fleet: A Return to Matr at Houston Met Dance on April 6 and 7. Writer Neil Ellis Orts speaks to the choreographer and performer about their new project that explores family lineages.

Also in April, Theater Under The Stars (TUTS) will debut *The Cher Show*, a musical tribute that tells the diva's life story. Writer David Clarke chats with leading lady Ella Perez, who portrays Cher from her youth until her early 20s. Get your tickets for the OUT@TUTS performance of *Cher* on April 25 and join us for the after-party!

This issue also features our annual Automotive section, where writer James Hurst reviews three elegant new truck and SUV models.

Finally, *OutSmart*'s 31st year in publishing will kick off in April. We want to thank our loyal family of advertisers, sponsors, and readers for making this accomplishment possible.

See you in April!



Greg Jeu
Publisher

THE EYE GALLERY

SEMI-ANNUAL SAMPLE SALE
UP TO 60% OFF

SEE STORE FOR DETAILS



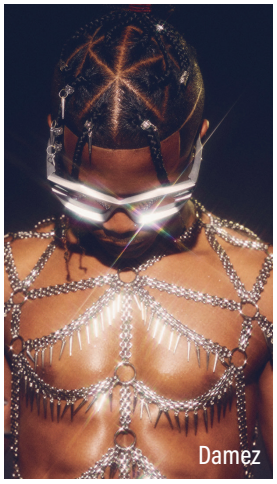
EYEGALLERYHOUSTON.COM

1806 WESTHEIMER RD - RIVER OAKS 713.523.1279

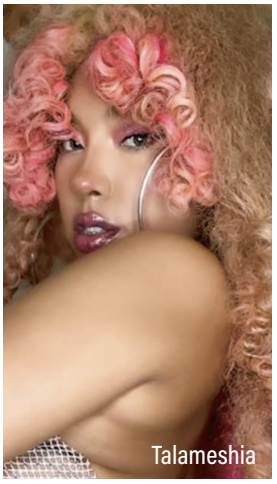
1700 POST OAK BLVD - POST OAK (NEXT TO WHOLE FOODS) 713.622.7470

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

QUEER THINGS to DO


Damez


LeToya Luckett


Talameshia

COMMUNITY

March 15–17

BLACK QUEER AF WEEK

The Normal Anomaly presents its third annual Black Queer AF Week 2024 with "homecoming" as the theme. The Normal Anomaly, a nonprofit that has opened Houston's only standalone Black LGBTQ drop-in center, will have a grand-opening reception hosted by Darrien Dyrell (Project Liberate '24) on March 15. The week's highlight will be Houston's own LeToya Luckett headlining the BQAF Homecoming Music Festival and Afterparty at Warehouse Live in Midtown. Other performers for the main event include Sevindeep, Damez, Je'Ronelle, and Martell Lacey. The afterparty features Charlie Xile and Talameshia. **tinyurl.com/559e4bzn**

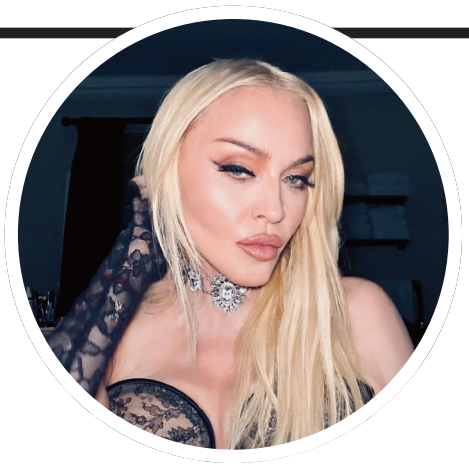


COMMUNITY

March 31

BUNNIES ON THE BAYOU 45

Bunnies on the Bayou celebrates the 45th year of its iconic Easter Sunday party in downtown Houston. The outdoor event features live DJs, entertainment on the main stage, drinks, food for purchase, dancing, sponsor booths, and more. This year's emcee is Houston's own Bearded Queen, Blackberri, fresh from her appearance on *Dragula Season 5*. Blackberri's unparalleled style and wit will keep you captivated and entertained throughout the day. The opening DJ is Marti Frieson, whose electrifying beats and dynamic energy will set your feet tapping. Headlining the event is Tracy Young, whose charm creates a vibe of sheer happiness and excitement. **tinyurl.com/3xujm4tv**



March 28 and 29

MADONNA'S CELEBRATION TOUR

Madonna's Celebration Tour was postponed because of a serious bacterial infection that kept her in the ICU for several days. But now she's back, and it's time to celebrate! This is the pop icon's first retrospective tour that looks back on her more than four decades of music. Madonna launched her first tour in 1985 in the United States and Canada. Over the ensuing four decades, Madonna staged some of the most controversial and dynamic pop shows ever mounted, selling out nearly every tour in seconds. To date, Madonna has performed about 700 shows across 11 concert tours, generating over $1 billion in ticket sales—the highest-grossing female touring artist of all time. This time, Bob the Drag Queen is also along for the ride. **tinyurl.com/mr2n2pmt**

COMMUNITY

March 3

35TH ANNUAL WALK TO END HIV

Allies in Hope is set to take over Sam Houston Park for the 35th Annual Walk to End HIV Powered by Gilead Sciences, Inc. Houston's own Kam Franklin will sing the National Anthem to kick off the event and perform a short set at the post-walk party. **tinyurl.com/ywb746by**



ART

Through May 27

KEHINDE WILEY: AN ARCHAEOLOGY OF SILENCE

Acclaimed queer artist Kehinde Wiley's new MFAH exhibit, An Archaeology of Silence, features large-scale paintings and sculptures of men and women in repose. **tinyurl.com/2rme3uft**



STAGE

March 7

ACTOUT: *THE NERD*

The Alley Theatre hosts an ActOUT reception with cocktails and light bites before the March 7 performance of their current production, *The Nerd*. **tinyurl.com/4v8erbuk**



COMMUNITY

March 9

OUT AT THE RODEO

Get ready to rodeo with pride at the March 9 headliner performance by country artist Lainey Wilson. **tinyurl.com/yhn3amk6**

STAGE

March 9

PRIDE CHORUS HOUSTON

Indulge in a dreamy evening of song at the choir's Dream a Little Dream concert. Immerse yourself in a world of musical nostalgia featuring timeless jazz standards and pop classics. **tinyurl.com/mryudcew**



STAGE

March 14

SASHA COLBY AT HOUSE OF BLUES

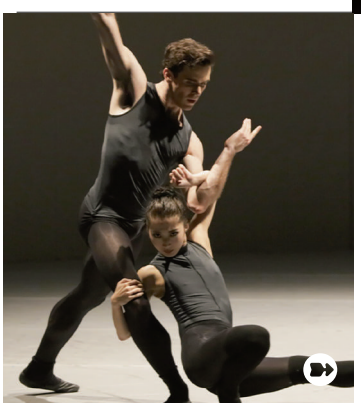
Colby's Stripped Tour marks the first time Live Nation has paired up with a *Drag Race* contestant—the dynamic Season 15 winner, to be exact. **tinyurl.com/58ytr6fj**

COMMUNITY

March 14

BRINGIN' IN THE GREEN

One of LGBTQ Houston's favorite and longest-running events. Wear something green and enjoy the open bar, hors d'oeuvres, and a silent auction of luxury items. **tinyurl.com/bdhhvcjk**



STAGE

March 15

OUT AT THE BALLET: *BESPOKE*

The Houston Ballet hosts a pre-curtain reception for LGBTQ ballet lovers and friends. Get 25% off select seats when you book online using code OUTBALLET. **tinyurl.com/mw75mzbt**

COMMUNITY

March 30

TROT FOR TRANS VISIBILITY

Celebrate trans visibility at this joyous and empowering event! Share the love, support, and vibrant energy as the Triple A Alliance proudly hosts a family-friendly 5K run, trot, walk, or sashay. **tinyurl.com/mrydx4f6**

COMMUNITY

March 30

SPACE CITY CLASSIC

The second annual Space City Classic is an LGBTQ all-gender 7v7 soccer tournament. Space City Pride FC welcomes players and teams from across the US and Mexico, and all games are played at Houston Sports Park. **tinyurl.com/2vksfjc8**

More Queer Things to Do →



QUEER THINGS to DO
SAVE the DATES

COMMUNITY
April 6

HUMAN RIGHTS CAMPAIGN DINNER

HRC hosts its annual fundraising dinner gala at downtown's Marriott Marquis, supporting the organization's work for LGBTQ equality. **tinyurl.com/29np9zfj**



COMMUNITY
April 11-14

ART CAR PARADE WEEKEND

Get ready for Houston's renowned display of innovative art on the move, making its comeback this April with a dazzling array of more than 250 moving works of art and a jam-packed schedule of activities spanning four days. **tinyurl.com/3h9t5wd4**



MEREDITH MASHBURN PHOTOGRAPHY

STAGE
April 25

OUT@TUTS: *THE CHER SHOW*

After the April 25 performance, Theatre Under the Stars presents its Out@TUTS reception for LGBTQ theatergoers and friends featuring light bites, drink specials, and live music.
tinyurl.com/4z7d9btp



STAGE
May 9

NICKI MINAJ

Toyota Center welcomes back the one and only queen of hip-hop Nicki Minaj, with special guest Monica.
tinyurl.com/mukf6c6w

Submit your events at calendar@outsmartmagazine.com


MADONNA
FOUR DECADES
THE CELEBRATION TOUR
MARCH 28-29 TOYOTA CENTER
TOYOTACENTER.COM
SPECIAL GUEST BOB THE DRAG QUEEN
LIVE NATION


2023 READERS'
Out•Smart
GAYEST & GREATEST
WINNER
CHOICE AWARDS
HFCU Mortgage
You're in Luck!
Multiple Mortgage Options Available For You!
Including HELOC & Home Equity Loans, No Origination Point Fees, Low Closing Cost Fees, and Refi/Cash-Out
< Scan here to check rates or apply today!
Credit Union membership is required before utilizing any product and/or service by establishing a savings account with $5. If you live, work, worship or attend school in Houston you may qualify for membership. Loans subject to credit approval. Other terms and conditions may apply. Apply online at www.houstonfcu.org, call us at 281-243-0500 or visit any of our nine convenient locations. HFCU is an Equal Credit Opportunity Lender.
HoustonFCU.org
Houston Federal Credit Union NMLS #673404
EQUAL HOUSING LENDER
HFCU Houston Federal Credit Union


ADD A TOUCH OF LUXURY TO YOUR ESTABLISHMENT
Valet Parking Services available for the venues:
• Hotels
• High Rises
• Malls
• Hospitals
• Restaurants
• Corporate Events
• Weddings
• Grand Openings
• Charity Events
• Funerals
PLANNING A PRIVATE EVENT?
JKM VALET SERVICES
CONTACT US TODAY!
832-378-3161
Jkmvaletservices.com

IMPORTANT FACTS FOR BIKTARVY®

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

(bik-TAR-vee)

MOST IMPORTANT INFORMATION ABOUT BIKTARVY

BIKTARVY may cause serious side effects, including:

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

ABOUT BIKTARVY

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

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

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

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

BEFORE TAKING BIKTARVY

Tell your healthcare provider if you:

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

Tell your healthcare provider about all the medicines you take:

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

POSSIBLE SIDE EFFECTS OF BIKTARVY

BIKTARVY may cause serious side effects, including:

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

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

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

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

HOW TO TAKE BIKTARVY

Take BIKTARVY 1 time each day with or without food.

GET MORE INFORMATION

- This is only a brief summary of important information about BIKTARVY. Talk to your healthcare provider or pharmacist to learn more.
- Go to BIKTARVY.com or call 1-800-GILEAD-5.
- If you need help paying for your medicine, visit BIKTARVY.com for program information.



GILEAD

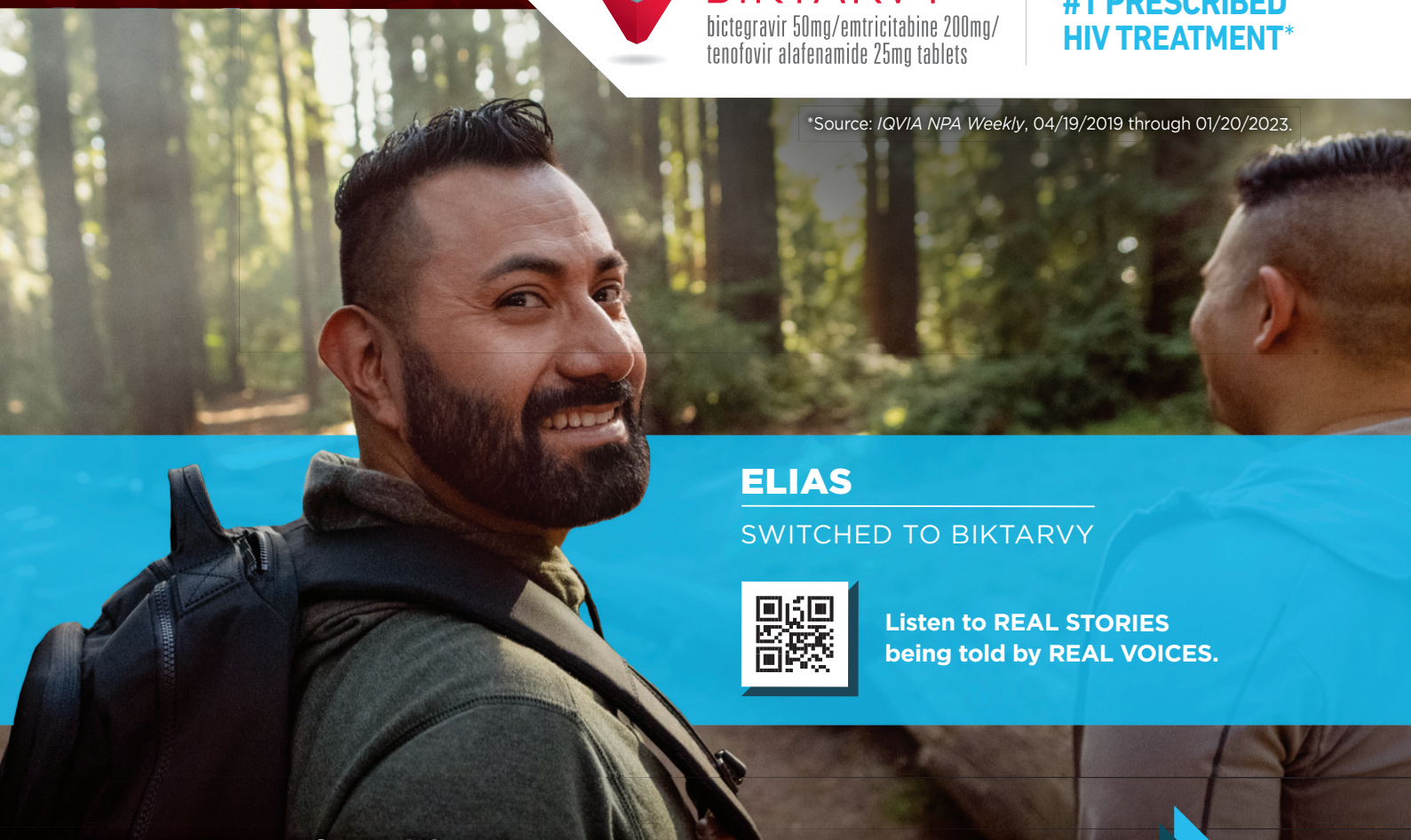
BIKTARVY, the BIKTARVY Logo, GILEAD, the GILEAD Logo, and KEEP BEING YOU are trademarks of Gilead Sciences, Inc., or its related companies. © 2023 Gilead Sciences, Inc. All rights reserved. US-BVYC-0250 04/23

BIKTARVY®

bictegravir 50mg/emtricitabine 200mg/
tenofovir alafenamide 25mg tablets

#1 PRESCRIBED HIV TREATMENT*

*Source: *IQVIA NPA Weekly*, 04/19/2019 through 01/20/2023.



ELIAS

SWITCHED TO BIKTARVY

Listen to REAL STORIES being told by REAL VOICES.

No matter where life takes you,

KEEP BEING YOU.

Because HIV doesn't change who you are.

BIKTARVY® is a complete, 1-pill, once-a-day prescription medicine used to treat HIV-1 in certain adults. BIKTARVY does not cure HIV-1 or AIDS.

Ask your healthcare provider if BIKTARVY is right for you.

Person featured takes BIKTARVY and is compensated by Gilead.

Please see Important Facts about BIKTARVY, including important warnings, on the previous page and at BIKTARVY.com.

Photos by
DALTON DEHART AND CREW



Krewe of Olympus Ball LII was held at the Wyndham Houston Hotel Heritage Center on January 27, 2024. Pictured are King Olympus LII - **Suzanne Armstrong**, Captain Olympus LII - **David Wallace**, and Queen Olympus LII - **Christine Agnew**.



On January 31, 2024, Houston's New Faces of Pride held its kickoff and happy hour at Pearl Bar. Pictured are **Andrea Simonton**, **Jeffery Huyhn**, **Bryan Cotton**, **Julie Mabry**, **Joan Cotton**, and **Vitor Burk**.



Mario Castillo, Council Member for District H, held a fundraiser at Ninfa's on Navigation on February 1, 2024. Pictured are **Mayor John Whitmire**, **Council Member Mario Castillo**, and **Zaf Tahir**.



On February 1, 2024, ActOUT's reception at The Alley Theatre for *Pictures from Home* was enjoyed by everyone who attended. Pictured are **Aurora Villafranca** and **Lauren Pelletier**.



On February 1, 2024, the Harris County Democratic Lawyers Association hosted the Clarence Darrow Award Dinner honoring Beto O'Rourke at Hotel ZaZa. Pictured are **Rep. Ann Richards**, **Lisa Ketai**, **Michelle Grossman**, **Beto O'Rourke**, **Justice Margaret Poissant**, **Judith Ramsey**, and **Seth Kretzer**.



On February 3, 2024, The Mystery and Fantasy Mardi Gras Party was held at Numbers. Pictured are **Scott Miller**, **Clifford Dotson**, **Ryan Balbos** as **Ms. Cotton Candy**, and **Robert Harwood**.



On February 4, 2024, the Black Leaders Caucus/ Victory Fund Candidate held a fundraiser for HD 146 Lauren Ashley Simmons. Pictured are Caucus President **Austin Davis Ruiz**, former Caucus President **Jovon Tyler**, **Lauren Ashley Simmons**, former Caucus President **Katharine Ligon**, and Houston City Controller **Chris Hollins**.



Victory Fund 2024 Houston Kickoff was held at the home of Richard Holt on February 8, 2023. Pictured are **Rep. Erin Gamez**, **Mayor Annise Parker**, **Hon. Phyllis Frye**, **Judge Jerry Simoneaux**, **Molly Cook**, **Council Member Mario Castillo**, **Lauren Ashley Simmons**, **Judge Steven Duble**, and **State Rep. Ann Johnson**.



On February 10, 2024, Bunnies on the Bayou presented "Fat Bunny" at Rich's. Pictured are Bunnies on the Bayou hosts.



The Houston Bar Association's LGBTQ+ annual Mardi Gras Party was held at Brennan's Houston on February 12, 2024. Pictured are **Bonnie Simmons** and **Georgina Pena**.



OUT for Education's second "Love (not so) Straight Up!" fundraiser was hosted by Hu'Nee B at Spring Street Studios on February 14, 2023. Pictured are **Wayne Lopez**, **Rae Sanchez**, **Roy Rivera**, **Ryan Fountain**, **Chelsea Sargent Lira**, **Brandi Lira**, **Bobby Koshy**, and **Hu'Nee B**.



ERSICSS presented Investiture 39 Carnival Masquerade at KiKi on February 24, 2024. Pictured are **Megan McCormack**, **Meghan Galloway**, **Alexa Bouvier**, **Geary Bennet**, **Chloe Crawford Ross**, and **Alex Torres**.

46th ANNUAL

Houston Pride® Festival & Parade

Saturday, June 29, 2024 | Downtown Houston City Hall



Largest Pride Festival in Texas
Tens of Thousands in Attendace

REGISTRATION OPEN

Exhibition & Vendor Booths | Food Trucks
Parade Participants

Register Now!

Registration Deadline: Apr 30, 2024
Late Registration until May 31, 2024

pridehouston365.org

PRIDE HOUSTON 365

abc13 Official Media Sponsor

@pridehoustontx
@pridehouston



Bering members holding pieces of the Vidas Robadas installation, which debuted in front of the church on March 3.

Art that Inspires Change

Bering Church honors victims of gun violence while demanding legislative reform.

By **LOURDES ZAVALETA**

In the past five years, over 4,100 Harris County residents have lost their lives to gun violence. Bering Church, an LGBTQ-affirming United Church of Christ (UCC) congregation in the heart of Montrose, will honor these victims through its *Vidas Robadas* installation this month, while calling on their community to demand stricter gun legislation.

Bering, in partnership with Texas Impact, erected *Vidas Robadas* (Spanish for "Stolen Lives") during the church's Sunday service on March 3. The installation will feature 200 T-shirts, each listing the name of a local person who has died by suicide or murder. *Vidas Robadas* will be on display in front of Bering through at least Easter Sunday, March 31. Other churches around Harris County will put up similar installations until all of the more than 4,100 gun-violence victims are represented.

"As people of faith, we have a great deal of concern about the ongoing loss of life due to gun violence, and a great deal of frustration that our political leaders aren't doing enough to address this," says Bering's senior pastor, Diane McGehee. "This installation will raise awareness and encourage people who see it to speak up and ask for change. We also want to personalize the victims. These are real people. They had families and communities, and now they are gone. We need to do something about it."

Bering's March 3 service included a sermon on serving others, and the congregation celebrated some of the ways it has been doing that. To conclude the service, attendees went outside to hang the T-shirts on frames attached to stakes in front of the church entrance.



Vidas Robadas features the names of Harris County residents who have died by murder or suicide in the past five years.

"This is an act of worship and we will dedicate it as a sacred act," McGehee says. "We will pray for those who died, and the families and communities who will be forever impacted by their loss. We will also pray for blessings over our first responders. It will be a prayer of gratitude and blessing, and a prayer that God will give us the courage and wisdom to act."

Texas Impact, which started the Vidas Robadas project, is an organization that equips people of faith with information and outreach tools to educate their communities. McGehee, who has collaborated with Texas Impact in various pastoral roles for over a decade, says Bering's partnership with the organization is crucial for helping to educate its community.

McGehee says that Texas Impact provides churches like Bering with accurate information about issues that impact the community, as well as updates on harmful bills proposed by local lawmakers, thus helping prepare folks to speak to their representatives. One of the goals of Vidas Robadas is to connect Texans across the state, so that they can band together to demand stricter gun legislation at the upcoming Texas Legislative Session in 2025. Members of Bering plan on making their voices heard next year at the Capitol, both in person and by writing letters and making phone calls to elected officials.

One of the most recent acts of gun violence in Harris County occurred at Lakewood Church in Houston. "What happened at Lakewood was horrible, and I would never want that to happen anywhere," McGehee says. "You would think any place of worship is safe, but we can no longer assume that. But it's not just houses of worship. We realize this is a bigger problem, and until everybody is safe, none of us are."

McGehee says Bering has a plan in place to promote safety among its membership. →



mistr

- ✓ **FREE** virtual doctor visit.
- ✓ **FREE** at-home testing kit.
- ✓ **FREE** labs.
- ✓ **FREE** monthly PrEP prescription.
- ✓ All these services are offered virtually and mailed to you discretely **FREE**.

www.heymistr.com/allies

ALLIES in hope

*FORMERLY AIDS FOUNDATION HOUSTON

The church has an armed security guard on campus and prohibits anyone else from having weapons in the church, including concealed-carry handguns. "God's house should not be a house of violence, and we are doing our best to keep people safe," she says.

Bering Church is one of Houston's oldest churches, founded in 1848 by German-speaking immigrants who were unwelcome in other places of worship. The church was originally a United Methodist Church (UMC) congregation situated in downtown Houston before moving into Montrose in 1926.

After many LGBTQ Houstonians moved to Montrose in the 1960s and 1970s, 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 United Methodist group that seeks justice for LGBTQ people.

In 2021, Bering voted to disaffiliate with the UMC due to the institution's anti-LGBTQ policies, and joined the LGBTQ-affirming UCC. Since the denominational change, Bering has built a stronger bond with its nearly 500 members (of whom about 75 percent are LGBTQ).

"It was heartbreaking [to leave the UMC], but it was clear that it was what we needed to do because of the harm that has been done and continues to be done to the LGBTQ community," McGehee says. "The church has no business excluding people based on their gender identity or sexual orientation. There are good people in the UMC who are trying to get this changed, but we couldn't continue to let that harm be a part of who we are."

McGehee says joining an LGBTQ-affirming denomination has also allowed Bering to turn more of its attention to helping others through advocating for the rights of all marginalized Texans, including LGBTQ people, immigrants and refugees, and people of color.

"We haven't spent so much of our focus on trying to keep a space for ourselves, and instead have gotten to address other issues," McGehee says. "Our church is thriving and growing into what it needs to be."

WHAT: *Vidas Robadas*
WHEN: March 3 at 10:50 a.m.
WHERE: Bering Church, 1440 Harold St.
INFO: beringchurch.org

SKIN Renaissance
LASER CENTER



PERSONALIZED | COMPREHENSIVE | DOCTOR SUPERVISED

OCTAVIO BARRIOS, MD
LUCIA MANGLE, MPAS, PA-C

Botox • Restylane
Radiesse • Sculptra



Dermal fillers can take years off, even decades; giving a natural, pleasant, and well-rested look. Dr. Barrios added volume to patient's upper & lower cheeks and chin to reverse the signs of aging.

- NON-SURGICAL
- IMMEDIATE LASTING RESULTS
- AFFORDABLE

• Wrinkles • Rosacea • Facial Sagging
• Face Acne (active & scars)
• Face & Leg Veins • Laser Hair Removal

• Platelet-Rich Plasma (PRP) Treatments for ED
• PDO Facial Thread Lifts

2023 Readers' Out•Smart GAYEST & GREATEST FINALIST CHOICE AWARDS

VOTED ONE OF THE BEST
Dr. Octavio Barrios
Best Physican 2005-2023
Skin Renaissance
Best Skin Care Center 2005-2023

Call for your FREE Consultation
713.942.SKIN (7546)
517 West Gray St. • Between Montrose and Taft



HOUSTON'S *Premier* DESTINATION FOR **ED TREATMENT**

www.TheMensClinic-Houston.com



"THE MOST POTENT non-surgical ED treatment currently available!"
- American Urological Association

The Men♂s CLINIC

713-828-1476

8800 Katy Fwy., Ste. 105
Houston, TX 77024

BIG YEAR FOR THE BUNNIES

Bunnies on the Bayou president **Jacques Bourgeois** discusses the organization's plans to shift their focus.

by **ZACHARY McKENZIE**



Spring has sprung and Houston's bunnies are ready to come out to play! Bunnies on the Bayou, Inc., the local organization that hosts an annual Easter Sunday fundraiser of the same name, proudly marks their 45th anniversary this year. Jacques Bourgeois, president of the board of directors, assures that plenty of fun and exciting entertainment is in store at this year's event. The community leader notes that he and his team will be hard at work advancing the philanthropic organization's footprint in the LGBTQ community throughout their Sapphire Year. And they have big plans for the future.

Bunnies on the Bayou is the largest LGBTQ fundraising festival in Texas. To date, the organization has provided more than $2 million to over 150 local nonprofits that have empowered and positively impacted the LGBTQ community since 2000. Beneficiaries throughout the years have included organizations that focus on underrepresented members of the community, trans individuals, unhoused individuals, the food-insecure, people with disabilities, and others in the Greater Houston area.

Bourgeois explains that although Bunnies on the Bayou is now synonymous with its annual fundraising event, the origins of the organization are important to remember. "The organization started as the 'Bunny Fuck Party,' or the BFP," he says. "It's relevant to recognize that, because we are sex-positive. Instead of shying away from topics like HIV and AIDS, we talk about it. That's our history, and you can't remake that."

The organization's inception was rooted in fun, but it evolved to support the community at large. "With the advent of the AIDS epidemic in the late '70s and early '80s,

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ALEX ROSA



Bunnies on the Bayou's board of directors

Bunnies grew into an Easter Sunday food pantry," Bourgeois explains. "In the early '90s, we grew into the Bunnies event you see today. We started hosting our festival at Wortham Theater Center's Fish Plaza, and we were eventually established as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit."

Over the years, the organization has grown in size and in the level of financial support they are able to offer community organizations. "We've grown from giving away $20,000 to $30,000 to local LGBTQIA nonprofits, to where we gave away $210,000 to 15 different LGBTQIA nonprofits in 2022 and $200,000 to 20 different nonprofits in 2023," Bourgeois proudly notes. "This makes Bunnies on the Bayou one of the most philanthropic LGBTQIA organizations in the nation, just by the sheer [dollar amount] that we give away in one day to one specific community."

Bourgeois, a Black leader in the community, explains that his initial perception of Bunnies on the Bayou was that it was for a particular subset of the queer community that didn't include him. As the board of directors and the festival evolved through the years, he was pleased to see it become a true representation of the LGBTQ community. "Bunnies is a Pride festival in its own right," he says. "We've grown organically as an organization because leadership has started to reflect more of our community as a whole. Our leadership looks exactly how our city looks. I have a board of nine members, and it is mostly female led."

The charismatic board president reflects on the diversity of the event's attendees, as well as the range of causes that are supported annually by Bunnies on the Bayou. "Now I feel like I can be a part of this, which for me is amazing. For a long time, I didn't feel like I could be part of it."

Bunnies on the Bayou 2024 will encompass the largest footprint in the event's history (an increase of 67 percent over last year's fundraiser) and will benefit 12 organizations—down from the typical 20. "We reduced our number of beneficiaries significantly, so we can invest back into the community ourselves and actually execute service-based projects," Bourgeois explains.

> **"WE'VE BEEN SHIFTING THE FOCUS FROM JUST BEING A GREAT PARTY TO GETTING PEOPLE TO UNDERSTAND THAT WE'RE HERE SUPPORTING COMMUNITIES."**
>
> —Jacques Bourgeois

DJ Marti Frieson, Grammy Award-winning artist Tracy Young, and emcee Blackberri, the Bearded Queen of Houston, will all be there to get the party started and keep it going throughout the afternoon.

During this pivotal year for the organization, Bourgeois and his team are already planning for the future as they react to the political climate in our state. With DEI and LGBTQ resource centers being outlawed in educational institutions and beyond, Bunnies on the Bayou is shifting to be more proactive in the community.

"These laws affect our community as a whole," Bourgeois emphasizes. "My board recognized that we need to not just focus on writing checks while being hands-off. We've come to the decision that that's no longer something we can do. We have a five-year plan to build and establish our own community LGBTQIA Resource Center. Despite these laws being passed, services still need to happen. They're not happening in kindergarten through 12th grade or in higher education, so it falls back on us as a community. We want to establish our own community resource center. Being a hub where everybody comes to us, we will utilize our extensive knowledge of how to run these programs, because we don't fund anything that we don't know how to do ourselves. A lot of what we've been doing these past few years is really shifting the focus from just being a great party to getting people to understand that we're here supporting communities. That's the root of what we do. We've always been here, we're always going to be here, and we're always going to be giving the most money."

Bourgeois knows his days as the leader of Bunnies on the Bayou will ultimately come to an end, so he is determined to make an impact, alongside his team, while serving as president. "This is the way nonprofits need to be run," he says. "Bunnies was set up with such care for the future and with regard to the past and the people who came before us. I'm not here to stay forever. I'm here to plant seeds for the next generation and for the future."

WHAT: Bunnies on the Bayou 45
WHEN: March 31, 2024
WHERE: Sesquicentennial Park
INFO: bunniesonthebayou.org

By DARYL SHORTER, MD

Protecting Your Peace

Examining legal roadblocks and strategies for resilience.



Nationally, LGBTQ+ people continue to experience greater visibility and overall acceptance. According to a recent Gallup poll, over 7% of the US population identifies as LGBTQ, with roughly one in five members of Gen Z (born 1997–2003) identifying as such. While roughly two-thirds of Americans believe same-sex relations are morally acceptable, a decrease from its height of 71% in 2022, this still represents an overall increase over the past several years.

Despite these favorable trends, or perhaps alongside them, the introduction of state-level anti-LGBTQ legislation showed a substantial rise in 2023. According to the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), 510 bills were introduced, slightly over double the 250 bills introduced in 2021. Proposed laws included a wide focus across areas ranging from education to healthcare to the governance of public spaces and services.

Whatever You Do, Don't Say Gay...

"Don't say gay" bills are prominent in educational settings and are intended to prevent teachers and administrators from discussing LGBTQ-related topics in school settings with young children, typically students between kindergarten and elementary-school grade levels. Those in support of "Don't say gay" bills also assert that parents are stripped of their opportunity to present information related to the LGBTQ+ community in the way that they see fit. Proponents of these bills also argue that an introduction to the LGBTQ+ "lifestyle" holds the potential to convert or encourage young children to engage in queerness, or exposes children to topics related to sexual behavior too soon.

This type of thinking is rooted in the homophobic and transphobic ideas that LGBTQ+ identity is a choice and that others can be converted just by exposure to the mere idea of it. Further, it suggests that being LGBTQ+ is primarily about sex rather than love, a belief that does not transfer equally to heterosexuality, where straight identity is more easily (and historically) rooted in ideas regarding family and morality.

Opponents of these bills rightly assert that just because a topic is introduced in the school setting—oftentimes outside of the control of the teacher—this does not remove→



Important Facts About DOVATO

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

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

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

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

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

What is DOVATO?

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

Please see additional Important Facts About DOVATO on the following page.

Ask your doctor about staying undetectable with fewer medicines in 1 pill.

Dovato
dolutegravir 50 mg/
lamivudine 300 mg tablets

Important Facts About DOVATO (cont'd)

Who should not take DOVATO?

Do not take DOVATO if you:

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

What should I tell my healthcare provider before using DOVATO?

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

- have or have had liver problems, including hepatitis B or C infection.
- have kidney problems.
- are pregnant or plan to become pregnant. One of the medicines in DOVATO (dolutegravir) may harm your unborn baby.
  - Your healthcare provider may prescribe a different medicine than DOVATO if you are planning to become pregnant or if pregnancy is confirmed during the first 12 weeks of pregnancy.
  - If you can become pregnant, your healthcare provider may perform a pregnancy test before you start treatment with DOVATO.
  - If you can become pregnant, you and your healthcare provider should talk about the use of effective birth control (contraception) during treatment with DOVATO.
  - Tell your healthcare provider right away if you are planning to become pregnant, you become pregnant, or think you may be pregnant during treatment with DOVATO.
- are breastfeeding or plan to breastfeed. **Do not breastfeed if you take DOVATO.**
  - You should not breastfeed if you have HIV-1 because of the risk of passing HIV-1 to your baby.
  - DOVATO passes to your baby in your breast milk.
  - Talk with your healthcare provider about the best way to feed your baby.

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

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

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

What are possible side effects of DOVATO?

DOVATO can cause serious side effects, including:

- See **"What is the most important information I should know about DOVATO?"**

ViiVConnect

Check out ways to access your prescribed ViiV Healthcare medications

Insurance Review | Financial Assistance Programs[a]

Call to speak to an Access Coordinator
1-844-588-3288 (toll-free)
Monday-Friday, 8AM-11PM (ET)

Get support from ViiVConnect
ViiVConnect.com

[a]Subject to eligibility and program terms and conditions; ViiVConnect programs do not constitute health insurance.

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

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

These are not all the possible side effects of DOVATO. Call your doctor for medical advice about side effects.

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

Where can I find more information?

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

Trademarks are owned by or licensed to the ViiV Healthcare group of companies.

October 2022 DVT:7PIL

ViiV Healthcare

©2022 ViiV Healthcare or licensor.
DLLADVT220016 November 2022
Produced in USA.

the opportunity for parents to responsibly discuss with their children topics related to sexuality. Conversations with children about the complexity of sexuality is actually an important part of parenting, particularly when tailored to the specific child and at the appropriate age level. Rather than trying to erase these conversations from the educational setting, it may be more important for parents, caregivers, and families to partner with schools to craft curriculum that is both accurate and inclusive.

Gender and Identity Wars

Members of the trans and gender diverse (TGD) community are faced with particularly hateful attacks. Laws that limit the ability to change identification to reflect gender identity and/or chosen names unfairly target TGD persons, adding further complication to the simple act of existence. And although it may be hard to believe at this point, we are still fighting against "bathroom bills" when there is no evidence to suggest that people are in danger from the use of public restroom facilities by TGD people that corresponds to their gender identity.

Just as alarming, we have witnessed restriction of the provision of gender-affirming healthcare across a variety of settings. In Texas, the passage of Senate Bill 14 (SB14) prohibits physicians and other healthcare workers from offering specific gender-affirming healthcare interventions such as puberty blockers and/or hormonal therapy to persons under the age of 18, even when parents might consent.

Sadly, legislative attacks such as these are superimposed upon a backdrop of limited protections for LGBTQ people in regard to housing and job discrimination, disparities in access to health services, and an increased threat of violence. In addition to the substantial uptick in anti-LGBTQ legislation, the ACLU reports that, despite representing only 7% of the US population, one in five (20%) reported hate crimes involves someone from the LGBTQ+ community.

When faced with attacks both in the legislature and the world, how can one manage to simply remain afloat?

Daryl Shorter, MD, is a Diplomate of the American Board of Psychiatry and Neurology and is board certified in both general and addiction psychiatry. His clinical practice focuses on veteran care, and he lectures widely on LGBTQ mental health. Dr. Shorter can be reached at dr.darylshorter@gmail.com.







Medicare fraud costs taxpayers *billions* every year. Reporting Medicare fraud can save taxpayer dollars and stop scammers in their tracks!

PREVENT BY PROTECTING YOUR MEDICARE NUMBER
DETECT BY READING YOUR MEDICARE STATEMENTS
REPORT BY CALLING 888-341-6187

SMP
Senior Medicare Patrol

Preventing Medicare Fraud
888-341-6187

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

ARE YOU SCAM SAVVY?
TIRED OF MEDICARE SCAMS?
WANT TO STOP FRAUD?

The Texas Senior Medicare Patrol works across the state to educate Medicare beneficiaries, their families and caregivers about Medicare fraud. We need people like YOU to help stop Medicare scams.



VOLUNTEER WITH US!

SMP
Senior Medicare Patrol
Preventing Medicare Fraud

Cherie Storey
State Volunteer Coordinator
713-341-6144
cstorey@bbbhou.org
www.TexasSMP.org

BBB
Start With Trust

The Better Business Bureau Education Foundation is the proud recipient of the Administration for Community Living's Senior Medicare Patrol Grant in the state of Texas.
This project was supported, in part, by grant number 90MPPG0056, from the U.S. Administration for Community Living, Department of Health and Human Services, Washington, D.C. 20201.

WINNER!

Joshua's Native Plants & Garden Antiques



HUGE SELECTION OF POTTERY • PLANTS • FOUNTAINS • SUCCULENTS • ART

713.862.7444

502 W.18th Street @ Nicholson 77008 Tues - Sun 9-6 JoshuasNativePlants.net

OUT OF THE CLOSET .org

THRIFT STORES

Benefiting AHF



1435 Westheimer Rd

(713) 391-8990

By GRACE YUNG, CFP

Tips for First-Time Investors

Plan ahead and stick to your investment strategy.



Are you new to investing? In the world of investing, the power of compounding is a force to be reckoned with. Learn how you can unlock this power.

1 Unpacking the Power of Compounding

Compounding is a remarkable investment phenomenon that goes beyond simple interest, allowing you to earn returns on both the initial investment and the previously acquired returns. For example, imagine investing $1,000 at a 7% annual interest rate. In the first year, you'd earn $70 in interest, bringing your total to $1,070. However, in the second year, you'd earn 7% not just on your initial $1,000 but on the $1,070, resulting in $74.90 in interest. This compounding effect snowballs over time, highlighting the importance of a more extended time frame for exponential financial growth.

2 Doubling Investments: The Rule of 72

The Rule of 72 is a valuable tool for investors to estimate how long it takes for an investment to double. By dividing 72 by the annual interest rate, you can get a rough idea of the doubling period. For instance, if you achieve an average annual return of 7.2%, your investment would double in approximately 10 years (72 ÷ 7.2 = 10). This rule emphasizes the significance of initiating investments early, as time is a crucial factor in leveraging the power of compounding.

3 Prioritize Saving, Pay Yourself First

Many people postpone investing, often citing pending expenses and debts or waiting for additional income. However, adopting a mindset of *paying yourself first* can revolutionize your approach to saving. This strategy involves setting aside a portion of your income before addressing other financial obligations.

Consider creating distinct savings buckets for specific goals such as vacations or a new car. For example, if you're planning a $3,000 vacation in a year, allocate $250 per month to a dedicated savings account. By automating this process, you ensure consistent contributions and build a financial cushion for your goals. The same principle applies to longer-term objectives, such as saving for a car purchase in three years. Allocate funds monthly to match or approach your anticipated future car payment, fostering disciplined saving habits.

4 Allocating Assets: A Strategic Approach

Diversifying funds by distributing them across various asset classes is a cornerstone of a sound investment strategy to mitigate risk. There's no one-size-fits-all solution for risk tolerance; it's a personalized aspect of financial planning.

For instance, consider a young investor with a longer time horizon. They might opt for a more aggressive asset allocation, emphasizing growth-oriented financial investments that carry higher risk but offer greater potential returns. On the other hand, an older investor approaching retirement may prefer a more conservative approach to protect their accumulated wealth. Collaborating with a financial planning professional can help you tailor an asset allocation strategy that aligns with your risk tolerance and financial goals.

5 Enlisting Professional Guidance

Navigating the complexities of financial planning can be challenging, particularly for first-time investors. Getting help from a professional adds a beneficial layer of expertise to your investment journey.

Grace S. Yung, CFP®, is a Certified Financial Planner practitioner with experience in helping LGBTQ individuals, domestic partners, and families plan and manage their finances since 1994. She is the managing director at Midtown Financial Group, LLC, in Houston. Yung can be reached at grace.yung@lpl.com. Visit letsmakeaplan.org or midtownfg.com/lgbtqplus.10.htm.

RODEOHOUSTON®

ENTERTAINER LINEUP ★ FEB. 27-MARCH 17



TUESDAY, FEB. 27
BLAKE SHELTON
OPENING DAY PRESENTED BY TEXAS CAPITAL

WEDNESDAY, FEB. 28
CARLY PEARCE
ARMED FORCES APPRECIATION DAY PRESENTED BY CROWN ROYAL

THURSDAY, FEB. 29
for KING + COUNTRY

FRIDAY, MARCH 1
50 CENT
BLACK HERITAGE DAY PRESENTED BY KROGER

SATURDAY, MARCH 2
HARDY

SUNDAY, MARCH 3
IVAN CORNEJO

MONDAY, MARCH 4
HANK WILLIAMS JR.
FIRST RESPONDERS DAY PRESENTED BY BP AMERICA

TUESDAY, MARCH 5
OLIVER ANTHONY

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 6
JELLY ROLL
COMMUNITY DAY PRESENTED BY TC ENERGY

THURSDAY, MARCH 7
LUKE BRYAN
VOLUNTEER APPRECIATION DAY PRESENTED BY PHILLIPS 66

FRIDAY, MARCH 8
MAJOR LAZER

SATURDAY, MARCH 9
LAINEY WILSON

SUNDAY, MARCH 10
LOS TIGRES DEL NORTE
GO TEJANO DAY PRESENTED BY FIESTA MART

MONDAY, MARCH 11
WHISKEY MYERS

TUESDAY, MARCH 12
BUN B
ALL AMERICAN TAKEOVER

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 13
NICKELBACK

THURSDAY, MARCH 14
ZAC BROWN BAND

FRIDAY, MARCH 15
JONAS BROTHERS

SATURDAY, MARCH 16
BRAD PAISLEY

SUNDAY, MARCH 17
ERIC CHURCH

ON SALE AT
RODEOHOUSTON.COM/TICKETS

THE NORMAL ANOMALY INITIATIVE, INC. PRESENTS

BQAF

PRESENTED BY ViiV Healthcare | accelerate

@THENORMALANOMALY

16 MARCH 2024

4PM- 2AM

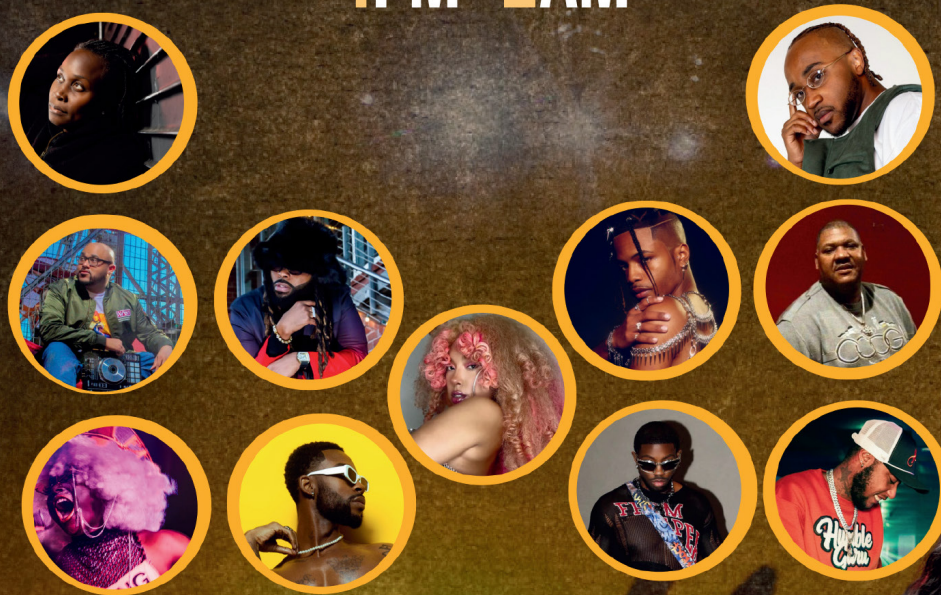
LETOYA LUCKETT
HEADLINER

RAESHANDA
TEAMJAMAR
KHAOSTALKS
HOSTS

SEVNDEEP
DAMEZ
JE'RONELLE
MARTELL LACEY
TAZDAREALIST
THOT SQUAD
CHARLIE XILE
TALAMESHIA
PERFORMERS

DJ SEDRICK
DJ PANDA
DJ ROCABYE
INDMIX

ANATOMY X
SPECIAL GUESTS





WAREHOUSE LIVE
MIDTOWN

2600 TRAVIS STREET, SUITE 200, HOUSTON, TEXAS, 77006

HIV VACCINE TRIALS NETWORK · CIVIC HEART community services · ALLIES in hope · FUNDED IN PART BY THE CITY OF HOUSTON THROUGH HOUSTON ARTS ALLIANCE · abc13 · OutSmart HOUSTON'S LGBTQ MAGAZINE · 97.9 THE BOX · THE PRIDE STUDY · PRIDEnet · All of Us LGBTQ · HOUSTON HEALTH DEPARTMENT · CNP

Honoring Women's History Month with leaders taking Space City to the next level.

WOMEN IN POWER

In an ever-evolving city like Houston, determined visionaries are essential for shaping and strengthening the local community. Unsurprisingly, many of those at the helm of Space City's greatness are LGBTQ women. From nonprofit founders to politicians and influencers, this Women's History Month issue of *OutSmart* introduces you to seven of Houston's leading ladies.

First, meet cover star **Avery Beyleu**, the new CEO of the Montrose Center. With over a decade of experience in national nonprofit leadership experience, Beyleu brings an abundance of perspective to Houston's largest LGBTQ resource center. Next, get to know **Ryan Wright**, the founder and CEO of Texas Greenhouse Project, an organization that provides stability to LGBTQ youth aging out of the foster care system. Then, learn about community organizer and staunch LGBTQ advocate **Lauren Simmons**' run for state representative. And political influencer **Olivia Juliana** tells us about educating her million-plus followers on election issues. Then we introduce you to **Meghan Fairbanks**, the creator of Trans & GenderQueer Houston, a new social group for trans and gender-diverse locals. **Mo Jenkins** then talks making waves in the Texas Legislature. Jenkins is the first trans woman to serve as a committee director for the Texas House, and if she wins her primary election for state representative on March 5, she will become the first out trans person to have their name on the ballot. Finally, read about business woman and activist **Denisha Maxey-Estes**' journey to finding her calling while overcoming adversity.

Leading with Purpose

Avery Belyeu is the new CEO of the Montrose Center, Houston's largest LGBTQ community services provider.

By **RYAN M. LEACH**
Photos by **FRANK XAVIER**
for OutSmart





Avery Belyeu, 38, has joined the Montrose Center as its new chief executive officer, following Ann Robison, who retired after serving in that role for 35 years. Belyeu brings with her a skill set developed over the course of an impressive career that has included years of LGBTQ-centered work. She also brings her perspective as a transgender and queer woman, whose total life experience gives her unique insight into the community served by the Montrose Center. As Belyeu assumes her new role, she intends to lead with not just her expertise, but also with her heart.

"I think all of us who work [at the Montrose Center] are here because we have a story that leads us here. This is a building full of helpers, and they are here because they have a story of their own, or they are inspired by the stories of the folks we serve. My story is that I was very much like a lot of the LGBTQ young people who come to our doors, in that I was raised by a very conservative family that didn't accept who I was. I was marginalized from that family. I experienced homelessness and housing instability because of that. That has been the journey of a lot of my friends who were raised in small towns like I was raised in. That is something that I bring with me to my desk every day—both my expertise I have across this career that I have built, and also my heart from my own personal lived experience," says Balyeu.

A Career Leading to Texas

Belyeu is originally from North Florida. She describes where she grew up as "cattle ranches and tobacco farms" more than South Beach or Miami. Her family, she says, has been in that region since the late 1800s, but she now considers Texas home—the place where she has lived and worked the longest.

Her Texas journey began with Lambda Legal, a civil-rights organization focused primarily on LGBTQ rights. For four years, she was the regional director for the South Central Region, overseeing eight states. She left that position in 2022 to pursue a career as a private consultant before the opportunity at the Montrose Center came open.

Belyeu says that leading an LGBTQ organization like the Montrose Center is a rare opportunity, and she considers it a dream job.→

"I just finished week one, and I still have so much to learn. But one thing I can say already is that I am blown away by the impact of the Montrose Center. From our counseling services to HIV testing, housing support, youth groups, and support for aging LGBT folks, the Center's staff is working holistically to fulfill our mission of empowering our community—primarily LGBTQ individuals and their families—to live healthier, more fulfilling lives."

Belyeu's 14-year career as a nonprofit leader includes a stint as The Trevor Project's education director, followed by the Suicide Prevention Resource Center and The National Alliance, a federal program that gave Belyeu the opportunity to better understand how resources for issues like suicide prevention are funded, and how to ensure that LGBTQ and other marginalized voices are centered in that work.

As she embarks on this new role, Belyeu says her first point of order is to take time to listen to the community and also build bridges that will help people to listen to each other.

"One challenge I see for the Center is that, because our community is so diverse, many folks may have a hard time understanding each other in the moment. Whether the differences are across the lines of age and life experience, gender identity, sexual orientation, or the intersections of race, our community is a beautiful tapestry of diversity. I believe that is a huge part of our strength, and it also presents an opportunity for us to open our hearts and do some deep listening [that might] feel confusing or challenging." she says.



An Intersectional Point of View

As someone who has experienced life from many different points of view, Belyeu's perspective on the Montrose Center's work is unique.

"Like all of us, my story is more complex than just the labels of being a "queer" and "trans" woman. I lived my twenties as a gay man in New York City and in Boston, where I started my career. So while "trans" and "queer" are primarily the terms I use today to describe myself, my life story of living and loving as a gay man is also a crucial part of who I am. In some respects, I think that I live at the intersection of many different parts of our community. I came out [before we had] many of the rights we enjoy today, and at a time where the HIV and AIDS crises were still looming large for many of us. That gives me some insight into parts of our community that were shaped by the battles of the '70s, '80s, and '90s that led to many of our gains across the early 2000s," says Belyeu.

"At the same time, I have spent a lot of my career working with LGBTQ+ youth," she explains, "and I am inspired by the ways they are re-imagining what it means to be part of our diverse community. They remind me that it's OK to explore, to reimagine ourselves, and be creative. They remind me that this journey can be about overcoming hardship, and also about joy. As I live at the intersection of different generations, and different identities—gay, queer, trans—I hope that in this role I can listen and work to support all parts of our diverse and beautiful community, because all of us belong."

Belyeu officially began work on February 19. She has already seen for herself that the Montrose Center is a place that the community accesses seven days a week. On the Saturday that she spoke to *Outsmart*, Belyeu had come into the office to get settled in and encountered a clothing swap taking place. Clothing swaps are often great resources for members of the transgender community who find themselves in need of a new wardrobe as they transition—a necessity that can create unexpected and overwhelming costs. The clothing swap is only the tip of the iceberg when it comes to Montrose Center services. Belyeu wants to make sure more people become aware of what is being offered, and she plans to use the status of her new role as an opportunity to share her discoveries about Center services with others on social media.

"One thing I hear from the community is that many folks aren't aware of the full scale of our programs, and also how to get involved," she says. "Over the next few months, I will be taking a journey of learning about the Center and I'll be sharing the things that excite me across our email and social media. I hope that our community will join me on that journey and rediscover their Center, or maybe even discover it for the very first time."

First Things First: Listen

As the sun sets on her first few weeks, Belyeu, who is still in the process of moving from the Dallas-Fort Worth area, has a lot on her plate. However, she remains clear on her first point of order.

"My first goal is to listen. First, I'll listen to my staff, who are some of the most dedicated and brilliant folks I have ever met. And at the same time, I'll listen to our community—folks who currently look to the Montrose Center as a resource. And finally, I'll listen to our broader LGBTQ+ community and allies at large who, for one reason or another, aren't currently involved with our mission," she says. "I will be in intense listening mode for the first six months, and then I hope to collaborate with our board and staff to lead us into a strategic planning process that will help us decide together, as a community, who we should become in our next 45 years. I am sure that process is going to help us set some lofty and exciting goals, and I can't wait for the community to help us decide where we should go next."

For more info, visit montrosecenter.org.

HOUSTON SYMPHONY



BANK OF AMERICA
POPS Series

21ST CENTURY BROADWAY

Apr. 5, 6 & 7 Jones Hall

Steven Reineke Conductor
Rodney Ingram Vocalist
Hailey Kilgore Vocalist
Derek Klena Vocalist
Ali Stroker Vocalist

Hear your favorite songs from *In the Heights*, *Waitress*, *Dear Evan Hansen*, *Spring Awakening*, *Hamilton*, *Wicked*, and more, with four singers from Broadway!

houstonsymphony.org

Creating Safe Havens

Ryan Wright redefines foster care for LGBTQ youth.

By **DAVID CLARKE**
Photo by **QUINTON/T-SQUARE PRODUCTIONS**



As an advocate, social-impact entrepreneur, queer-identifying woman, and winner of the 2023 Houston LGBTQ+ Political Caucus' Jim Owens Newcomer of the Year Award, Ryan Wright is working to disrupt and ultimately eradicate the foster-care-to-prison, homelessness, and trafficking pipeline for LGBTQ youth—especially trans-identifying young women. To accomplish this, Wright founded and currently serves as executive director for the Texas Greenhouse Project (TGP) and its Transitional Housing Mission, which their website describes as "built on a trauma-informed approach, fostering growth in neglected community members with the core values of service, integrity, and freedom."

Creating safe spaces for LGBTQ youth in foster care wasn't where Wright's professional journey began, but the idea for it started percolating within her at an early age. "I'm the only child, but for a few years, my mom was a foster parent and we had two girls come and stay with us," explains Wright.

Her sisters were eventually reunited with their birth family, but when her former partner told her about the horrific living conditions within the residential treatment center for boys in foster care where he worked, she couldn't help but think about her sisters. "It was very personal for me. So I actually connected with a CPS caseworker in the Dallas area, and I asked, 'Where's the demographic? Where's the most pressing need?'"

That CPS caseworker informed Wright that LGBTQ children in the Texas foster-care system, especially those who are trans-identifying, were the most in need. "At the time, only three facilities in the entire state would accept transgender children, and now it's reduced to one," Wright says. "And they were telling me that, in these facilities, some of them would make [the children] wear their biological-gender clothes during the week and only allow them to wear their true-gender clothes on the weekend. It broke my heart, and in my own coming out and my own personal journey as a queer woman, it felt like this was absolutely a calling for me."

"You bring me a problem, and I want to solve it," Wright asserts. I immediately go into research mode, and I thought, 'Who owns these things? How do they work? How are they licensed?'" She leaned on her professional experiences as a lawyer—a career she decided to pursue after enduring a bad business deal during her 5th-grade market-day experience, as well as her experiences working in real estate, to create TGP and solve this specific problem.

"I was already looking in the housing space, and one of my goals was to own a 100+ unit complex. I wanted a Camden. This is on my bucket list of accomplishments," Wright adds. "I started reading the code, did a lot of research, and realized I could do this. I have a house, and it's in better condition. So that's where it started."

Because of her knowledge and skills, Wright can circumvent issues that arise for others who try to create living spaces for foster children. "I found out very quickly that part of the reason a lot of these facilities struggle and get closed down is that they're not following the very robust minimum standards that are set by the state," Wright explains. "Ultimately, they're not always in compliance and they get violations and penalties."

Beyond being able to interpret and follow the bare minimums required by the laws and administrative codes, Wright's previous professional experiences allow her to excel at other much-needed management tasks. "Having spent so much time learning and studying investing and creative investment strategies has given me a more creative and innovative perspective on how to structure the partnerships that we're aiming to build with our projects," she states.

Although TGP's current B. Wright Transitional Home operates out of her Fort Bend County home, Wright's dream of building a "Smart City" that provides access to technology, education, treatment, housing, entrepreneurship, and resources—and that is capable of housing a minimum of 1,000 residents—seems more than attainable.

Moreover, success for her Texas Greenhouse Project will bring the state a step closer to empowering young people in the LGBTQ community. "Success looks like reducing, if not completely eradicating, homelessness, trafficking, and forced sex work," Wright says. "Reducing the prison populations as well," she adds, "because, unfortunately, 20 percent of the people in the prison system have come through the foster system, and they're at a much higher rate of returning."

TGP's success promises to provide an entire segment of the LGBTQ community with the skills to be homeowners and business owners who help boost the economy and improve the overall safety of their localities. "I'd love for this to be a model carried around the country and the world, because everyone needs a safe place and a safe environment," Wright emphasizes.

Undeniably tenacious and ready to kick down any metaphorical doors in her way, Wright welcomes other Black women (and anyone else) to take a stand and create change as business owners. "Don't be afraid to ask for help, which I'm terrible at," she admits. "So I say that to myself as well."

Wright also explains that aggressive networking, being your most true, authentic self, and continuing to learn are also keys to being successful. "People want to support you. They want to help you. They may have some advice that they can give to you and your vision. Then you can grow beyond just your initial starting point."

For more info on the Texas Greenhouse Project, visit TheTexasGreenhouseProject.com, where you can sign up to be a sponsor. Transgender women between the ages of 18 and 24 can submit an application for transitional housing on their website.



Fighting for What's Right

Lauren Ashley Simmons is running for office to advocate for public schools and transgender teens.

By **CONNOR BEHRENS**

Lauren Ashley Simmons knew she had to run for state representative in District 146 when Rep. Shawn Thierry, a Democrat from Houston, announced she was breaking with her party to support Senate Bill 14, which bars gender-transitioning care for children and teens.

"I was appalled by Rep. Thierry's vote," Simmons says. "Only she knows why she has turned against LGBTQ+ families, but it's time for her to go—for that and many other reasons."

For Simmons, this isn't just about reclaiming a place at the table for the LGBTQ community; it's about fighting for what's right. She has never run for elected office, but says her district's residents encouraged her to run after a video of her criticizing the State's takeover of Houston ISD went viral online. With two children in Houston ISD schools, Simmons is worried about Republican attacks on public education and feels that Thierry was unresponsive to constituents about the issue.

"Thierry voted with Abbott to ban books in school libraries, and she skipped the vote to impeach disgraced Attorney General Ken Paxton," she says. "Thierry's biggest backer is an anti-abortion billionaire who gave more than $1 million to Abbott and $850,000 to former president Donald Trump. Thierry has also refused to publicly condemn Abbott for his state takeover of HISD schools or his voucher plan that could ultimately close neighborhood public schools. My kids are in HISD schools and are being harmed by Gov. Abbott and Rep. Thierry."

Simmons believes her past work history gives her the skills necessary for this position, and she promises to be a strong voice for equality in the Texas House if elected.

"I am a union organizer with a proven track record of fighting for the very people that Greg Abbott and his allies are trying to keep down," she says. "I educate, organize, and mobilize. I currently organize Black low-income women and Black migrant women to get fair wages and benefits, improved working conditions, and better job security. I have been an organizer and fierce advocate for Texas State employees and Houston teachers. I am a proud CWA member and shop steward.



"I will bring all those skills with me into office, and that will inform my continued advocacy for the LGBTQ+ community. I will become a member of the House LGBT caucus, prioritize hiring staff from our community, and ensure that my office is a safe space for our community when issues arise that cause LGBTIA+ groups to mobilize."

Simmons says her progressive stance on several issues makes her the ideal candidate for this position, and she promises to fight for all — no matter their race, gender, or sexuality.

Simmons opposes the censoring of LGBTQ and other books in schools and public libraries. She also promises to pursue legislation that is intersectional, and she's committed to blocking legislation that attacks not only the LGBTQ history, but Black history, Native American history, Latino history, Asian history, women's rights, and more.

"I am fighting to keep our public schools strong by supporting teachers, students, and parents, Simmons says. "I am fighting to get health care for people who have to choose between paying for medicine or paying the rent. I am fighting for living wages for the very people that Greg Abbott and Ken Paxton are trying to keep down. I am fighting against the continued and accelerating erosion of our civil rights and the erasure of Black history. And I am fighting to protect LGBTQIA+ people from family separation, violence, and death."

Born and raised in the Third Ward, Lauren attended public schools and Trinity United Methodist Church. She was a Jack and Jill kid who was active in that acclaimed leadership development and volunteer service organization. Then life threw a curveball. Lauren became a mom at age 19 and had to navigate motherhood, postpartum depression, and staying in school so she could one day provide for her family.

"Those experiences have given me a perspective that will serve many of those in District 146 well," she notes. "I know what it's like to be without power and keep fighting. I went literally overnight from being a comfortable middle-class kid to a 19-year-old mom on food stamps. I struggled, for sure, but my struggles are not that different from many people today who have lost their safety net."

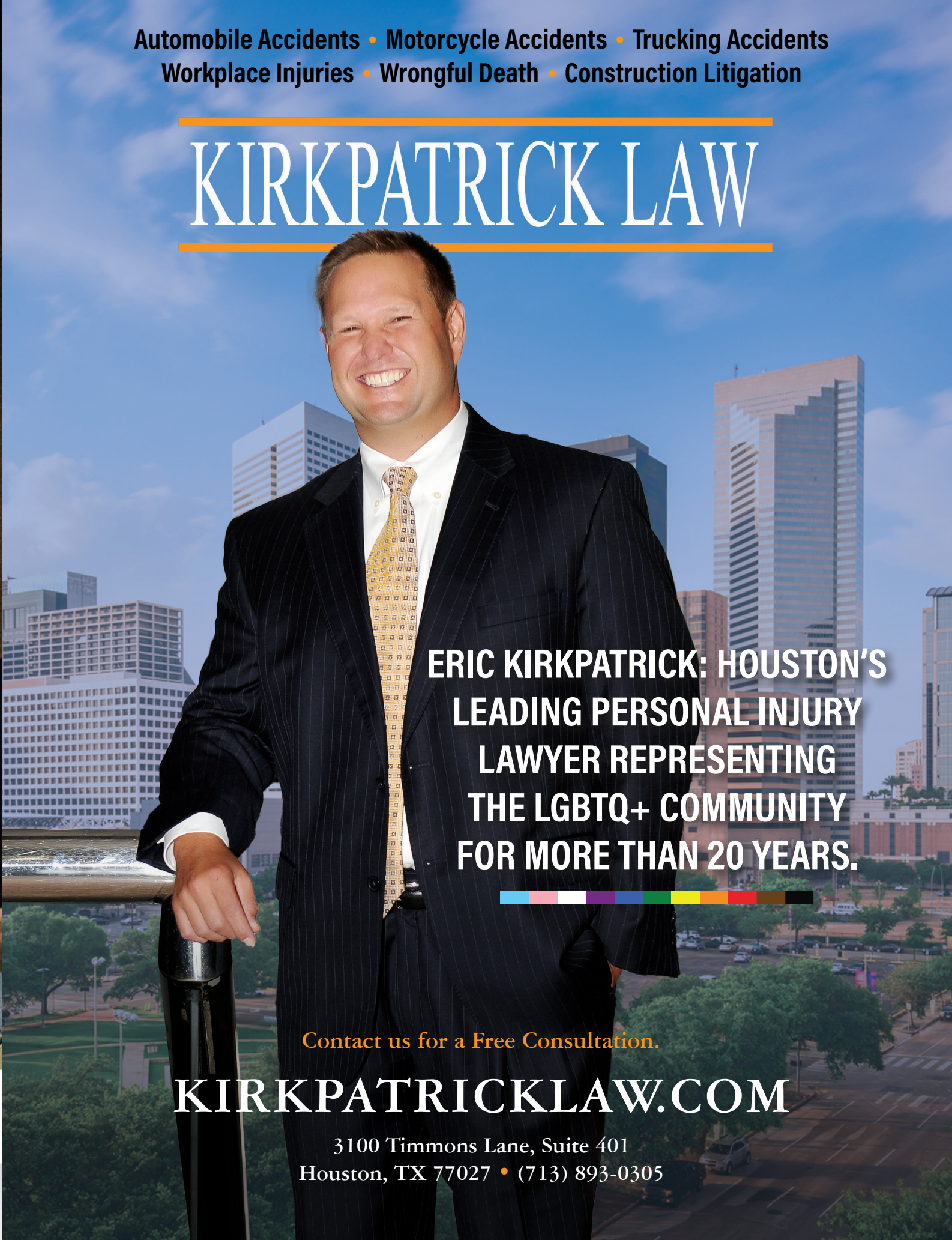
In a country that is incredibly divided, many people seem pessimistic about the future. But Simmons says she stays motivated and optimistic about what lies ahead because she knows firsthand how tough the American spirit is.

"When I think about and talk about the toughest times in my life, I think of the Black women in low-income apartments where I lived who taught me how to survive—how to stretch every penny," she emphasizes. "I owe them a debt. That's why I do what I do."

For more info on Simmons' campaign, go to laurenashleysimmons.com

Automobile Accidents • Motorcycle Accidents • Trucking Accidents
Workplace Injuries • Wrongful Death • Construction Litigation

KIRKPATRICK LAW



ERIC KIRKPATRICK: HOUSTON'S LEADING PERSONAL INJURY LAWYER REPRESENTING THE LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY FOR MORE THAN 20 YEARS.

Contact us for a Free Consultation.

KIRKPATRICKLAW.COM

3100 Timmons Lane, Suite 401
Houston, TX 77027 • (713) 893-0305



Person of Influence

Olivia Julianna inspires over a million followers to create meaningful political change.

By **CONNOR BEHRENS**

Whether she's advocating for abortion rights or meeting with Vice President Kamala Harris to discuss queer policy changes, 21-year-old Olivia Julianna is wasting no time using her voice to create change in the ongoing battle for equality. Fighting for what's right is something that's always been deeply important to this ambitious Houstonian.

"I grew up in the church and worked in ministry, and that is where my passion for service came from," Olivia says. "I see Jesus as the ultimate activist in the story of my upbringing. He loved all people, served all people, cared for all people. That's how I chose to live my life."

Since then, Olivia has amassed some notable activist's credentials as she quickly makes a name for herself. She was the director of politics and government affairs for Gen-Z for Change, with Bloomberg Media naming her one of the 50 Most Influential People of 2022. When US Representative Matt Gaetz, a Florida Republican, criticized Olivia on Twitter and publicly made comments about her body at the Turning Point USA summit in Florida, Julianna responded by rallying her Twitter followers to contribute more than $2 million to the Gen-Z for Choice Abortion Fund.

With over a million followers on TikTok, Twitter, and Instagram combined, Olivia's message is clearly resonating. However, she says she's just a regular person who is using her platform to advocate for progressive candidates and drive narrative change, hoping to inspire more young people to get involved in politics along the way.

"I think one of the main issues in this country is apathy," she says, "and I think a lot of people have voter apathy because they vote in federal elections thinking that will solve all our problems. But that's not the case. State governments are largely to blame for the worst laws we've seen in this country, but most people don't realize that. I want people to understand that every level of government has a huge impact on our lives, which is why we should be engaged on every level. I also advocate for the issues most near to my heart: reproductive health care, education, voting rights—things that matter to me as a Texan.

"At the end of the day, I'm just a regular person," she emphasizes. "I live a fairly normal life. I wake up every morning and walk my dog, do my laundry, cook my meals. I'm not a pundit on a major network or a politician who was born into privilege. I'm just a 21-year-old

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ALEX ROSA

who really cares about my home state and other people. I think that people are more comfortable hearing from someone they can relate to when it comes to these important issues and policies. It provides a sense of comfort."

For those in the LGBTQ community wanting to get involved with activism, Olivia emphasizes that showing up to protest and vote is a huge help.

"We must show up in numbers to vote, to block-walk, and to make public comments that we will not let them do these things unchallenged. They will have to look into unafraid eyes when they try to take our rights away," she forcefully asserts. "They want us to be too afraid to speak out, which is why we must always speak out."

If people are too nervous to get involved in activism or they aren't out yet, Olivia encourages them to be involved as openly or as quietly as they're comfortable with.

"Some people may not be OK being outwardly involved in LGBTQ+ advocacy for safety concerns or they haven't yet come out to folks, and the good news is that you can be an intersectional activist," she explains. "Abortion advocacy, domestic-violence prevention advocacy, and voting-rights advocacy all have to do with LGBTQ+ rights. You can march, but you can also become a poll worker during election season. You can protest, but you can also become a voter registrar and register people to vote in elections. There isn't any one way to correctly be involved."

"WE MUST SHOW UP IN NUMBERS TO VOTE, TO BLOCK-WALK, AND TO MAKE PUBLIC COMMENTS THAT WE WILL NOT LET THEM DO THESE THINGS UNCHALLENGED. THEY WILL HAVE TO LOOK INTO UNAFRAID EYES WHEN THEY TRY TO TAKE OUR RIGHTS AWAY."

— Olivia Julianna

Having met with several leaders, including Vice President Kamala Harris, Olivia feels that her activism is making a sizable impact, with leaders remembering her and the values she's fighting for.

"I've actually met the vice president a few times, and each time has been like a breath of air," she says. "Every time we've spoken, she's asked me about my studies and about my family. She's remembered me every time. Sometimes it can feel like organizers from the South aren't really seen or heard, that we are forgotten in the shuffle. Speaking with the vice president has made me feel seen and heard, and to me, when I come into any room of power, I bring my people with me. I bring Texans, I bring Latinas, I bring women. So to be able to represent Southern organizers in such an important way has really left an impact on me."

"Texas gives me hope," Olivia notes. "Houston gives me hope. We watched our county judge be outspent by millions of dollars and have an ad run against her during the World Series, and she still won! We killed school vouchers this past session. We've got an amazing candidate, Colin Allred, who will be at the top of the ticket in November against Ted Cruz. We have things that are working for us here, and I'm confident that they will pay off."

Keep up with Olivia Julianna on Instagram @Oliviajulianna.

SCHWARTZ IMMIGRATION LAW PLLC

2417 DUNLAVY

2023 READERS' Out•Smart GAYEST & GREATEST WINNER CHOICE AWARDS

Best Female Immigration Attorney



EXPERIENCE MATTERS!

Ana Maria Schwartz
She/Her/Hers
Attorney at Law
Schwartz Immigration Law, PLLC

Principal Office:
2417 Dunlavy St.
Houston, TX 77006
(713)337-5270

Austin Office:
106 E. 6th St., Suite 900-123
Austin, TX 78701
(512)322-5270

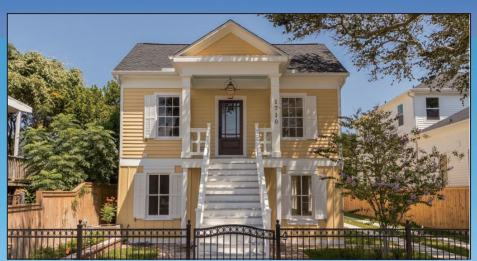
COOLER in the SUMMER • WARMER in the WINTER

LIVE in GALVESTON

NEAR by the BEACH!

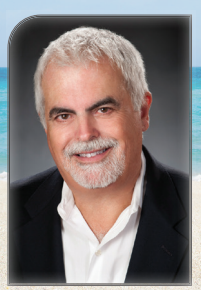
CLOSE to HOUSTON

HISTORIC HOMES



1710 22nd Street, Galveston, Texas • Circa 1874! $1,050,000

Ideal VRBO property close to the beach! Three blocks to the Gulf of Mexico and the beach! Fully renovated 1874 high raised Victorian with 5 bedrooms, 5 baths, stunning kitchen & den with open stairwell atrium. The deluxe kitchen has a 15 feet high cathedral ceiling, adjoining den and dramatic circular staircase to the downstairs game room. Ceramic tile back splash, quartz countertops, gas cooktop and large farm house sink There are two primary bedrooms, one on each floor and each with tiled ensuite baths, along with four bedrooms and three baths. Red oak wood floors throughout the upstairs and tile floors downstairs. Large 2nd floor covered exterior deck is 21x20. Completely fenced with a large two car garage.



David Bowers, Realtor®

Better Homes and Gardens REAL ESTATE

GARY GREENE

409/763-2800

David@DavidBowers.com

Sally B. Wallace Preservation Award for Green Revival (solar panels on my 1899 Victorian home)

Thank you for voting me Best Realtor® in Galveston -OutSmart Readers' Choice 2013-15

Community Builder

Meghan Fairbanks works to connect trans and gender-nonconforming Houstonians.

By **CONNOR BEHRENS**



Meghan Fairbanks' journey toward becoming an out-and-proud transgender woman has ignited her passion to better the lives of those in the LGBTQ community.

"I came out about five years ago and quickly saw how dire the state of transgender rights is," she says. "I knew I had to get involved to make things better."

After discovering a passion for advocacy and activism in response to anti-LGBTQ legislation in 2021, Fairbanks has continued to advocate for LGBTQ rights and other social-justice causes. She is currently a board member of the Transgender Foundation of America and maintains memberships with Houston's LGBTQ+ Political Caucus and the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU). Additionally, she is a graduate of Equality Texas Equality Leaders program.

In 2022, Fairbanks founded Trans & GenderQueer Houston to provide transgender and gender-nonconforming folks with a place to socialize and network outside of the traditional support-group environment.

"I always wanted a group where trans people could come together," she says. "Support groups existed, but they were only online. There wasn't anything that was specifically a social event, so I just decided to start one. What I like about Trans & GenderQueer Houston is that it's just a means for trans people to get together, socialize, and hang out. You can be together with other members in the community without the heaviness of a support group. Saying that, there's definitely some peer support going on in our groups, but it's mostly to just hang out, find friends, learn about resources, etc."

Fairbanks personally finds the group meetings rewarding, and she gets inspired to make the group better when trans people

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ALEX ROSA

approach her and tell her how appreciative they are.

"Soon after I started the meetings, I had two people tell me this was the first time they had ever come out in public as themselves," she says. "That completely floored me. Since then, I've had people tell me they had never met another trans person before coming to the meetings. I just had someone earlier this year tell me that attending these meetings was the first time they witnessed trans joy. All that positive feedback I get just makes me want to work harder to make these meetings better. There are so many wonderful people in our community, and I think the vast majority of us do a really great job of supporting each other. That's the kind of stuff that gives me hope for the future."

The Harris County Commissioners Court recently appointed Fairbanks and Diamond Stylz, another transgender activist, to at-large positions on the county's newly formed LGBTQIA+ Commission, and the duo has pledged to protect and empower Houston's LGBTQ community. The LGBTQIA+ Commission was established in 2023 to develop goals and coordinate research for recommended planning, programming, and action relating to the LGBTQ community's progression and civil-rights protections in Harris County. While there's only been one meeting since Fairbanks and Stylz were added as members, the two have already begun discussing plans for the commission and how to help the community.

"I CAME OUT ABOUT FIVE YEARS AGO AND QUICKLY SAW HOW DIRE THE STATE OF TRANSGENDER RIGHTS IS. I KNEW I HAD TO GET INVOLVED TO MAKE THINGS BETTER."

—Meghan Fairbanks

"We had a really good meeting," Fairbanks says. "We talked about priorities and discussed the needs of the community like health care, access to mental health, and engaging with the community."

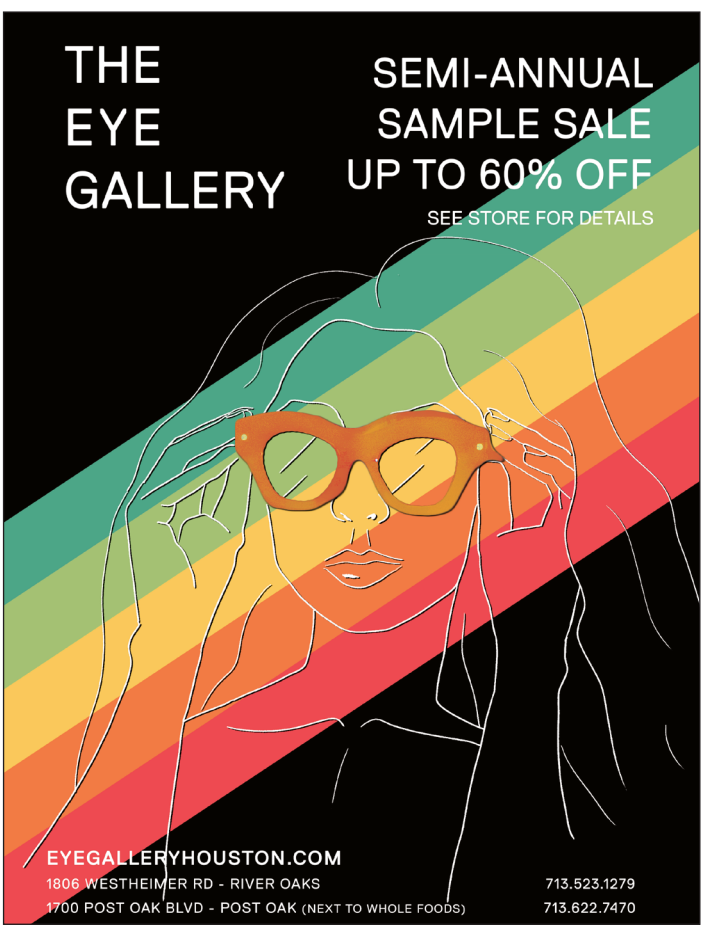
With so many LGBTQ groups scattered all across Harris County, Fairbanks says it would be great to coordinate with these groups and help bring them together through the County's LGBTQIA+ Commission.

"We are wondering if there are any ways we can organize all these groups," she says. "The Commission really just wants to make sure we listen to the needs of all members of the LGBTQ+ community. We want to do more. We actually have plans in place at the next meeting for there to be an opportunity for public comment."

Despite all the trans injustice happening across the country, Fairbanks says she is still optimistic that change is on the way and better days are ahead for the LGBTQ community. She stresses the importance of getting out and voting, as commissions and support groups can only go so far in uniting the community.

"Vote—*period*," she emphasizes. Get your friends to vote and get everybody you can to vote, because voter turnout in this country is honestly garbage. I think one of the things that harms us is voter apathy and people just feeling like their vote doesn't count. Your vote absolutely counts. It's the single most powerful thing that any citizen of this country can do. It's a powerful thing to stand at that ballot box and have your voice be heard."

For more information on Trans & GenderQueer Houston, visit tggh.org







Breaking Down Barriers

Mo Jenkins makes transgender history in the Texas Legislature.

By **DAVID CLARKE**
Photo by **WILLXWHIT PHOTOGRAPHY**

Mo Jenkins is shaking things up as the first trans woman to be a committee director and committee clerk in the Texas Legislature. Currently working for Abel Herrero, the state representative for Texas House District 34, Jenkins is herself now running for state representative. If she wins her primaries, Jenkins will be the first openly trans person to have their name on the ballot, and potentially the first openly trans person to serve in the Texas Legislature.

However, working in politics wasn't Jenkins' dream. It was her mother's diagnosis of congestive heart failure that fueled her original career aspirations.

"I never wanted to go and work in politics. I didn't know much about it as a kid," Jenkins recalls. "I actually wanted to be a cardiothoracic surgeon to invent new ways to keep hearts alive."

Growing up, Jenkins had to overcome many adversities. "There was a point where my mom and I ate butter, sugar, and rice for four months straight because we ran out of meat and beans," she says. "We didn't have anything to eat, so that's what we ate—breakfast, lunch, and dinner—except when I was at school. Then I had the school lunches."

Jenkins also recalls moving often as a child, coming home from school to find the electricity had been cut off, and having to live with her grandmother when her mom got sick and they were facing eviction.

As a teenager, Jenkins experienced homelessness while also attending public school. "Being in collegiate high school is how I pulled myself up," she says. "That's how I got myself the scholarships to be able to go to college, to get a degree, to now have the job that I have. So I always want to protect those pathways for students, protect our public schools, and give investments to our higher-education programs so that people can go to school and come out with less debt."

In college, Jenkins was a double major in biomedical sciences and political science. "I only added political science because I had a professor who told me, 'If you add on a liberal-arts major, it'll help boost your GPA for med school,'" Jenkins admits. "I just chose the first one that they put in front of me, but one of the classes I took was Campaigns and Elections with Dr. Gleason. And I fell in love."

That one class changed Jenkins's life path completely. She dropped her biomedical sciences major and focused exclusively on political science. Her hard work earned her a 2020 internship working for State Representative Herrero and launched her political career.

"In my professional life I'm lucky to have a boss who allows me to be my authentic self," explains Jenkins. "There are some members of the Legislature that have tried to weaponize me being a Black trans woman, to the point where it has threatened my safety."

It's not easy to be openly trans in the Texas Legislature, but Jenkins doesn't let that deter her. "With all the debates about these bathroom bills and things," she says, "I know the images the lawmakers are thinking of. They're thinking of the big biker who puts on the blonde Party City wig, and that's what they think 'trans' is. So I try to have realistic conversations, and it's a lot harder for these members to attack our community when they have to face us every single day. Members will say some sick stuff because they know that you cannot get to them. They know that if you try to approach that dais, that DPS is going to stop you. They know that you can't go to those back hallways with them," Jenkins notes. "But when they know that they cannot run away from the community that they are talking about, they are a lot more careful with their words."

"I WANT TO BE A GREAT EXAMPLE FOR THIS HISTORIC MOMENT, BUT I ALSO WANT TO SHOW REPUBLICANS THAT YOU CANNOT PIGEONHOLE TRANS PEOPLE."

— Mo Jenkins

Jenkins experienced this firsthand during the debates over SB 14, when she confronted both Republican and Democratic legislators about their use of dehumanizing language regarding the trans community.

"I want to be there in those spaces because I want you—to my face—to say these things, because you can't run to the members' lounge. I can go there. You can't run to the back hallway. I can go there. You can't hide on the floor, because I'm there with you," she states defiantly.

Yet Jenkins doesn't want to be the only trans person in the Legislature. "It gets lonely," she admits, so she encourages anyone interested to throw caution to the wind and put their name on the ballot. "I want to be a great example for this historic moment, but I also want to show Republicans that you cannot pigeonhole trans people as just being trans. We are policy experts. We are educators. We are administrators. We are nonprofit leaders. We are in the community doing work all the time, and you see us all the time."

For more info, visit mojenkins.com.

BOOKKEEPING & BEYOND LLC
YOUR BUSINESS MANAGEMENT SUPPORT TEAM

BKBY is a team of experienced bookkeepers. We provide full-charge bookkeeping services to small businesses, sole-proprietors, and individuals. Our combined years of experience and genuine desire to be of service, makes our team the perfect fit for small businesses that are seeking an outsourced solution for their bookkeeping needs.



"BKBY is so much more than a bookkeeping service."
—Deborah B.

"BKBY has handled all of our financial management for over five years."
—Dr. Penchas

"BKBY went above and beyond... as I have never seen a company do for a customer."
—The BL Family

"BKBY has saved me from an accounting nightmare!"
—Whitney K.

"BKBY provides top notch services."
—Will P.

"BKBY keeps everything running smoothly."
—Hollee M.

CALL TODAY! 832-234-2542 | info@bkby.org | www.bkby.org | 99 Detering St., Ste 106, Houston, TX 77007

Overcoming All Odds

Denisha Maxey-Estes's arduous life journey helped her find her calling.

By **IAN L. HADDOCK**

Denisha Maxey-Estes recently celebrated her first anniversary with the love of her life, Tee Estes. Now, she's adding to that list of new beginnings she has accomplished as a woman who has had many evolutionary milestones. Denisha is a person who prefers to stay in the background, but for Women's History Month, her story is offered as an example of the constant uphill battle that many women experience as they struggle to find their joy and peace.

Denisha works at the International Better Business Bureau and has been an active advocate for women and LGBTQ people across the Houston metropolitan area. Her story, though, is about so much more than her work and advocacy; it is about how eliminating stigmas can bring a better life, no matter how serious life's challenges may be.

At 15, Denisha was pregnant with her first of six children. A single parent while still in high school, she was also battling with finding a language for her sexual identity. While paralyzed by the stigma of being a teenage mother, she nonetheless would not make the choice to abort her child. Though leaning on her mother and other family members for support, she also took jobs to meet the financial demands of taking care of her offspring, not fully realizing the great burden of that responsibility.

"At 15, you're still a child," she says, "and it is difficult because your decisions will affect someone else. Over time, though, it has kept me humble knowing that you are only one decision away from becoming a statistic."

As a pregnant teenager and a Black woman, Denisha was more likely to experience maternal mortality. But even after surviving the birth of her children, the possibilities for creating a sustainable life were dim. With social, structural, and political issues working against her as a Black woman, it would be hard to find a way to attain any sense of normalcy in her life. Or so she thought.

"God always puts people in your path that see something in you that you don't see in yourself," she says.



In her early twenties, Denisha found a job that provided health insurance for her and her children, and a salary sufficient to provide for their necessities. For her, this was good enough. Her manager, however, observed her commitment to the job, work ethic, and overall personality, and began to groom her for a better role. In short order, this young mother of six was in school earning an undergraduate degree.

"'I see more in you' is what she would tell me," Denisha says, "and that was all the fuel I needed to see more for myself."

Today, having earned a Master of Business Administration degree, Denisha is a grandmother. Her children have graduated high school, and one has completed her undergraduate degree. Denisha's journey is a testament to what they can achieve, and her humility helps to keep her entire family close. Her mother died two years ago, and since her children's other grandparents aren't alive, Denisha has become the matriarch and fabric that holds the family together. She uses her experiences to uplift each family member and empower them to keep going.

"MY JOB AS A PARENT IS TO BE THERE AND USE MY EXPERIENCES—NOT TO TELL THEM WHAT TO DO, BUT TO ENSURE THEY HAVE OPTIONS AND A SOFT LANDING."

—Denisha Maxey-Estes

"Things come up when you are growing up with your children. I have a child navigating being married and a parent, a child who is living with HIV, a child who is getting out of prison, and a child who I am navigating conversations about PrEP with. My job as a parent is to be there and use my experiences—not to tell them what to do, but to ensure they have options and a soft landing."

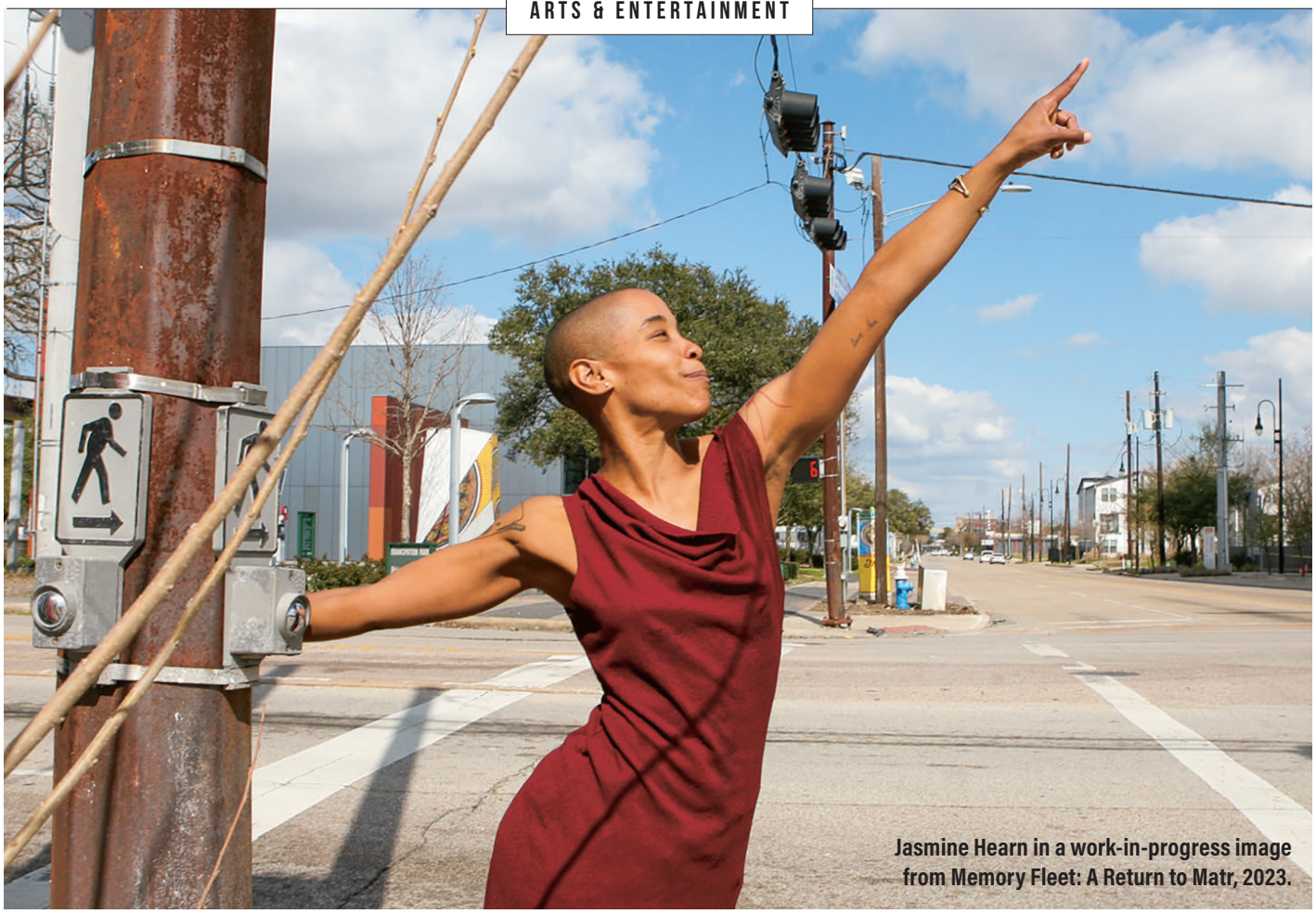
Denisha extends that help with soft landings to others in her advocacy for women and LGBTQ issues as a volunteer for the Houston Area Women's Center, as well as serving as vice chair of The Normal Anomaly Initiative's board of directors. This work allows her to continue her journey to uplift, understand, and empower marginalized people by using her life experiences and work.

During Women's History Month, we celebrate people like Denisha—those who may not have a visible story of triumph written in the history books, but who have such an important role in making our world a better place.

Today, Denisha has her eyes on an even bigger future as she becomes a newlywed empty-nester. "One thing that comes from having a child at 15 is the shame attached to it. You always see yourself as a 15-year-old pregnant girl. You chase those things that will take you away from your shame, but until you learn to embrace the 15-year-old girl, you won't be able to be fully present in the moment. Now, I'm in a place where I can be picky. Passion is my journey now."

Keep up with Denisha Maxey-Estes on Instagram @msdreamzchaser.





Jasmine Hearn in a work-in-progress image from Memory Fleet: A Return to Matr, 2023.

Memory, Mothers, and Home

Dancer and choreographer **Jasmine Hearn** explores family lineages.

By **NEIL ELLIS ORTS**
Photo by: **PREETIKA RAJGARIAH**

When talking about Jasmine Hearn's *Memory Fleet: The Return to Matr,* there are certain words that come up again and again. Memory. Mother. Home. Concepts that spring out of and return to these words have been motivating work by Hearn over several years and are currently manifesting in this project, to be produced by DiverseWorks the first weekend of April. There are at least three beginnings to this event.

Origins I

Hearn was born and raised in Houston, growing up in the northside neighborhood of Acres Home. They describe themself as a clumsy and shy child, always falling down. Hearn's mother put them into a ballet class, following the example of an older sister who was a ballet dancer. Hearn loved the dancing and took to it well, but admits now, "I would only dance either in that random ballet class that my mother put me in, or all by myself in my room upstairs."

Despite that shyness, Hearn describes their childhood as growing up in a dancing environment, encountering dancing at family reunions and at church. "I was always trying to catch up and be like my sister and like my aunties who I saw getting ready for parties. So in a way, dance was just part of the everyday."

As Hearn grew, they lost their shyness about dancing in front of others, and by the age of 12, they were enrolled at the Houston Met Dance Center, enjoying the rigor of the classes found there. Soon, they were finding opportunities to dance and taking every one, "from doing improvisation solos for The Links for their lunches, or for Jack and Jill of America talent shows, to dancing in different productions in high school," Hearn says. "So I always loved dance and I always made time for dance. I was very grateful that my mother made space for me for that."

When it came time for Hearn to go to college, they headed to Pittsburgh and Point Park University. Immediately upon graduation, Hearn landed their first professional job as a company member of Dance Alloy Theater, a prominent dance company in Pittsburgh at the time. Since then, they have never stopped dancing professionally and have danced with, among others, David Dorfman Dance, Sandra Organ Solis's Earthen Vessels, and Urban Bush Women. With every job, they found mentors as well as colleagues.

Origins II

In 2015, Hearn made a memory piece in collaboration with their grandmother, who was

starting to lose memories to dementia. That dance theater solo, *Memory Keep(h)er,* was an exploration of not only memory but of the divine feminine. Hearn began thinking about expanding these thoughts, gathering more oral histories from other matriarchs and aunties. How is memory stored? In what ways do we remember? How do you archive the lives of mothers? This became the beginning of *Memory Fleet.*

"Within my own familial lineages, there is a running hereditary situation of forgetting and dementia," Hearn says. "I was thinking about ways of being with this sense of a fleeting memory, but also being with the sense of 'we build these moments together.' *Memory Fleet* in itself is a way I ask myself to be in community with the lineages I've been able to be a part of and a way of holding the memories for one another and for myself. It's a way I get to be in conversation with my aunties—those that mothered me in my own community of Houston."

Memory Fleet is only starting in Houston. The plan is to take this process to Hearn's other homes in Pittsburgh and New York in order to explore those dance lineages. For the DiverseWorks showing, Sandra Organ Solis, the first professional Black woman in the Houston Ballet, will make an appearance, so that lineage will be very present in this iteration.

Here, a who's who of Black women choreographers spills from Hearn. "I've been able to be a part of lineages such as Jawole Willa Jo Zollar, who founded Urban Bush Women; Bebe Miller, Marlies Yearby, Joan Miller, and then also other lineages that folks know about a little bit more just because of how we share history, like Katherine Dunham, Pearl Primus, Debbie Allen. I'm knowing and naming the fact that without their work, without their rigor, without their rest, I would not be able to do what I do today."

Interlude: Archiving

Hearn speaks of *Memory Fleet* as not only a performance, but also an archive project. They think of archiving from at least three directions. "First and foremost is what I learned from Mame Diarra Speis of Urban Bush Women. She talked about how her body is her first home. That really stuck with me, and I continue to be in the understanding that my body is my first home. So if my body is a home, what do I store in my home?" The practice of listening to the stories and responding to them through movement is one way of storing or archiving the collection of memories in the body, and taking it on the road to share with audiences.

Secondly, there is a collection of clothing. "We're also collecting different garments that are loaned or donated from this community of womb-centered people," Hearn explains. The collection contains a variety of dresses and skirts that were meaningful to the owners. "These very treasured pieces hold memory in themselves. So these garments are traveling as an installation in the performance."

Finally, the stories that are being collected will be part of an online archive, a place of collected and collective memories from mothering and mentoring figures. This will launch in March of 2025.

Origins III

Ashley DeHoyos Sauder, curator for DiverseWorks, first saw Hearn perform while in New York City for a conference. It was 2019 and Hearn was presenting their work *you think you fancy* at Danspace, a prominent venue for dance. "They came out in these costumes that were so Houston," Sauder says. "Part of Jasmine's practice, which I love, is thinking about the materiality of the costumes and the histories and how that fed into dance. I just remember [the performers] parading around Danspace and they had on Frenchy's Fried Chicken T-shirts with sequins."

That performance started a conversation between Sauder and Hearn, as Hearn was already developing *Memory Fleet.* Hearn wanted to make this expansion of *Memory Keep(h)er,* and it had to premiere in Houston. "They were really intentionally thinking about what it looks like to come home," Sauder says. This struck a chord with Sauder, who describes herself "as someone who spent half my life trying to get out of Texas, only to come back to Texas for my curatorial work and career." That's five years of conversations about memory, leaving home, and returning.

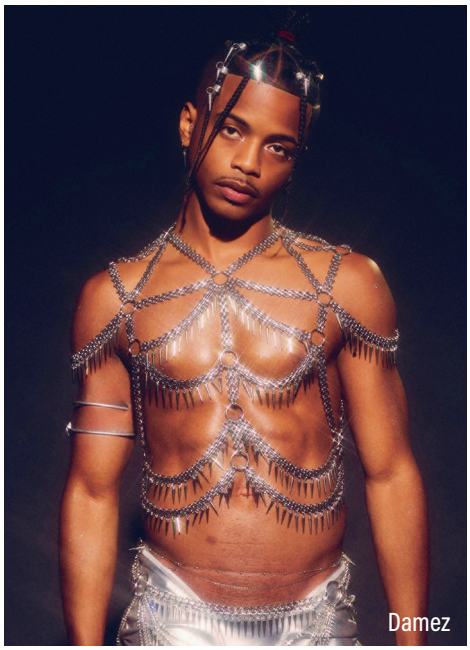
"This is a really exciting time for me to return back home as my whole self." Hearn says, reflecting on where they were in their journey as a teenager leaving home. "I hadn't come out as queer, I hadn't come out as a nonbinary person, so to be able to return to those who had mothered me and to be fully in my identity has been incredibly cathartic and really difficult, and also one of my favorite moments of being a part of this project."

Such a tender, vulnerable time might give others pause, but Hearn concludes with a declaration for how they share their work and their heart with the world: "I do understand that I am my most powerful self when I am in movement."



JAY WARR

WHAT: *Memory Fleet: A Return to Matr*
WHEN: April 6–7
WHERE: Houston Met Dance, 4916 Main St #100
INFO: tinyurl.com/JasmineH


Damez


RaeShanda


Thot Squad


TazDaRealist

Empowering Narratives

Black Queer Advancement Festival Week is creating space for Black LGBTQ performers.

By **IAN L. HADDOCK**

As a person in love with storytelling and a believer that history is often overlooked if it's not documented, being a raconteur has been a gift to me as we continue to face challenges in politics, culture, and society. Throughout my years of doing work on the ground and having the opportunity to participate in media, I've often found that the arts are where we begin to shift people's narratives. As being queer is becoming more mainstream, we are starting to see the effects of representation change the perception of the social climate around us.

My lens of telling our stories comes from the idea that Black queer people have always existed, and our spaces of bravery and joy are often underdocumented. It was 2005, and I was just a teenager, when I rode in a car with friends from Texas City to go to Bartini in Houston. It was my first experience in a gay club, and there was a feeling of belonging and assurance that my experience was one of many. Standing in the middle of a sea of Black queer people dancing, jaysetting, voguing, and lip synching, I had found my place. At that very moment, I knew it was essential to one day create spaces for people who looked and loved like me to find joy and to be celebrated in the community.

Black Queer Advancement Festival, or Black Queer AF, is an ode to the community at-large. In our third year, we are beginning to cement our place in Houston history as a premier event that centers on the talents and empowerment of the Black queer community. In the first two years, this celebration was held during Black Pride Weekend, but after many conversations it has moved to the week of Spring Break in order to celebrate the anniversary of The Normal Anomaly Initiative.

This celebration also includes the grand opening of Houston's only standalone Black LGBTQ drop-in center, a space that serves as a testament to the community's forward movement in Houston and the future of possibilities for Black LGBTQ people. Influencers, elected officials, community leaders, and socialites will come from across the region to support these events.

Chris Hollins, Houston's city controller, says, "As Houston's chief financial officer, it's important to support organizations like The Normal Anomaly because creating inclusive spaces is critical to Houston's success as a diverse destination to live, work, and raise a family."

The premier event, The BQAF Music Festival, is the pinnacle of the week's events and is unique because it is Texas' only festival that provides a platform specifically for Black queer people. Over the last two years, we have had over 30 artists perform on our stage, along with many celebrities and influencers hosting events and speaking on panels—over 90 percent of them Black queer people.

This year will be no different, with almost 20 people participating in some way at the BQAF Music Festival. Our headliner and ally, LeToya Luckett, says, "As the headliner of this event, I am excited to perform because my LGBTQ+ fam has always made me feel seen and loved. It's beautiful to be able to connect through music, and I can always expect good vibes and fierce lewks! I can't wait!"

RaeShanda Lias-Lockhart, Damez, Thot Squad, and TazDaRealist are just four of the other hosts and artists who will be entertaining at the festival.

LET'S CHECK THE BOARD

RAESHANDA LIAS-LOCKHART

On Instagram @shop_aif

RaeShanda has millions of followers worldwide, but at her heart she is a Southern girl with charm, class, and comedy. A U.S. Army veteran, she sampled a number of work opportunities following her discharge—including private lending and higher education—before running for City Council in Louisville, Kentucky. Though her dreams were derailed for a moment by politics, she would still end up in the public eye as she and her former wife were married on TLC's *Say Yes to the Dress*. Years later, she turned her camera on and began using her platform to educate people on ideas and concepts that are important to her. As the camera rolled, she opened up with "Let's Check the Board" and became an internet phenomenon overnight.

"Let's Check the Board" was not rehearsed and was simply a way to communicate her ideas and opinions to the public from her Louisville boutique, All Is Fair in Love and Fashion. Her style of social commentary is to make complex concepts really simple. She often talks about abortions, hate crimes, Black history, and gun laws in a way that you forget you're learning, and you end up following her for more.

"I don't see myself as a star; I am just being myself," she says. "The only thing that has changed is the freedom I have to do what I want and knowing people are actually listening to me, and I can pick what I choose to stand for."

While influencers are often about the comedy without the education, RaeShanda's brand of normalizing conversations about controversial and important topics is a masterclass in using your power for good. It is also an asset to the Black, LGBTQ, and female communities because her following is often educated in such an entertaining way that they forget she is expanding their perceptions. "I have been gay since second grade," she says, "but I'm so palatable that sometimes white people forget that I'm Black, and straight people forget that I'm gay."

This will be RaeShanda's third time back in Houston and her second time appearing on behalf of The Normal Anomaly. Hosting the BQAF Music Festival with Team Jamar, she says, "means being unapologetic in who I am created to be. No apologies. No chaser."

REPRESENTING FOR ALL OF US

DAMEZ

On Instagram @damez

Damez was always meant to be a star. He has been all over the internet and is now on movie screens with his viral Renaissance Tour outfit. Clad in silver, he was in the audience at the concert with Lil Nas X and ended up having a cameo in *Renaissance: A Film by Beyoncé*. Before that moment, Damez was featured on many platforms including *MTV News*, *Billboard*, and *Out* magazine. He has released six projects to date.

Damez is one of the featured performers at the BQAF Music Festival. An all-around self-made musical artist with talents that include songwriting, creative directing, rapping, and dance, Damez was selected to be a part of the lineup because of his tenacity, professionalism, and commitment to his craft. With all his talents, he is sure to leave the audience hyped and excited.

"Platforms and opportunities like this," he says of the BQAF Music Festival, "remind us of our power, strengths, and the gifts of our community. It reminds us we deserve to be on stage and celebrated."

Though he hasn't previously performed in Houston, Damez has family here and across Texas. He once lived here for a few months while taking a break from college, but hasn't returned since becoming a rising star. In essence, this is also a homecoming for him. With Beyoncé being his favorite artist of all time, he says, "All of this feels like a full-circle moment for me."

You can expect Damez's performance to be high energy and high entertainment value, with storytelling that showcases what Black Queer AF means to him. "Black Queer AF, to me when I hear it, sounds like pride—being unapologetically you. Being Black and queer, there is so much culture there," says Damez. "There's struggle and so much pain, but there's also so much joy there. I'm representing all of that."

THE NONBINARY REBEL

THOT SQUAD

On Instagram@blvck.bunnie

Thot Squad is the first nonbinary performer to grace the BQAF stage, as well as the newest artist on that stage. Also known as Blvck Bunnie, Thot Squad released their first single in 2022 and has rapidly gained a following on all social-media platforms with their unapologetic music created for the Black, female, LGBTQ, and sex-worker communities. This freedom to create couldn't have happened any sooner. "For a long time in my life," they say, "I felt like I had to calm myself down because I didn't want to deal with whatever anyone had to say. Going into music gave me the opportunity to say that this was exactly how I feel and who I am."

Thot Squad's transparency in their music and in life is what makes them so relatable to the masses. They recognize the power in centering Blackness in queer spaces. Though BQAF Week is uplifting the Black LGBTQ experience, it does not keep anyone from any community from attending. Actually, it is quite the opposite; BQAF believes that by focusing on the most marginalized and creating a brave space for them, it inevitably becomes a safer space for most anyone. Thot Squad likens it to a religious experience when being among people with similar intersections.

"When you go to a regular Pride event [around the country], you may see our language and our culture, but you will see few of us at the events. So to be in spaces where you know the focus is on people who have a baseline experience like yours, it validates our experience in the broader community."

Thot Squad's blend of EDM, rock and roll, and rap performance promises a lot of call-and-response, much like a church service, with high-energy songs like their popular singles "Pound Cake" and "Shoo Doo." This will be Thot Squad's first time performing in Houston, and their desire to visit was sparked over ten years ago after hearing Beyoncé's "Bow Down" lyrics, which began "H-town coming, coming down / I'm coming down dripping candy on the ground."

For Thot Squad, performing is not just about the entertainment; it is a spiritual calling. They have a desire for the audience to be so bought into the moment that whatever weighs heavy on their minds melts away. "My goal is to be so 'out loud' that it inspires other people to say, 'Oh, if she can get up there in some blue platforms, I can do what I want to do myself.'" →







ADVOCACY THROUGH MUSIC

TAZDAREALIST

*On Instagram @iamtazdarealist_*

TazDaRealist has been a part of the BQAF family for a couple of years. Last year he performed with our collaborating partner, Pink Elephant Music Festival, in the Hip Hop Cypher onstage. He also made history as the first trans man to have a spot on our stage. This year he is returning to perform a full solo set.

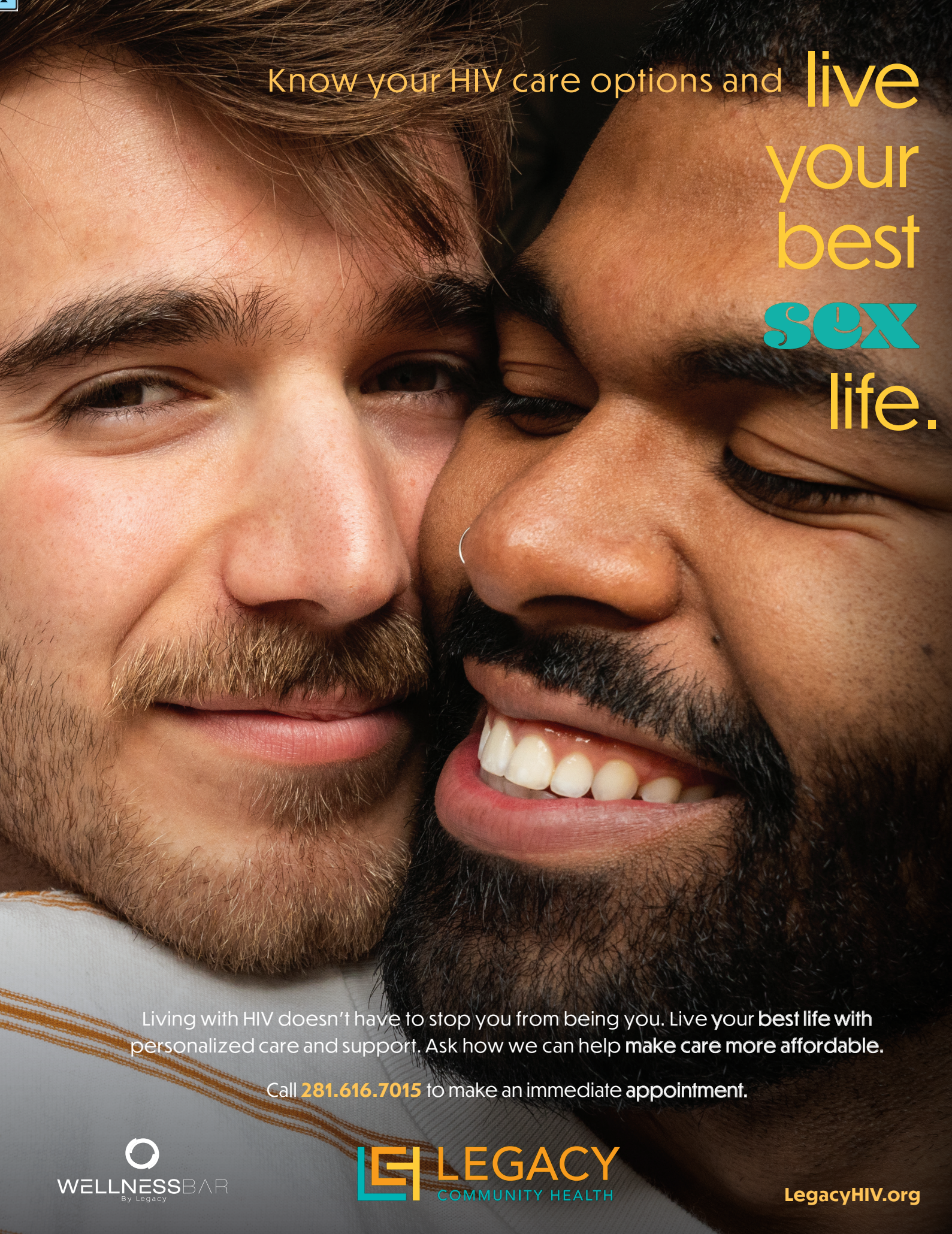
TazDaRealist garnered a lot of attention for openly talking about his transition through music. Two years ago, after having his top surgery, he decided to honor the process through a deeply personal music video and song he wrote, entitled *Rewind This*. Since then, he has become one of the most prominent emerging artists here in Houston. "I know that a lot of Black trans people, and especially Black trans men, feel like there's certain things we can't do," he says. "I am happy to show them that we can do anything we put our minds to."

TazDaRealist's advocacy expands outside his onstage persona and into community work. Recently, his pursuits led him to start The Trans Action Project last November. Their first event, TransGiving, was one of the largest-ever convenings of transgender people, with a majority of the attendees being transmasculine.

"TransGiving was a focus on people of trans experience who are alone and whose families have rejected them," he says. "I want them to know that there is a community of people here for you to become family and build together."

Whether it's advocacy through action or through music, TazDaRealist will always bring the storytelling, transparency, and authenticity. "Black Queer AF means strong, melanated people coming together as one to do our best, and I'm still trying to completely realize the fact that I will be one of the people on that stage," he says.

WHAT: Black Queer AF Music Festival
WHEN: March 16, 4 p.m.–2 a.m.
WHERE: Warehouse Live Midtown, 2600 Travis
INFO: normalanomaly.org/BQAF


Know your HIV care options and live your best sex life.
Living with HIV doesn't have to stop you from being you. Live your best life with personalized care and support. Ask how we can help make care more affordable.
Call 281.616.7015 to make an immediate appointment.
WELLNESSBAR
By Legacy
LEGACY
COMMUNITY HEALTH
LegacyHIV.org

Tribute to an Icon

Ella Perez plays Cher in the TUTS production of *The Cher Show*.

By **DAVID CLARKE**

Calling all gypsies, tramps, and thieves: Theatre Under the Stars is bringing *The Cher Show* to Houston's Hobby Center in April. Featuring 35 hit songs and Tony Award-winning recreations of every stunning Bob Mackie gown that Cher wore, this musical tells the story of the unstoppable diva's six-decade career. Recent SUNY Cortland graduate Ella Perez, starring as Babe, the youngest of three versions of Cher in the show, talks about the musical and the legacy of the beloved songstress.

Perez, 23, is excited to tell Cher's story onstage, and finds a kinship with her iteration of the American legend. "I love Babe. She's so spunky, charismatic, and has such big dreams. It's definitely something that I can relate to," Perez notes. "I play her from being a first-grader up until her early 20s, and I see a lot of myself in her. She always wanted to be something special when she grew up. She didn't know if she wanted to sing, act, or just be a famous personality. That was something that I also always wanted."

Of course, Perez being a proud bisexual doesn't hurt, either. Cher has only publicly identified as straight, but hinted at potential queerness during a 2002 interview with *The Advocate* when she famously said, "Do I sleep with women? Occasionally."

Playing an icon, especially one who came of age in a vastly different era, is a daunting task that Perez was more than happy to tackle. "They supplied us with a lot of research material from her book, and things like that," admits Perez. But the young actress also delved into her own research, as well. "I've watched a lot of Cher's videos. There are some really nice videos of her from the '60s when she is the age that I'm playing, and I [spent time] picking up on her mannerisms and channeling the sound that she had at that time."

Regarding Cher's voice, there is a very specific tonality and intonation that people remember when they think of her. But Perez's Babe predates that iconic and often imitated vocal quality. "She didn't really sound like that back then," Perez explains. "She still had this very rich contralto voice, but I wanted to find a happy medium between the Cher voice that we all know and how she actually sounded in the '60s. The old footage is so fascinating to watch, and it really helped me a lot."



Ella Perez

COURTESY

"THERE'S RAINBOWS, SPARKLES, GLITTER, AND SKIN SHOWING! IT'S REALLY SPECIAL, AND YOU CAN TELL THAT THERE'S GAY INFLUENCE IN THERE FOR SURE, HONEY!"

—Ella Perez

The Cher Show is without a doubt a love letter to Cher that explores every aspect of the star's enduring relevance. "I think the most inspiring thing about her is her longevity and her ability to almost shape-shift. She has adapted to every music trend, remained relevant, and has reinvented herself [multiple times] to keep herself



MEREDITH MASHBURN PHOTOGRAPHY

Catherine Ariale as Lady, Morgan Scott as Star, and Ella Perez as Babe in *The Cher Show*.

relevant since the '60s," states Perez. "She has been around forever, and she's not going anywhere, either. She was still on the top of the charts with her Christmas album that she just put out. It's so incredible to see a self-made woman like that. She came from nothing and built this empire herself. It would be very easy for her to get caught up in it all and just become a whitewashed version of herself. But she has always been so real and very authentic. People pick up on that, and that's why she's stayed relevant for this long."

Beyond identifying with Cher's authenticity, queer audiences will delight in many things that *The Cher Show* has to offer. "There are definitely gay themes in there, and I think the whole show is like a gay dream," Perez explains. "There's rainbows, sparkles, glitter, and skin showing! It's really special, and you can tell that there's gay influence in there for sure, honey!"

Perez enthusiastically describes how honored she feels to portray Cher. "When do you ever get to pretend to be a diva pop star onstage every single day for your job? It's really magical, honestly, and it's so much fun!"

Yet, Perez doesn't think her performance, or that of the other two actresses playing Cher, is the main attraction. "I always love to mention how incredible our ensemble is," she says. "They are just the sweetest, kindest, and most talented souls. They add so much love, energy, and generosity to the stage with everything that they do. We literally wouldn't be able to do it without them."

The Cher Show plays 15 performances in Houston April 16–28, including the OUT@TUTS performance on April 25. Use ticket code OUT@TUTS to purchase discounted April 25 tickets. For ticket information, visit tuts.com or call 713-558-8887.





The Circus Comes to Town

RuPaul's Drag Race reigning champ **Jimbo** promises lots of laughs—and bologna.

By **SAM BYRD**



Drag superstar and reigning champion of *RuPaul's Drag Race All-Stars*, Jimbo, is bringing her world tour to Houston's House of Blues on Wednesday, March 20. Presented in partnership with Murray & Peter and House of Jimbo, *Jimbo's Drag Circus* is sure to be a trip through the mind of the wacky and hilarious female impersonator.

"*Drag Circus* is going to be me playing six different characters telling you a silly story. It's going to take you on a wild ride," she says. "My intention is to transport people, show them a really good time, and make them laugh. It's going to be awesome."

As fans will remember, Jimbo presented a *Casper the Friendly Ghost* character during her run on *All Stars*, which featured the performer placing bologna on her body and tossing slices across the runway. For *Jimbo's Drag Circus*, that character is resurrected in a storyline that starts with a whodunit mystery when Jimbo's bologna is stolen.

Jimbo shared her reasoning about why she is so fascinated with this mystery meat.

"I think it's all about when you're being told you can't play with food. It's kind of playing with those kinds of taboos in a funny kind of way with bologna," she explains. "Some people love bologna. Some people hate it. It's kind of weird. It was something that I didn't necessarily like as a kid, but I also kind of loved eating it in a weird way. It's a confusing meat, and it's also useful for all kinds of things. You can wear it as a hat, make it into a mask, throw it like a Frisbee, and slap it around. It's multi-purpose, and it's also easily found." Jimbo has toured more than 20 countries and has never had an issue purchasing bologna to incorporate into the show.

Casper introduces the plot at the beginning of the show, and with each new character, Jimbo inches absurdly closer to finally retrieving the missing meat. Other characters that guests can expect to see resurrected include Joan Rivers and Shirley Temple, which the illusionist performed during the *RuPaul's Drag Race* fan-favorite challenge, "The Snatch Game."

Having a circus-themed show is entirely appropriate for Jimbo, as she modeled her personality after one of the main staples of circus acts: a clown.

"The inspiration behind the character of Jimbo is the fact that I am a clown, and I am a drag performer," she says. "I love making people laugh. I love fashion and costumes. Jimbo combines a really cool look with a fun, dynamic, and surprising performance. I love connecting with my audience. That sums up my character: bouncy, fun-loving, and a good time."

Jimbo's look has definitely turned heads. The visual of Jimbo is often associated with hyper-mammiferous assets. Partnered with her party girl-bordering-on-ditzy-but-also-deceivingly-smart personality, it's a winning combination.

It's also a look that we've been able to see plenty of. She first burst onto the scene

in *RuPaul's Drag Race Canada,* and then went on to compete in *RuPaul's Drag Race: UK vs. The World,* where she experienced a shocking early elimination in the season when she was told to sashay away. Finally, her special day arrived when she competed on *Drag Race All-Stars Season 8* and won the crown.

"It's a dream come true. Obviously, as a performer and a drag queen and a competitor, you're striving to win that crown. You're striving to make it all the way through the competition and to show your whole prepared package," she says of her experience touring the world after her first two stints on television.

Those tours also set her up to win the *All-Stars* season. After all, the third time is often the charm when competing in a *RuPaul's Drag Race* franchise.

"I was so grateful to have that experience as a performer and a costume designer, and to take all of that stuff which I had put into my packages on *UK vs. the World* and on Canada's *Drag Race*. But then I was able to go on tour around the world and meet all kinds of new artists and designers and make money in order to have a full, completely polished winning package for *All-Stars,* which takes a lot of collaboration. It takes a lot of money. It takes a lot of time. It takes a lot of resources, and I was so lucky to be able to keep upping my game, my drag, and my performance, and I was able to secure my crown and place in the Drag Race Hall of Fame."

You can keep up with Jimbo by visiting houseofjimbo.com/en-us or dragfans.com/tour/jimbo-2024.

WHAT: Jimbo's Drag Circus
WHEN: Wednesday, March 20
WHERE: House of Blues, 1204 Caroline
INFO: houseofblues.com







Matt Trietsch
COUNSELING & PSYCHOTHERAPY

in person & online counseling for adults

- trauma, shame, spirituality
- depression, anxiety, grief/loss
- career, relationships
- life transitions, coming out



512.591.8510
5900 Memorial Dr., # 218
Houston, TX 77007
supervised by Jeanene Smith, LPC-S, LMFT-S

matt-trietsch.com

ST. HOPE FOUNDATION
"Your Patient Centered Health Care Home"

GET PrEPARED!

Find out if PrEP is right for you by scheduling your appointment today!

Medical | Research | Dental | Pharmacy | Vision



BENEFITS OF CHOOSING ST. HOPE FOUNDATION AS YOUR PREP PROVIDER ARE:

- LOW COST, SAME-DAY SERVICE
- BOARD-CERTIFIED EXPERTS
- TELE-HEALTH FOLLOW UP
- FREE PHARMACY HOME DELIVERY

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT TREATMENT, CALL US:
281-779-8705
www.offeringhope.org



We have immediate openings for experienced advertising executives at OutSmart Media Company.

Salary, commissions, and benefits. A creative, fun environment.

APPLY TODAY!

Send your cover letter and resume to employment@outsmartmagazine.com

Out•Smart
Houston's LGBTQ Magazine

CHAPULTEPEC LUPITA
MEXICAN RESTAURANT & BAR



WHERE EVERYONE IS BEAUTIFUL

Home Of The Best Margaritas in Houston!

813 Richmond Ave
Houston, TX 77006
713-522-2365





MADONNA'S TOUR HITS HOUSTON

Super fans speak about the Queen of Pop's time-traveling show this month at the Toyota Center.

By **CONNOR BEHRENS**

Madonna will come to town later this month for her first retrospective tour, offering her fans more than four decades of pop hits.

The superstar's twelfth concert tour, The Celebration Tour, comes to the Toyota Center in Houston on March 28 and 29—complete with a giant disco ball, giant screen projection cube, and a carousel-like glass window with large crucifixes depicting a chapel. The tour features multiple costume changes and more than 30 songs from the Queen of Pop's discography.

Madonna kicked off the US leg of her rescheduled Celebration Tour back in December, then postponed the remainder while she recovered from a serious bacterial infection that kept her in the ICU for several days.

But now, it's time to celebrate, and Houstonians of every sexual and gender identity will be getting into the groove as Madonna hits the stage.

Three members of Houston's LGBTQ community spoke with *OutSmart* about the Queen of Pop's impact on their lives and the gay community, as well as what they're anticipating most about the concert. →

WHAT: The Celebration Tour
WHEN: March 28 and 29
WHERE: The Toyota Center
INFO: livenation.com



RICK ADAME (He/Him)
54, Program Coordinator

Madonna is known to be late to begin her shows. Do you mind an "unpunctual" tardy diva?
Her tardiness is not a factor. I have seen Madonna every time she tours, and I don't mind her being late. Actually, I am expecting that she will start late. That gives me time to enjoy myself with my friends who are also attending.

If you could meet Madonna, where would you take her in Houston?
I would show her how beautiful our city is. I would take her to South Beach club, as she loves dancing and the nightlife.

Given Houston's vibrant food scene, where would you take Madonna to dinner?
I would take her to Mantra. Since she's a vegan, that seems like the ideal place.

Madonna has been around for 40 years. When did you become a fan?
I have gone to every concert since The Virgin Tour. However, I've got to say her 1990 Blonde Ambition Tour at The Summit is what did it for me. I have never witnessed a concert like hers in my lifetime.

Why do you think she's endured the test of time?
Madonna continues to always reinvent herself, and nobody else does it like her in the music business. She opened the door for so many of today's artists such as Taylor Swift and Pink.

What moment in her concert are you most looking forward to?
Her tribute to all the great ones we have lost.



PATRICK MAGEE (He/Him)
34, Creative Director

Why do you love Madonna?
Growing up gay in Katy, Texas, she expanded my mind a bit and encouraged me to be brave, to be myself. She showed me that not only is it OK to be different, but it's valuable. I've also always respected her work ethic and dedication to perfection. She went to the hospital last summer, and by all reports nearly didn't make it. So this Celebration Tour truly is a celebration of a woman who inspired me—and countless other young men growing up in small towns all over the world—through the joys of music and dance. It also helps that we have the same birthday!

If you could meet Madonna, where would you take her in Houston?
I would take her to La Colombe d'Or. We could have dirty martinis in the bar. She loves an eccentric hotel photo shoot, so we could take photos in her suite while we get dressed for dinner. (Think her in a bathtub wearing something definitely not age-appropriate!) Then we'd go back downstairs to dinner and dish on Lady Gaga or Britney's wedding to Sam Asghari.

What moment in her concert are you most looking forward to?
She performs three songs that I absolutely love but assumed I would never hear her perform live because they're not hits. These are for the real ones: "Bad Girl" (remember when Christopher Walken played her love interest in the music video) and "Mother and Father," a song about losing her mother at a young age from my favorite album of hers, American Life. One of my earliest exposures to Madonna was the Reinvention Tour in 2004. She opens the show with this amazing video shot by Steven Klein to "The Beast Within." At a young age, I found the artistry and message to be incredibly salient and inspiring. YouTube it! She performs this as an interlude between songs with footage from the original Steven Klein video, so I'm beyond excited to see it in a stadium setting because I still love the visuals.



THOMAS DEGNEN (He/Him)
55, Human Resources Business Partner

Why is Madonna important to you?
It was not easy being gay in high school in the early- to mid-1980s. Music was always an escape. MTV was also new—a way to "see" the music. Madonna provided a visual and audible escape. But then she became an advocate for us. She spoke out early in the fight against AIDS. She called out injustices. She made people feel included before inclusivity was even a discussion or incentive. She represented the unrepresented groups. And it was damn good dance music. "I know a place where you can get away. It's called the dance floor." Indeed.

Madonna has been around for 40 years. When did you become a fan? Why do you think she's endured the test of time?
For sure, I am one of the old-timers. I've been around since she came on the scene. But as far as becoming a fan? July, 1985. I remember that because that was the day we were due to go on our annual family vacation. I begged my parents to wait a day because the MTV premiere of "Dress You Up" was going to air that day. Thankfully, my parents allowed it, so I had a watch party at my house. From there, even though she is ten years older than me, we had the same phases. When she got naughty in the '90s with Erotica, I was discovering my wants and desires. When she got ethereal with "Ray of Light," I too mellowed. She adapts, she changes with her audience. She tries new sounds, but always remembers her "club kids" and gives us remixes. As for enduring, the lyrics to her song "Rebel Heart" sums it up perfectly: "Outgrown my past and I've shed my skin, letting it go and I'll start again, start again. Never look back, it's a waste of time. I said, 'Oh yeah, this is me and I'm right here where I wanna be.' I said, 'Hell yeah, this is me. Right where I'm supposed to be.'" Me too, Madonna, me too.

DO IT



ANYWHERE, ANYTIME

Getting tested for HIV is quick, easy, and FREE.

Find a location near you OR request an at-home test kit at LegacyCommunityHealth.org/GetTested.

Plus, learn which HIV prevention and treatment options work for you.

LEGACY COMMUNITY HEALTH

WELLNESSBAR By Legacy

LEGACY PHARMACY



REVVING UP

Discover the future of **driving** with cutting-edge technology and style.

By **JAMES T. HURST**

Welcome to our annual Automotive Special, where we embark on a journey through the world of automobiles with a touch of flair. From rugged trucks to luxurious SUVs, the 2024 lineup showcases innovation and refinement, all with a hint of sophistication. In this edition, we explore the Ford Maverick, a compact truck that exudes confidence, perfect for those who dare to stand out. Then there is the luxurious embrace of the Lincoln Nautilus, where elegance meets performance in a symphony of design and technology. And not to be forgotten is the Toyota Tacoma, a rugged companion ready to conquer any terrain with its robust features.



2024 Ford Maverick

2024 FORD MAVERICK

Introduced in 2022, the Maverick can be described as the compact truck that looks like a truck, drives like a truck, and feels like a truck. This utilitarian, competitively priced model offers excellent fuel economy, a reasonably sized cargo bed, impressive towing, and loads of available equipment to enhance towing and off-road capability. Ford offers the Maverick in the XL, XLT, and Lariat trim levels. The base engine is a 2.0-L four-cylinder, producing 250 horsepower and 277 lb-ft of torque, paired to an 8-speed automatic transmission. Front-wheel drive is standard and optional all-wheel drive is available. The second option is a 2.5L four-cylinder engine paired with a hybrid system to produce a combined 191 horsepower and 155 lb-ft of torque. This combination is only available in front-wheel drive mated to a continuously variable automatic transmission. Prices for the Maverick range from $25,410 to $39,945, depending on trim and options.

2024 LINCOLN NAUTILUS

The all-new Nautilus for 2024 can be described as a sophisticated, bold, reimagined sanctuary that raises the comfort level to a whole new dimension. The experience begins when you step inside the luxurious cabin, and the digital experience envelops your senses with a 48-inch panoramic screen across the dashboard. It is paired with an 11.1-inch center-console touchscreen where →



INTELLIGENT. STYLISH. LUXURIOUS.

DISCOVER THE ALL-NEW LINCOLN NAUTILUS AT PLANET LINCOLN

BLACK LABEL

LINCOLN BLACK LABEL
2024 NAUTILUS

- » At-Home Test Drives
- » Lincoln Black Label Experience Liaison
- » Service Pick Up & Delivery
- » 4 year/50,000 mile Premium Maintenance Plan
- » Complimentary Anytime Car Wash & Annual Detail*

RANDALL REED'S PLANET LINCOLN

OUR ULTIMATE EXPRESSION OF DESIGN & PERSONAL SERVICE

Planet Lincoln's Effortless YES Promise To Our Client

OUR GOAL:
To provide the best automotive experience ever.

THE RIGHT PEOPLE - REMOTE TRANSACTION - SINGLE POINT OF CONTACT - TRANSPARENT PRICING - TECHNOLOGY



YOUR TIME
YES! Planet Lincoln is ready when you are. You may not have time to visit the dealership. We will bring the vehicle of your choice to demonstrate at your location showcasing the vehicle's latest technology and available options.

YES



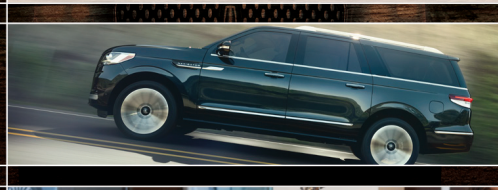
YOUR SPEED
YES! Planet Lincoln provides remote transparent information on the price, the value of your trade and all available payment options for retail and lease. No need to visit the dealership, our single point of contact concierge will assist and structure all payment options.

YES



YOUR LOCATION
YES! Planet Lincoln will deliver your new Lincoln and required documents to the location of your choice for an easy, transparent, effortless single point of contact automotive purchase.

YES



YOUR BEST SERVICE EXPERIENCE
YES! Planet Lincoln provides online service appointment scheduling which allows us to provide pickup and delivery for service. In addition, we'll provide a Lincoln loaner* while your vehicle is being serviced.

YES



*APPLIES TO SELECT VEHICLES/YEARS & SERVICES. SEE DEALER FOR DETAILS. © WCAG

(888) 242-5059 | 20403 I-45 NORTH, SPRING, TX 77388 PLANETLINCOLN.COM


2024 Lincoln Nautilus



2024 Toyota Tacoma

the digital experience can be customized to enhance your moods and whims. All of this meets you at eye level, which allows you to focus on the road ahead. The Nautilus is offered in the Premier, Reserve, and Black Label trim levels, with prices ranging from $50,415 to $74, 250. With LED lighting across the front hood and in the back, the Nautilus is a beautiful midsize SUV. Power is offered with either the standard 2.0-L turbocharged engine producing 250 horsepower or the 2.0-L turbocharged hybrid engine producing 310 horsepower paired to a 100kW electric motor capable of achieving an EPA-estimated 30 mpg in the city and 31 mpg on the highway.

2024 TOYOTA TACOMA

The fourth-generation all-new Tacoma is offered as a 2-door Xtra Cab or a 4-door Double Cab with a choice of a 5-foot or 6-foot cargo bed, and either rear-wheel or 4-wheel drive. Trim levels include SR, SR5, SR5 Prerunner, TRD Sport, TRD Off-Road, and Limited. For 2024, the Toyota has improved mileage with the I-FORCE turbocharged 4-cylinder engine mated to an 8-speed automatic transmission, producing 278 horsepower and 317 lb-ft of torque. Prices will range from $31,500 to $52,100. Toyota did their homework and focused on improving the Tacoma across the board with design influences from the larger Toyota Tundra. What has evolved is a more modern and appealing truck that will compete with other brands. The lower trim levels are equipped with a 7-inch instrumentation panel and an 8-inch touchscreen info-tainment display. The upper trim levels are offered with a larger 12.3-inch instrument panel and 14-inch info-tainment touchscreen. Toyota has done a good job with improving this ever-popular truck.

Special Thanks to our Community-Supportive Dealerships :

Randall Reed's Planet Lincoln
20403 I-45 North, Spring TX 77388, phone 281-539-4900
Randall Reed's Planet Ford
20403 I-45 North, Spring, TX 77388, phone 866-879-9329
Fred Haas Toyota World
20400 I-45 North, Spring, TX 77373, phone 844-361-8416

COVERAGE TO LIVE THE LIFE YOU WANT

2023 READERS' Out•Smart GAYEST & GREATEST WINNER CHOICE AWARDS
Voted the BEST Male Insurance Agent



- Automobile insurance
- Business or Commercial
- Call to see if you can save

Lane Lewis
Your Local Agent
2200 North Loop W Ste 136
Houston, TX 77018
LLewis@FarmersAgent.com

Call 713.688.8669 today!
For Home, Auto, Life and Business.

FARMERS INSURANCE

Restrictions apply. Discounts may vary. Not available in all states. See your agent for details. Insurance is underwritten by Farmers Insurance Exchange and other affiliated insurance companies. Visit farmers.com for a complete listing of companies. Not all insurers are authorized to provide insurance in all states. Coverage is not available in all states.

PLAN WISELY.
YOU WON'T GET A DO-OVER.

A successful retirement in the future can often depend on having a solid plan now. If your money isn't working as hard as you are, it may be time to act—there are no do-overs in retirement planning. Now is the time to consider developing a strategy that can help you work toward your financial goals. I specialize in providing comprehensive, objective financial guidance with the goal of maximizing every remaining moment of the retirement countdown.

Call today to learn more or to schedule a consultation.





Rick Dickson, CFP®, MBA
Galene Financial
520 Post Oak Blvd Ste 780
Houston, TX 77027
(713) 489-4322 Office
(713) 489-3679 Fax
rdickson@galenfinancial.com
www.galenafinancial.com

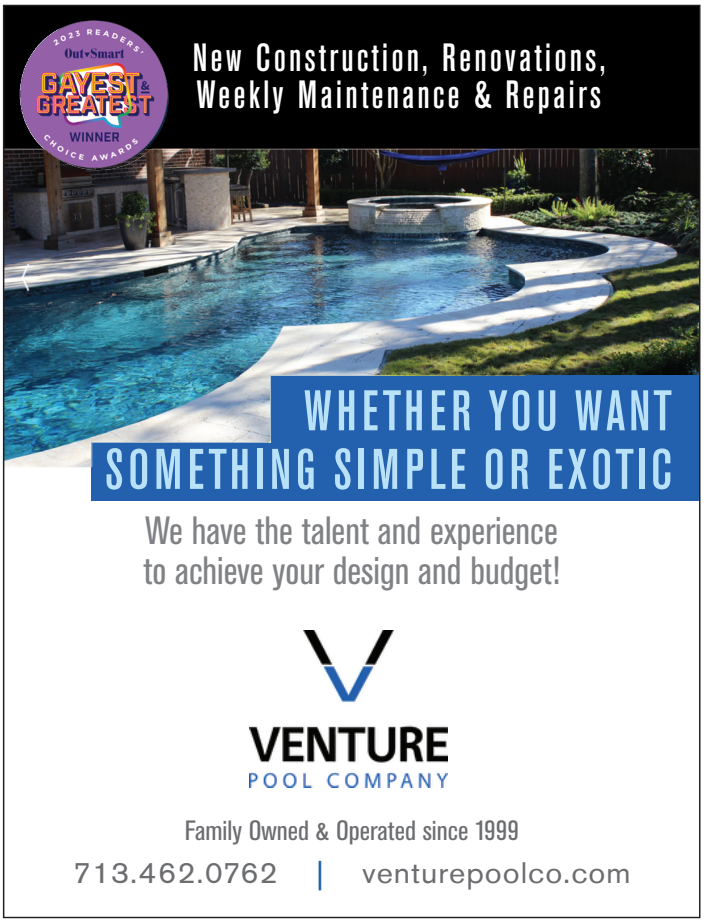
GALENE FINANCIAL

2023 READERS' Out•Smart GAYEST & GREATEST WINNER CHOICE AWARDS
Voted Best Financial Planner/Advisor

Securities and advisory services offered through LPL Financial. Member FINRA/SIPC.


FRED HAAS TOYOTA WORLD
20400 I-45 N.
SPRING, TX 77373
FREDHAASTOYOTA.COM
HOUSTON'S
#1 TOYOTA DEALER
19 YEARS IN A ROW*
CLAIM BASED ON TOTAL RETAIL SALES VOLUME PER GST 2003-2022 FOR FRED HAAS TOYOTA WORLD.
2023 READERS' OutSmart GAYEST & GREATEST WINNER CHOICE AWARDS
VOTED BEST IMPORT AUTO DEALERSHIP
TOYOTA
FAST, FRIENDLY, Easy
JUST MINUTES FROM DOWNTOWN!
832.764.8913
FRED HAAS FAMILY PLAN
THANK YOU FOR VOTING US AS OUTSMART'S
BEST IMPORT DEALERSHIP
3 YEARS IN A ROW
BEST AUTO DEALERSHIP
BASED ON OUTSMART PUBLICATION'S VOTERS: BEST AUTO DEALERSHIP (2019) AND BEST IMPORT AUTO DEALERSHIP (2020-2022)


2023 READERS' OutSmart GAYEST & GREATEST FINALIST CHOICE AWARDS
Voted one of the Best Female Eye Doctor
Outsmart Readers' Choice Awards 2023
DR. JULIET FARMER
THERAPEUTIC OPTOMETRIST
Boutique EYE CARE
1806 A. Westheimer Rd.
Houston, TX 77098
713.528.2010
Schedule online at
BOUTIQUEEYECARE.COM


2023 READERS' OutSmart GAYEST & GREATEST WINNER CHOICE AWARDS
New Construction, Renovations,
Weekly Maintenance & Repairs
WHETHER YOU WANT
SOMETHING SIMPLE OR EXOTIC
We have the talent and experience
to achieve your design and budget!
VENTURE
POOL COMPANY
Family Owned & Operated since 1999
713.462.0762 | venturepoolco.com

#StopHateNow

The Harris County District Attorney's Office has prosecuted 77 hate crime cases in the last 7 years. The most ever, by any District Attorney's office in Texas.
If you see or experience a hate crime, report it.



HCDAO VICTIMS SERVICES (713) 274-0250
ANTI-DEFAMATION LEAGUE (713) 627-3490
LGBT SWITCHBOARD 24-HOUR HELPLINE (713) 529-3211
THE MONTROSE CENTER (713) 529-0037



OFFICE OF DISTRICT ATTORNEY
HARRIS COUNTY, TX
KIM OGG

HARRISCOUNTYDA.COM



Casual Elegance - Come As You Are!

Whether you're celebrating a special occasion or simply enjoying a leisurely afternoon, we are sure McHughTEA will become your favorite tearoom.
We've got Sunday brunch, space for parties, tea inspired treats and more!
We can't wait to meet you - visit soon!

Save the Date
- March - Irish Tea
- May - Mother's Day
- June - PRIDE
- July 4 - No Tax on Tea

McHUGHTEA
TEA ROOM & GIFTS

5305 Bissonnet, Bellaire, TX 77401
713.218.6300 | mchughtea.com

THE DRIPBAR
HOUSTON HEIGHTS

An IV Vitamin Drip Experience

NOW OPEN

Receive **50% OFF** your First Drip!

*Offer applies to Lifestyle Drips only

- Increased Hydration
- Immune System Support
- Weight Management
- Boosted Energy
- And so much more!

2505 W. 11th Street
Suite 400
Houston, TX 77008
(713) 575-2504

Feed your Cells. Fuel your Life.

Daniel R. Garza, MD

Medication Management Psychotherapy

Specializing in:
Depression · Bipolar
Anxiety · ADHD Disorders

OutSmart GAYEST & GREATEST WINNER
BEST MALE PSYCHIATRIST
OutSmart Readers' Choice 2008–2023

281.610.8190
3131 Eastside St. • Suite 415
Limited Evening Appointments Available
Ψ Se Habla Español Ψ
DRGarzaMD.com



Carrie McManus (l) and Ashley Campbell

Love Knows No Distance

Carrie McManus and **Ashley Campbell** grew closer during their long-distance courtship.

By **DAVID CLARKE** | *Photos by* **CHARLIE EWING**

Newlyweds Ashley Campbell, 32, and Carrie McManus, 38, reside in Houston's South Acres. After sharing about eight and a half years together, they got married on February 17 in the intimate Parlor Hideaway space at Houston's C. Baldwin Hotel. The luxe hotel, named after visionary and "Mother of Houston" Charlotte Baldwin, exists as a tribute to female tenacity.

Ashley met Carrie online in March of 2015. "I had just graduated and moved to San Diego," explains Friendswood native Ashley, who came out shortly after her big move. "I had changed my profile preference to women. And then, of course, that's when Carrie appeared in my life."

Despite meeting online, the spark was instantaneous. "Her personality really did shine through for me," states Carrie, who grew up in Southern California. "She seemed pretty easygoing and laid back, and then when I got to meet her in person, I first noticed her smile."

"Carrie's eyes—they're very green, especially if she's tired or sleepy. They're beautiful, and they really sparkle a lot," Ashley adds. "That was the first thing I noticed about her."

When it comes to who made the first move, they both try to take credit. "Technically, online, I made the first move," Ashley elaborates. "Carrie always laughs at me, saying that I gave a dry 'Hey,' but I was so nervous. I thought she was so beautiful. I didn't want to mess anything up."

After their first date, Carrie made her move. "We had been chit-chatting for hours, and I was really not sure if she was feeling me or if she was trying to be my friend," Carrie admits. "She drove me up to my front door area, I got out of the car, and then I thought, 'I need to go for it!' I quickly opened the car door, leaned in, and gave her a kiss."

The couple wisely had a meet-cute in Los Angeles to make sure neither was being catfished before committing to an actual date. "After we had met, I texted her and said I'd like to take her on a proper date,'" says Carrie.

Their first date was at the now-shuttered Anaheim restaurant Roxy'z by Zov's. "It was pouring rain, but luckily we both got there safely and had a really nice dinner and a long →

Pet Emergencies Happen...



That's Why You Can Always Count On Us!

- Certified Doctors and Staff
- Advanced Training in Emergency Medicine
- Critical and Urgent Care
- State-of-the-Art Equipment
- On-Site Surgical Center
- In-House Lab & Pharmacy
- Board Certified in Internal Medicine

VERGI HOUSTON

AAHA ACCREDITED The Standard of Veterinary Excellence

24 HOUR EMERGENCY & CRITICAL CARE HOSPITAL
WE SAVE LIVES!

Call the VERGI Pet Emergency Hotline at (713) 932-9589
Veterinary Emergency Room Group on I-10 @ Campbell Road

8921 Katy Freeway • Houston, Texas 77024

For helpful tips & other emergency information visit www.VERGI247.com

Right now is the perfect opportunity

- TO BE PROUD OF WHO YOU ARE
- TO BE COMPASSIONATE TO YOURSELF AND OTHERS
- TO SHOW GRATITUDE TO THOSE YOU LOVE AND TRULY APPRECIATE

Thank you again to my OutSmart readers for voting me Best Astrologer for all of these years."

Voted BEST ASTROLOGER by OutSmart Readers



LILLY RODDY

ASTROLOGER

- Personal astrological sessions
- Relationship readings - personal / business
- Presentations & lectures to organizations

CONSULTATIONS BY APPOINTMENT ONLY

GIFT CERTIFICATES • CREDIT CARDS

713.529.5842

Lillycath@aol.com • www.LillyRoddyShow.com

FOUNTAINS & STATUARY







OPEN 7 DAYS

- Disappearing Fountains
- Glazed Urns
- Fountains
- Birdbaths
- Decorative Precast Rock Waterfalls
- Fiberglass Garden Ponds
- Bowls
- Tables & Benches
- Pumps & Tubing
- Planters
- Pedestals
- Flower Pots
- Fountain Tops
- Religious Statues
- Concrete Animals, Fish, Birds & Reptiles
- Talavera Style Mexican Pottery
- Various Sized Stepping Stones

AARP **713.957.3672**

Just Outside the 610 Loop in Houston!

11804 Hempstead Rd., Houston, TX 77092

fountainsandstatuary@yahoo.com

www.FountainsAndStatuary.com

2023 READERS Out•Smart GAYEST & GREATEST WINNER CHOICE AWARDS

Finalist BEST GARDENING/ NURSERY SUPPLY

Make Your Photos or Art

2023 READERS Out•Smart GAYEST & GREATEST WINNER CHOICE AWARDS

COME TO LIFE!

copy.com

COPY CENTER/COMPUTERS/INTERNET BAR

1201-F Westheimer Houston, TX 77006

713.528.1201 | www.copydotcom.com

CANVAS PRINTS | COLOR POSTERS
GREETING CARDS | MUCH MORE









chat," Carrie recalls.

"We started out having dinner, and then, of course, I'm lingering because I'm nervous," Ashley adds. "I lingered some more when I took her back home, and that's when she kissed me."

Beaming with palpable love for one another, the couple acknowledges that the beginning of their relationship wasn't easy. "I was living in Costa Mesa, Ashley was living in San Diego, and that's about two hours apart," says Carrie. "We did long-distance commuting to see one another, switching off weekends for four years while we were working our respective jobs."

Carrie moved to San Diego to test out living with Ashley, but still commuted back up to Costa Mesa for work. "That was a tough time in our lives, because we had very demanding jobs," Ashley says. "I was working for a congresswoman, Representative Susan Davis, and Carrie was a manager. I find it so amazing that we always made sure we had time for one another. We just put each other first. So that's how we were able to make it work."

"I know it kind of sounds cliché and some people may not believe in it, but I really do feel like I knew she was the one the moment that I met Ashley," gushes Carrie. "I just had this deep sense of knowing within my soul that I had met her before, and she just felt very familiar and comforting to me."

Looking back, Ashley also feels she knew Carrie was the one for her the first time they met. But it was Carrie's 30th birthday trip to Costa Rica that made this tangible for her. "I realized, 'Oh my gosh, I think I love her.' I missed her way more than I think I had with any other previous relationship. I was coming out while we we're dating, and I wanted to prove to Carrie how much I loved her," Ashley says, referring to the way she decided to propose at their hotel. "We took a surprise trip to New York City with her brother and his girlfriend. They were so instrumental in helping me work with the hotel staff."

"I was so shocked, and I couldn't believe it," exclaims Carrie. "It took me a good minute to take everything in, because I was looking at all the decorations and everything around the room. I heard the music playing and it felt like a whole minute later when I finally turned around and I saw that Ashley was down on one knee and holding a ring up to me."

As for their wedding itself, they originally planned to do something simple at the courthouse. "When we came across the C. Baldwin hotel, saw the speakeasy, and dealt with their amazing sales team, it just felt like it was really right," says Carrie. "On our wedding day, it was surreal when Ashley and I were sharing our vows with one another. I had that moment where all I saw was her."

Ashley and Carrie's wedding superheroes were their officiant and friend, Cherrelle Duncan, their photographer, Charlie Ewing, their baker and friend, Laquita Jenkins, the staff at C. Baldwin, and Earl and Debbie McManus, Carrie's father and stepmother who made their wedding possible. Each played a special part in their wedding, and their guests bowled them over with heartfelt toasts. "It was so beautiful hearing how much of an impact we make on people's lives," says Ashley. "Hearing that during my wedding was so moving."

The next big adventure for Ashley and Carrie will be motherhood. Carrie is due in April, and both women are excited to begin that new chapter of their lives together.

WANT TO TELL YOUR STORY?
Email us at letters@outsmartmagazine.com



SEEING CLIENTS
IN-PERSON
OR THROUGH HIPAA
COMPLIANT
CONFERENCING
SESSIONS



Denis "Woodja" Flanigan, Ph. D.
Licensed psychologist

Psychotherapy, Career Counseling
denisflanigan@houston-psychologist.com

Specializing in individuals, couples, & family relational issues to regain your direction, sense of meaning, and your happiness.

Voted
BEST MALE MENTAL HEALTH THERAPIST
2011 – 2022 OutSmart Readers' Choice Awards

2023 READERS' Out•Smart GAYEST & GREATEST CHOICE AWARDS

HELPING YOU REACH YOUR FULL POTENTIAL!

2211 Norfolk St., Suite 206, Houston, TX 77098 | 713-589-9804

www.Houston-Psychologist.com



2205 FANNIN STREET, HOUSTON, TX. 77002 • (713) 659-4998 • THECLUBS.COM

THE CLUB HOUSTON
A PRIVATE MEN'S CLUB GOOD. CLEAN. FUN.

STEAM | SAUNA | WHIRLPOOL | LOCKERS | HUGE OUTDOOR POOL & PATIO | PRIVATE DRESSING ROOMS | 18+ ONLY

OutSmart's Bar Guide is now on your phone! Scan here to check out our directory of LGBTQ bars and clubs in and around Houston, including your favorites in Galveston, Huntsville, Spring, and College Station. Whether you're a local or a visitor, we've got you covered with this updated guide to the best LGBTQ-friendly spaces.







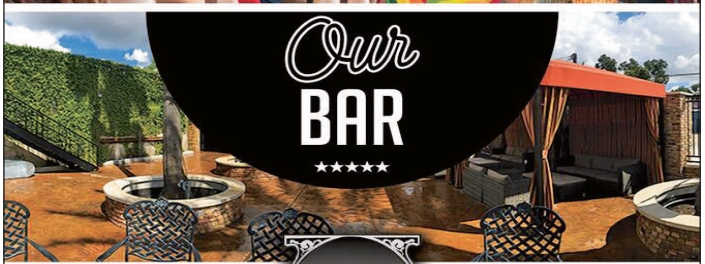


RICH'S HOUSTON

ReBar evolved into Rich's Houston, a vibe restaurant, lounge & boutique day / night life experience.







804 & 808 PACIFIC ST
713-521-2519
JR's Bar & Grill HOUSTON
NEVER A COVER
JRSBARANDGRILLHOUSTON

HOUSTON'S
NEW FACES of PRIDE

2024 PRIDE FESTIVAL & PARADE

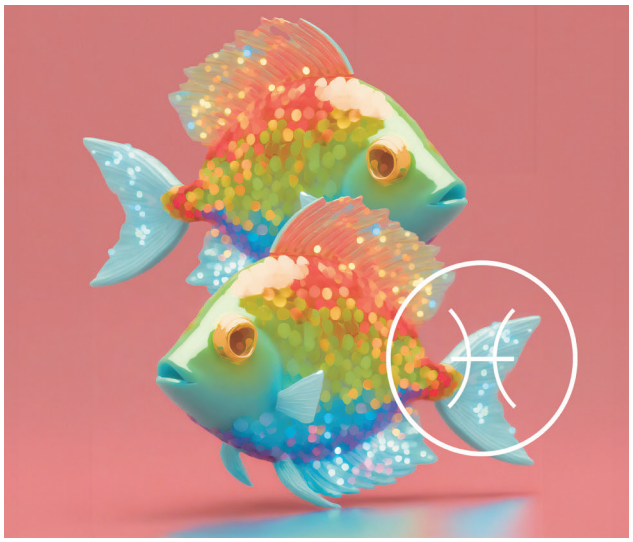
June 22nd, Fish Plaza, Wortham Theater

Join 350 vendors at Houston's largest Pride Festival and Parade aimed at raising funds for our two benefiting non-profits Tony's Place and Grace Place.

Early bird pricing now through 3/1.

newfacesofpride.org

By **LILLY RODDY**



Eclipses, Equinox, and Another Retrograde

Ride the wave of **Pisces** energy.

The important news this month is our first of two sets of eclipses. The Lunar Eclipse/Full Moon will be on March 25; the Solar Eclipse/New Moon will be on April 8. The sun enters Aries on the first day of spring, March 19, at 10:06 p.m. March is a busy month, and we can plan to get a lot done in the first two weeks. We get an early start as daylight savings time returns on Sunday the 10th. Good days this month are the 1st, 4th, 24th, and the 28th. Tense days this month are the 3rd, 9th, 17th, and the 21st. Friendships, compassion, and social equality are strong this month for all of us. The dreaded Mercury retrograde begins his influence on March 28. Get ready!

ARIES (Mar. 21–Apr. 19)
You balance your time between work and social obligation with your need for rest and retreat. Friends and work colleagues can be very helpful with any projects you are working on. You may even want to take on a leadership role with your business associates or within your community. You need to balance this with your need for self-care. You are looking into your future to find where you really want to be, instead of just what you can do. The latter part of the month is a very good time to act on your plans. You are looking to expand your resources and make better use of your time, attention, and money! This can be a good time to look for another position, maybe go back to school, or make your hobby profitable.

TAURUS (Apr. 20–May 20)
This month continues to be a big time of evaluation and change. There is a major focus on career this month. You may be looking to take a leadership position, start something on your own, or possibly retire. You are active and ready to make some moves! You are also re-evaluating your friendships and your participation in business and social groups. You are looking for greater support and a goal that you can participate in. You may also take on a leadership role in a business organization or get connected to a cause. You are more socially active in the first half of the month, but in the latter half you are ready for some rest and retreat. This is a very good time for reflection and to evaluate your plan of action. This continues to be a good time for investments or expanding your resource base.

GEMINI (May 21–June 21)
Career energies are especially active this month and next month, as well. For some, this is the time to step up and take on a management position. For others, this is the time to consider doing something on your own. And for some of the older folks, this is a time to cut back and create a better home and work life. You are more visible than usual, and your actions and attitudes influence those around you. This is a good time for travel, supplementing your education, and working with global businesses. In the latter part of the month, you are more interested in social activity and strengthening connections with friends. You are also more open to exploring your spirituality. You are interested in developing a belief system that really represents you.

CANCER (June 22–July 22)
Your focus this month is on sharing your knowledge, working at freeing yourself from debt, and putting new energy into your career and social expectations. This is a very good time to seek more education to broaden what you already have. Or you may be the teacher who is developing classes to help others. With money, you are dealing with two things: part of you wants to rid yourself of the shackles of debt, and the other part wants to throw caution to the wind and do what you like. In the long run, the first choice is the best. In the latter part of the month, your career energies are very active. This is a great time to start something on your own, put new energy into your existing situation, or take on a management role at your current workplace. Continue working on improving your social network.

LEO (July 23–Aug. 22)
This month continues to focus on romantic and business partnerships. On one level, this is an active time to revitalize your current partnerships to make sure everyone is pulling in the same direction. You are more willing to express your opinion and argue your position, if necessary. You have not been as patient over the last month, and this continues well into next month. You may want to increase your exercise and burn off some of your excess energy. If relationships are not going well, you will take a stand that change must occur, or your partnership may come to an end. There is a lot of focus on finances, resources, and debt this month. This is a better time for safe investments, refinancing to get rid of debt, and finding a way to make your services more attractive to customers and clients. You will want your work area clean and organized!

VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept.22)
Relationships are a major theme for you this month. Those in positive relationships are setting new goals and directions for growth and reestablishing those connections. Difficult partnerships have to find some resolution before the end of the month, when your patience will be extremely limited. This can also be a time to take your partnership to the next level. This applies to both romance and business. You are also being made more aware of your relationship patterns and what you can do to make them better. The focus from last month on paying more attention to health and exercise patterns continues through most of this month. This is a great time to get rid of bad habits and start some healthy ones. Your work environment needs some improvements. Take your time and don't rush your decisions.

LIBRA (Sept. 23–Oct. 23)
Your health and work habits are going through a huge time of re-evaluation. With work, you are wanting to improve your workspace with new equipment, better time management, and making your working conditions better—because it's the right thing to do! With your health, this is a good month to have a checkup, visit the dentist, commit to a workout schedule, set better boundaries at work and with needy friends, and find more joy in what you do every day. In the latter half of the month, relationships begin to demand your focus and attention. And with Mercury going retrograde at the end of the month, this is a super time to remember why you got together in the first place. This is also true for close friends. If you are single, you are more confident about putting yourself out there. Fun is important this month!

SCORPIO (Oct. 24–Nov. 21)
Family changes and obligations are having an impact on your career. This theme has been developing since October 2023. Your family is expecting you to step in and get things organized. If you have aging parents, this can be a time when you have to monitor their care more closely. This can also be a time when new families are being started. This

month is very good for taking a hobby or activity that you enjoy and turning it into something you do for profit. You find ways to have more fun and express your creativity, rather than trying to satisfy others. This is also a better time to be with your children or the people you take care of. In the latter part of the month, you are getting back into your routines and considering what new ideas you want to put into action. With Mercury retrograde at the end of the month, you have plenty of time to scrutinize your options before you choose.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov.22–Dec.21)
Home, family, and creating a stable base to operate from are the big topics this month. For some, this is a time to focus on house repair and possible relocation. One of the reasons for relocation is a better job and long-term security. Your family is also expecting you to be the adult in the room. There are some power struggles going on, and you will be the rational one. Home is a place of spiritual retreat for you, and when there is too much chaos there, it's time to clean house. You are looking to upgrade your work situation. You may be getting new equipment or creating your own home office. In the latter part of the month, you are looking to step away from some of the demands on your time and put some fun back into your life. The end of the month is a great time to connect with old friends!

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22–Jan. 19)
As the month starts, you are in an organizing mood. You are re-evaluating the way you manage your time on a daily basis. Essentially, you are working on your personal calendar or agenda. As you eliminate the activities that no longer serve a purpose, you set a new agenda and make commitments to the more creative aspects in your life. You continue to re-evaluate your finances and investments. Getting rid of debt is a major goal for you. You may be increasing your fees or looking for a position that pays more. This can be a good time for refinancing and obtaining loans. This is just part of getting your life more organized and more manageable. In the latter half of the month, home and family take over your focus. And with Mercury retrograde at the end of the month, your attention will be focused there through mid-May. You will have time to consider all your options before you have to choose.

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20–Feb. 18)
This month continues to be a time of self-focus, self-improvement, and speaking out sooner when you are unhappy. This is a very good time for starting new projects, improving your health, starting a new relationship, looking for a better-paying position, and just feeling more self-confident. This is a better time to sell yourself, your ideas, your products, or your services. You re-evaluate your personal worth and set better personal boundaries. You are quicker to say no, instead of trying to be nice. You are more conscious of your finances this month, so you may be working on getting rid of debt or cutting back on spending. In the latter part of the month, you are putting more energy into daily chores and activities. The idea of moving or relocating continues to be strong through the rest of 2024.

PISCES (Feb. 19–Mar. 20)
This is the birthday cycle for all the mermaids and mermen. You are looking back at the past year and making determinations about what occurred and how you felt. This also is the time to set new personal New Year's resolutions. You continue to be in a more serious mode this month and for the rest of this year. You set new personal boundaries that affect your relationships, your family responsibilities, and your career path. You feel older and are taking more time to really consider your choices. For some, this is a time to restart your life. You are looking for stability in relationships so you can build a future. For the older folks, this can be a time of stepping back and doing more of what you like, instead of the social expectations you have lived with. You are wanting to live your dreams! In the latter half of the month, you consider what actions you will take to reach those goals that help you feel more in control.

For more info, visit lillyroddyshow.com.



Kibbles and Bitz

Nibbles Zon Bits Thorne is the cat's meow.

By **SAM BYRD**

Meet Nibbles Zon Bits Thorne. This kitty has claws, but he only uses them when necessary. Known as the tuxedo cat who is always fitted with a bow tie, the performer is remembered for delivering a little sugar, adding in a little spice, and making everything feel really nice. Find out more about how he is delivering the cat-scratch fever to Houston's drag scene.

Pronouns? He/Him/They/Them

Inner Avatar?
An Instapot—I mean, as long as it has the right amount of time and everything it needs, wonderful things will come from it.

Home town? Dallas

Drag birthday?
June 24, 2021

What do you like best about drag?
The freedom to fulfill my more masculine self that had to remain trapped due to the social "normal."

Describe your performing persona.
Quirky and charming.

Story behind your name?
My name is a variation of an original name idea given to me by Nikki Blonsky during a video call. I was supposed to be Kibbles N Bits, with the idea of being animal-themed.

How did you learn makeup skills?
Years ago, I used to be a Mary Kay saleswoman. They taught me makeup basics and the importance of skincare. Through trial and way too much error, I quickly learned how I liked my makeup to look. But it is always changing and slowly evolving as I grow as a performer.

Most memorable moment as a performer?
It was my first time doing a contest show at Pearl Bar. My mother was in the audience cheering me on while I shot underwear all over the bar.

Thoughts about the proposed Texas legislation regarding drag performances?
First off, it goes against the personal expression of an individual. Second, why does the government suddenly want to care about something that has been a predominant part of history for centuries? Third, if drag were to be banned, it would mean the loss of a culture that is used in everyday life without most people even realizing it's happening.



Follow Nibbles Zon Bits Thorne at Facebook.com/neko.purrie and on Instragram @lez_purr

Favorite hangout spots?
I spend most of my time at Tony's Corner Pocket and Barcode.

Do you have a drag family?
I have two types of drag family. I have the families I gained in town from performing, and then there's my Imperial family that I gained from being a part of the Imperial Court System, where we raise money for nonprofits through performing.

Must-have clothing accessory?
A hand-painted and rhinestoned bow tie from my shop, Creator's Delight.

What would people be surprised to know about you?
I'm adopted, multilingual, afraid of small fish and large bodies of water, and I can't have caffeine.

What was your dream job as a child?
I wanted to be a vet—until I realized I would have to use needles on animals.

Favorite drag character from the media?
Ben Dela Creme and Jinkx Monsoon are my top. Please don't make me choose between my terminally delightful mommy and my swamp-witch mommy.

Where can fans see you perform?
I perform with E.R.S.I.C.S.S at their different locations throughout the year, and every blue moon I'll pop up at Pearl Bar for the H-Town Kings show.

What have you learned from drag that you use in your everyday life?
I can turn a profit making mixes and rhinestoning outfits.

What's your life's mantra?
Sometimes life is not worth freaking out about. Stop what you're doing, take a deep breath, and realize that no matter what happens, you will still survive.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ALEX ROSA

HEALTH CARE REIMAGINED

Exceptional Care Team

Free Rapid HIV, Hep C, and Syphilis Testing

Daily Oral or Long-Acting Injectable HIV Prevention & Treatment Options

Same- and Next-Day Appointments Available



James Carroll, MD



Maggie White, FNP

WALK IN OR CALL (713) 814-3730 TO SCHEDULE

2023 READERS' Out•Smart GAYEST & GREATEST WINNER CHOICE AWARDS

THANK YOU OUTSMART READERS!

Best Men's Health Clinic

Best Women's Health Clinic

Best Female Nurse Practitioner – Maggie White, FNP

Scan to Learn About All of Legacy's HIV Testing, Prevention, and Treatment Services

WELLNESSBAR By Legacy

WellnessBarByLegacy.org

120 Westheimer Road, Ste F

Houston, TX 77006

FRED HAAS TOYOTA WORLD

20400 I-45 N.
SPRING, TX 77373
FREDHAASTOYOTA.COM

#1 TOYOTA DEALER
20 YEARS IN A ROW*



*CLAIM BASED ON TOTAL RETAIL SALES VOLUME PER GST 2003-2023 FOR FRED HAAS TOYOTA WORLD.

2023 READERS' OutSmart GAYEST & GREATEST WINNER CHOICE AWARDS

Thank You

FOR VOTING US AS OUTSMART'S **

BEST IMPORT DEALERSHIP
3 YEARS IN A ROW

BEST AUTO DEALERSHIP

**BASED ON OUTSMART PUBLICATION'S VOTERS: BEST AUTO DEALERSHIP (2019) AND BEST IMPORT AUTO DEALERSHIP (2020-2023)

JUST MINUTES FROM DOWNTOWN! **832-764-8878**