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FEB. '18

HOUSTON'S LGBTQ MAGAZINE



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Early voting in March 6 primary races begins February 20. Visit [OutSmartMagazine.com](http://OutSmartMagazine.com) for continuing coverage of 2018 elections, including Houston GLBT Political Caucus endorsements.

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With an annual budget of roughly a half-million dollars, Pride Houston, Inc., is among our most important local LGBTQ nonprofits.



While the annual Pride parade and festival represent Houston's largest LGBTQ gatherings, the group's influence extends beyond those June events to sponsorships and other activities throughout the year.

That's why it is so critical that Pride Houston has resolved a months-long legal dispute involving its past president, and is moving forward under fresh leadership.

OUTSMART takes great pride, if you will, in featuring Pride Houston's new president and CEO, Loren "Lo" Roberts, on our February cover. Among other things, Roberts is pledging to make Pride Houston "the organization of the community" once again.

Roberts also happens to be the first black female president of Pride Houston, and

coincidentally, February is Black History Month. But she isn't the only local black LGBTQ leader taking on a major new role.

Last month, Mike Webb became the first genderqueer president of the Houston GLBT Political Caucus, after being chosen by the group's members to lead them through a critical election year. And Harrison Guy, who co-chairs the city's LGBTQ Advisory Board, is preparing to launch Gatekeepers, a new organization geared toward empowering black gay men.

Elsewhere in this February issue, we chat with the artists behind Dissent and Desire, a photography exhibit at the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston that chronicles LGBTQ life in India, where gay sex remains illegal.

We also continue two recently launched editorial series in this issue. "Heroes of Harvey" profiles Recovery Houston leader Blaise Mladenka, while "Out for Change in 2018" introduces readers to Angelina County justice of the peace candidate Justin Mosley.

It is worth mentioning that since our January "Out for Change" issue went to press, the record number of LGBTQ candidates in Texas has increased from 35 to 48. OUTSMART's coverage of those candidates has also been picked up by numerous local, state, and national publications—from the *Advocate* magazine to Breitbart (yes, *Breitbart*).

On that note, I'll leave you with a reminder that early voting in the March 6 primary races begins February 20. For more information, visit HarrisVotes.com.

—John Wright



ON THE COVER

LO AND BEHOLD  
Lo Roberts leads  
Pride Houston into  
new era. (See page 24.)

Photo by  
Emex Nwogu

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# Mike Webb Leads Caucus into Critical Election Cycle

Group elects its first genderqueer president.

By **Brandon Wolf**

**M**ike Webb, the newly elected president of the Houston GLBT Political Caucus, says 2018 will be “the year when the resistance strikes back.

“This is the one of the most important elections in decades, for the U.S. and for Texas,” Webb says.

The 32-year-old spent the last two years as vice president of the Caucus before being elected last month to replace interim president Frances Valdez. Valdez took over last year after Fran Watson stepped down to run for the Texas Senate.

Webb identifies as genderqueer and prefers the pronouns “they,” “them,” and “theirs.” The first genderqueer president in the Caucus’ history, Webb views it not as a label, but as a liberation from expectations related to gender.

“I just exist as ‘me,’” Webb says.

Webb defeated Alexis Melvin, a transgender activist and former Caucus board member, in the race for president, during a standing-room-only meeting at the Montrose Center.

“The Caucus is well positioned to expand our influence over the next year, so we all need to move forward together,” Melvin said after the election.

A Houston native, Webb was raised in the city’s Third Ward by a single mom. As part of a religious family that attended a homophobic church—Webb finally found empowerment in HATCH, Houston’s program for LGBTQ youth.

Academic achievement earned Webb a scholarship to Reed College in Portland, Oregon. Through an exchange program that involved a year at Howard University in Washington DC, Webb worked as an intern in the office of congresswoman Sheila Jackson Lee (D-Houston).

Last year, Webb served as an aide to State



## Continuing a Legacy

Mike Webb lists among his heroes the late Houston congresswoman Barbara Jordan. Webb, who worked as an aide to State senator Sylvia Garcia in 2017, is shown in front of Jordan’s portrait in the Texas Capitol.

senator Sylvia Garcia (D-Houston) during the 85th Texas Legislature in Austin, which featured attempts to pass dozens of anti-LGBTQ bills. Webb describes 2017 as “a year of aggressive bigotry.”

“I’ve seen what happens when hatred wins,” Webb says. “[The Caucus’] goal is to achieve equality for everyone in our community by electing strong, passionate, pro-LGBTQ candidates.”

In addition to Jackson Lee and Garcia, Webb has worked for former Houston mayor Annise Parker, as well as for Legacy Community Health. Webb’s heroes include the late Houston congresswoman Barbara Jordan and the gay black civil-rights pioneer

Bayard Rustin.

Webb lists improved outreach to black and brown communities as a priority for the Caucus. Too often, people simply assume that those communities will support progressive candidates, according to Webb. “They need to hear from us. They need to be included and respected—involved from beginning to end. They should be part of the leadership and included in every meeting.”

Webb also hopes to deepen the Caucus’ relationships with organizations like United We Dream, Black Lives Matter, trans groups, and others.

Webb believes some progressive voters have forgotten that politics can be →

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intimidating for people who have never been involved, adding that the Caucus should be “intentionally inclusive” and welcoming. Webb also wants the Caucus to refocus on HIV/AIDS, and include questions in its candidate endorsement screening process about what candidates will do to address the issue.

“We can’t operate in a silo,” Webb says. “We can’t just focus on our issues. We have to expand and be victorious with [issues that we have in common]. As we attack hatred and bigotry together, we will be more effective.”

Webb points to the Caucus’ Houston Advocacy Day during last year’s legislative session as a good example of coalition-building. “Our coalitions should include communities and organizations most impacted by racism, homelessness, transgender violence, and sexism, because all of these issues impact our LGBTQ+ community,” Webb says. “Our community is so amazingly diverse with an inclusive culture,

we are in a unique position to actually lead the progressive movement.

At the time of Webb’s election, candidate screenings were already underway for the March 6 primary election. With a record number of people seeking the Caucus’ endorsement, Webb gave high praise to members of the screening committee who are racing against the clock to complete that process in time for the group’s February 3 endorsement meeting, set for 11 a.m. at Saint Stephen’s Episcopal Church, 1805 West Alabama.

“The Caucus endorsement is one of the most sought-after by progressive candidates,” Webb says. “The process is very transparent and well thought-out. The committee looks for a candidate’s level of knowledge of LGBTQ policy areas, and asks them what they are willing to do to raise the quality of life for local LGBTQs.”

Webb emphasized that the Caucus is non-partisan, and that invitations to screen were sent to all candidates—Democrats, Republicans, and third-party candidates. Noting that

progressive voters often look for the Caucus card at polling places, Webb says the group plans to expand distribution of its endorsement list to all of Harris County, and even into Fort Bend and Brazoria counties.

To get out the vote, Webb says Caucus volunteers are eager to begin phone-banking on behalf of endorsed candidates. The endorsement card will be mailed to more than 30,000 households (and counting) as the group expands its geographical reach.

“We should welcome common-sense Republicans and independents who are committed to fighting LGBTQ+ discrimination,” Webb says.

“If we truly believe in civil rights, we have to aggressively fight racism in all its forms. Ultimately, issues like immigration are human-rights issues. The Caucus is a human-rights organization, and has always fought on the right side of history.”

*Brandon Wolf is a regular contributor to OUTSMART magazine.*

## COMMUNITY

Photos by Dalton DeHart and Edgardo Aguilar



On January 15, the **Human Rights Campaign Houston** hosted an MLK Day of Service at Kindred. Pictured are volunteers.



On January 6, **Fran Watson for State Senate** hosted a People First Volunteer Block Walk at Jenni’s Noodle House. Pictured are supporters.



On January 15, **Resurrection Metropolitan Community Church** hosted an MLK Day of Service. Pictured are volunteers.



On January 14, **Jackie Duval-Everson** (second from left) hosted Bingo for Puerto Rico at the home of Flor and Manuel Solis. Pictured are **Pat Gandy** (l-r), Duval-Everson, **Manuel Solis**, **Flor Solis**, and **Rachel Everson**.



On January 21, Michael’s Outpost hosted a celebration of the beginning of Mardi Gras with Mother of Montrose **Mona Lott-Gill**. Pictured are Lott-Gill (far left), **Don Gill** (far right), and other performers.

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## 'A New Brain'

*An artist in crisis... a musical.*

Colton Berry plays Gordon (left and in triangle) and Jayson Kolbicz plays Roger in *A New Brain*.

BOTH PHOTOS - ART FACTORY STAFF



**A** late '90s musical with music and lyrics by William Finn and book by Finn and James Lapine, *A New Brain* is an eccentric tale of an artist, an illness, and love. Songwriter Gordon clutches his head and falls face-first into his lunch, while in the hospital he's told by a doctor that he needs an MRI. Actually, the doctor sings

him the song "There's Trouble in His Brain." Gordon fears that he will die with his best songs unwritten. His boyfriend, Roger, consoles him; a cast of characters (including a children's TV host dressed as a frog) parade singing through the plot as well as Gordon's hallucinations. Songs like "Brain Dead" and "Craniotomy" may not be show-

stoppers, but overall the music is entertaining and the story is actually based on Finn's experience with his own brain condition. But it all works out in the end.

—Marene Gustin

**A New Brain**  
 • February 9–25  
 • Art Factory, 1119 Providence  
 • [artfactoryhouston.com](http://artfactoryhouston.com)

🔊 Radio   ★ Performing Arts   📁 Art & Photography   + Other Things   📅 Save The Date

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2

**The Big DO** + Fundraiser for Main Street Theater honoring Mattress Mac. [mainstreettheater.com](http://mainstreettheater.com)  
**The Crystal Ball** + The Fresh Arts' fundraiser. [fresharts.org](http://fresharts.org)

3

**Dua Lipa** ★ Don't miss this hot new singer. [dualipa.com](http://dualipa.com)  
**Houston Remixed** 📅 thru Mar 1  
 Paintings and sculptures about Houston. [archwaygallery.com](http://archwaygallery.com)

4

**Dissent and Desire** 📅 thru April 29  
 This exhibition is comprised of 48 photographs and first-person texts depicting an unprecedented portrait of LGBTQ+ lives in India today. (See page 28.) [camh.org](http://camh.org)

6

**Ten Dollars to Hate** + Author lecture about the KKK in Texas in the 1920s. [hnh.org](http://hnh.org)

7

**A Little Day Music** ★ Beethoven for all! [dacamera.com](http://dacamera.com)  
**An Enemy of the People** ★ Ibsen's play about corruption and ethics. [classictheatre.org](http://classictheatre.org)

8

**Texas Monthly Whiskey Affair** ★ Live music and brown spirits. [texasmonthly.com](http://texasmonthly.com)  
**INFINITO Into Space** 📅 thru 28  
 Works by artist Mariana Sammartino. [serranogallery.com](http://serranogallery.com)



9

**30th Annual Pearl Ball** + A fun fundraiser for student-nurse scholarships. [gsftx.org](http://gsftx.org)  
**The Barber of Seville** ★ & 10 HGO's production held at the GRB. [houstongrandopera.org](http://houstongrandopera.org)

10

**Peaceful Bones** + Author talk and book signing by Dr. Axelrod. [go.peacefulbones.com](http://go.peacefulbones.com)  
**For Colored Girls...** ★ *last day* A beautiful, powerful piece of theater. [obsidiantheater.org](http://obsidiantheater.org)

11

**Hello, Dolly!** ★ *thru 25* It's so nice to have you back where you belong! [crightontheatre.org](http://crightontheatre.org)



13

**Mardi Gras! Galveston** + Last day to party hard on the island. [galveston.com](http://galveston.com)

14

**Happy Valentine's Day!**

15

**LUEY Weekend: Houston's LGBTQ+ Leather Party** + *thru 18* Various clubs around Montrose.  
**Core Dance** ★ *thru 17* Two contemporary dances. [matchhouston.org](http://matchhouston.org)

16

**Esther & Jonah** ★ Two biblical stories set to beautiful music. [arslyricahouston.org](http://arslyricahouston.org)

17

**Leap and the Net Will Appear** ★ *thru Mar 4* A new play by Chana Porter. [catastrophictheatre.com](http://catastrophictheatre.com)

18

**Beethoven for All** ★ A free performance by Kinetic string quartet. [dacamera.com](http://dacamera.com)



20

**Rec Room Arts' Residency Festival** ★ *thru Mar 24* Music and live performances. [recroomarts.org](http://recroomarts.org)



22

**Oscar at the Museum** ★ *weekly thru Mar 3* A screening of Oscar-nominated short live-action films. [mfah.org](http://mfah.org)

23

**War-Toys** 📷 *thru Mar 15* Photographs of children in war-torn lands. [uhcl.edu](http://uhcl.edu)

24

**Arthur Yoria** ★ A release party for his new album. [arthuryoria.com](http://arthuryoria.com)

25

**Ann** ★ *thru Apr 8* The one-woman play about Texas governor Ann Richards written by Holland Taylor. [stagetheatre.com](http://stagetheatre.com)

26

**Eye on Houston: High School Documentary Photography** 📷 *thru June 24* Exhibition of student photographs. [mfah.org](http://mfah.org)

27

**Of Mice and Men** ★ And two other music groups at White Oak Music Hall. [whiteoakmusic hall.com](http://whiteoakmusic hall.com)

28

**Turtle Island Quartet** ★ Grammy Award-winning chamber quartet. [matchhouston.org](http://matchhouston.org)



## Save the Date

March 8-11  
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The cast of Corteo includes 51 acrobats, musicians, singers, and actors from around the world. [houstontoyotacenter.com](http://houstontoyotacenter.com)



## Save the Date

March 10  
**Sail the Seven Seas** 📄  
A 7 p.m. concert by the Houston Pride Band. [matchhouston.org](http://matchhouston.org), [houstonprideband.org](http://houstonprideband.org)

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## Calendar of Events

*continued from previous page*

### **War-Toys: Israel, West Bank, and Gaza Strip** Thru Mar. 15

Now thru March 15

Since 2011, Los Angeles-based artist Brian McCarty has been traveling to war zones and refugee camps in the Middle East to conduct art-based interviews with children affected by armed conflict. Boys and girls are invited to become art directors for McCarty's photographs of locally found toys, recreating their experiences through play. This exhibit, his first solo show in Texas, hangs the children's drawings alongside his 21 photographs. Oddly beautiful but very haunting, War-Toys will make you glad to be living in Texas.

**uhcl.edu**



Brian McCarty's Sderot House, 2012.

### **Decadent Desserts & Dancing**

February 25

## 25

If your boots are made for dancing and you've got a sweet tooth, then come on out to Neon Boots Dancehall & Saloon for a fundraiser benefitting AssistHers. The annual event, sponsored by the Montrose Center, will also offer BBQ with the sweets, and once you're done chowing down, take to the dance floor to work off the calories with a little two-stepping. Tickets are \$25 in advance, and \$30 at the door.

**montrosecenter.org**

### **AIDS Walk Houston**

March 4

## Save the Date

The 29th annual AIDS Walk Houston starts downtown, and this year there's a free concert after the walk! Lace up your shoes and get ready to raise some money for HIV/AIDS agencies.

**aidshelp.org** ■



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# Facing the Challenges of Long-Term Care

LGBTQ adults should plan ahead for unique issues.

**W**hen planning for retirement and potential healthcare needs, LGBTQ people can face unique challenges, including the loss of an income stream when a partner passes away, or being excluded from medical decision-making.

In addition, long-term care planning for LGBTQ people can be clouded by lack of family support, isolation, and even discrimination. Due to these obstacles, having a plan in place to pay for care could mean the difference between relying on sources that may not be ideal, and having control over how and where your needs are met.

Even if you are currently in tip-top shape, the odds of needing at least some type of assistance are higher than you might think. U.S. government statistics show that someone turning 65 today has a nearly 70 percent chance of requiring long-term care services and support, which typically come with a hefty price tag. According to a Genworth survey, the average cost of a semi-private room in a skilled-nursing facility in 2017 was \$7,148 per month—or nearly \$86,000 per year. And the average cost of a home health aide or a homemaker service was \$4,000 per month.

Providing care for a partner can be taxing in other ways, too. For instance, even when you have the best of intentions, providing care for a loved one—especially on a regular basis—can be physically and emotionally draining.

Caregivers also end up spending, on average, 20 percent of their annual income on those they care for. According to a 2016 AARP survey, out-of-pocket costs for caregivers averaged \$7,000 annually.

In addition, many caregivers who are still employed may need to make adjustments to their schedules, such as working different or fewer hours and taking time off that may or may not be paid.

So how can you (and your partner, if applicable) best prepare for a potential long-term healthcare need in the future?

The usual funding sources include long-term



care insurance, annuities, investments, life insurance, home equity, and Medicaid.

Unfortunately, many in the LGBTQ community will end up facing future healthcare needs alone, which can make financial challenges even more difficult.

Based on a study from *The Gerontologist*, roughly one-third of 45- to 63-year-olds were single in 2012, and most of them were either divorced or had never been married. So the risk of LGBTQ people finding themselves without a built-in support system is substantial.

In order to help combat this, it is essential to plan ahead, and to know what resources are available. In Houston, those resources include:

- The Montrose Center, which is raising money to build a senior-living facility where LGBTQ Houstonians can retire and age together. The Montrose Center also oversees the Seniors Preparing for Rainbow Years, or SPRY, which offers community outreach, men's and women's groups, professional counseling, case management, social and recreational activities, health and wellness education, and the Montrose Diner drop-in center and congregational lunch program.
- AssistHers, a women's healthcare resource providing information and resources for women's care and caregiving options.
- SAGE USA, the largest and oldest organiza-

tion dedicated to improving the lives of older LGBTQ adults, with both a national presence and local chapters throughout the U.S.

Although most people don't like to think about it, the potential need for healthcare and long-term care services is very real—particularly as we get older. Because of that, it's wise to have your financing options in place, just in case.

Doing so can keep you from having to scramble if or when the time comes. It can also help to ensure that you won't need to dip into savings or assets that have been earmarked for other needs.

When setting up a long-term care financing plan, it can be beneficial to work with an advisor who specializes in working with the LGBTQ community. That way, in addition to the financial aspects, you can freely discuss caregiving options that will allow you and/or your partner to feel more comfortable.

*Grace S. Yung, CFP, is a certified financial planner practitioner with experience in helping domestic partners plan their finances since 1994. She is a principal at Midtown Financial LLC in Houston and was recognized as a "Five-Star Wealth Manager" in the 2014 September issue of Texas Monthly. Yung can be reached at [grace.yung@jpl.com](mailto:grace.yung@jpl.com).*

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For a full list of side effects, please talk to your doctor. Tell your doctor if you have any side effect that bothers you or does not go away.

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- This drug should only be used during pregnancy if clearly needed

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Mytesi comes from the *Croton lechleri* tree harvested in South America.

## FOR YOUR CALENDAR

Check out these fabulous events co-sponsored by OUTSMART and our marketing partners.

**February 8: "Honey Bunnies"** featuring Honey Bunny and Ginger Kitty, benefitting several LGBTQ local charities. [bunniesonthebayou.org](http://bunniesonthebayou.org)

**February 8:** OutReach United **Red Hot Party** at Pearl Bar featuring Nikki Knockout and Zar the belly dancer, benefitting local charities. [outreachunited.org](http://outreachunited.org)

**February 25:** AssistHers presents **Decadent Desserts & Dancing** benefitting AssistHers at Neon Boots Dancehall & Saloon. [montrosecenter.org/ddd](http://montrosecenter.org/ddd)

### SAVE THE DATE

**March 3:** OutSmart Pride Night at the **Houston Sabercats** rugby game. [outsmartmagazine.com](http://outsmartmagazine.com)

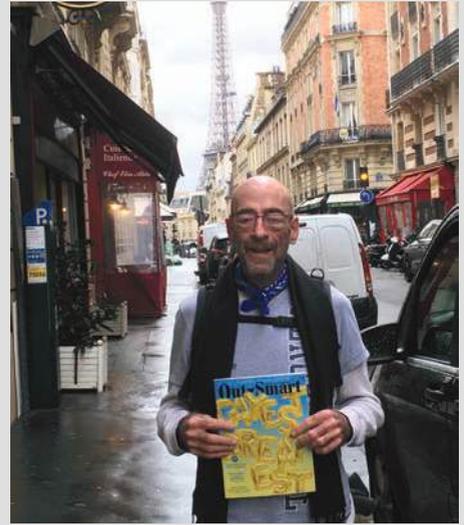
**March 4: AIDS Walk Houston** 2018, benefitting AIDS Foundation Houston as well as other local HIV/AIDS charities. [aidswalkhouston.org](http://aidswalkhouston.org)

**March 16: Bringin' In the Green** presented by the Montrose Center, benefitting the Center. [montrosecenter.org](http://montrosecenter.org)

**March 10:** The Diana Foundation presents the **65th Annual Diana Awards**, benefitting local charities. [thedianafoundation.org](http://thedianafoundation.org)

**March 10:** The Houston Pride Band presents **"Sail the Seven Seas"** concert. [houstonprideband.org](http://houstonprideband.org)

## TimeOut in France



In January, **Daniel Impastato** took OUTSMART to Paris.

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# Newfound PRIDE

Lo Roberts pledges to make Pride Houston 'the organization of the community again.'



**By Brandon Wolf**  
Photo by Emex Nwogu

**D**uring the Houston Pride festival last year, Lorin “Lo” Roberts walked around the grounds and asked people why the event was important to them.

One young woman told Roberts that ten years earlier she had come out to her family and friends in a small Texas town, only to find herself rejected. “But now, here I am celebrating,” the woman said.

Roberts cites this interaction as just one example of why she believes our annual Pride events remain relevant. She says the woman’s response made her feel thankful that she had

joined Pride Houston years before as a volunteer, and was being groomed to take the helm of the group last fall.

On October 1, Pride Houston’s board voted unanimously to make Roberts president and CEO. Roberts, a “proud Houstonian” who describes herself as “28 years young,” became the first black female to lead the organization.

Roberts, who works as a nurse and identifies as queer, describes her life as “happy”—focusing first on her family and young daughter, and second on Pride and Houston’s LGBTQ community. “Between those two things, and

working in the nursing field, I’m giving myself to a lot of different people who need me,” she says.

Roberts first joined Pride Houston six years ago. “I was ‘volun-told’ by an ex-partner to get involved,” she says. “I fell in love with Pride. I had a knack for it right off the bat. Over the years, I’ve become more and more involved, and I began to learn the inner workings so that I could eventually make a difference. To be honest, when I first became involved with the organization, there were not too many people that looked like me.”

Roberts says her biggest accomplishment thus far has been working to alleviate financial challenges by bringing in more sponsors. She also cites her ability to pull together the annual “Rock the Runway” event last year in less than 24 hours, coordinating the efforts of volunteer chair Anthony Ramirez and over a dozen “amazing volunteers.”

From a personal perspective, Roberts says she is proud to be Pride’s first black, queer, female president. “It’s not a pride I hold for myself, but one that I share with every other member of this community who looks like me,” she says. “These are strides for all queer people of color.”

### Trial by Fire

The first test of Roberts’ leadership skills came sooner than expected. Halfway into her first month in office, former Pride Houston president Francisco “Frankie” Quijano wrote to board members and characterized Roberts as the “president-elect,” claiming that she did not meet the qualifications of the organization’s bylaws. Quijano asserted that he was still president.

It is possible that Pride board members would have entertained Quijano’s objection, if not for the fact that he removed Roberts as an administrator of their Facebook discussion group, and blocked her from accessing the organization’s bank accounts.

Fearing that Pride Houston’s business assets were endangered, Roberts and the board

responded swiftly. They hired attorney U.A. Lewis, who filed a request for a temporary restraining order against Quijano and his husband, Abijah Kratochvil. The order was granted on October 23, and the parties came before Harris County State District Judge R.K. Sandill on October 31.

In court, Quijano maintained that a Pride Houston president must have two years of prior board service. Roberts had been a director on the board for one year, and an observer for one year. Pride Houston spokesman Dan Cato says it is commonly accepted that the observer role qualifies as board service. An observer is privy to all communications of the board and is expected to attend all meetings, but cannot vote. Quijano rejected that interpretation.

With the parties initially unable to reach a resolution, Sandill issued an injunction against Quijano on November 16, and set the case for trial in April. However, on December 22, Pride Houston and Quijano filed a joint motion to dismiss, signaling that the dispute had been resolved.

Quijano agreed to turn over access to Pride Houston’s business assets, and not to interfere with the operations of the organization. He also resigned from his position as board observer, while Kratochvil stepped down as a director. Under the agreement, neither party can take further legal action, and each is responsible for its own attorneys’ fees and court costs.

Cato says Pride Houston’s legal expenses totaled \$3,000. He also confirmed that an audit by an outside agency is scheduled, to review Pride’s financial history and assist in establishing more transparent practices. According to a tax filing from 2015, the most recent year available, Pride Houston’s total revenue was \$345,416. That was down from \$413,000 in 2014 and \$621,000 in 2013, records show.

Pride Houston board members say they remain baffled by the recent controversy. Quijano, who served as president since 2011, had openly discussed his plans to retire with various community members. He reportedly worked with Roberts for a year to prepare her for the presidency, and nominated her prior to the October 1 election. Two weeks later, he challenged her legitimacy.

Quijano did not respond to a request for comment for this story. His attorney, Angie Olalde, said in a statement that Quijano and Kratochvil were “happy with the parties’ mutual decision to end this litigation, and feel that

the lawsuit should never have been filed in the first place.”

### Click Your Ruby-red Heels

With the LGBTQ community now under attack at the state and national levels, Pride Houston board members say this year’s 40th-anniversary event will be as relevant as ever.

The theme of this summer’s celebration is ruby, the traditional brilliant-red gemstone for 40th anniversaries. Iconic actress Judy Garland donned ruby-red heels in *The Wizard of Oz*, and the film’s signature song, “Somewhere Over the Rainbow,” has long been a sentimental favorite in the LGBTQ community.

Many of this year’s Pride events are still in the planning stages, and will not be revealed until an upcoming kickoff party. However, they might include a first-ever LGBTQ Pride night at a Houston Rockets game, called “Ruby at the Rockets.”

Pride Houston also plans to forego the traditional male, female, and ally grand marshals in 2018. Instead, the organization will honor all grand marshals from the parade’s previous four decades.

The parade and festival are set for Saturday, June 23. Originally scheduled for June 30, the date was moved to give the city time to prepare for its Fourth of July celebration.

Houston’s first official Pride parade was at 3 p.m. on July 1, 1979. It traveled east along Westheimer, from Shepherd to Bagby Street.

The Montrose route’s length and starting time would vary over the years. In 1997, the parade became a nighttime event, and in 2015 it was moved from Montrose to downtown. Anchored by a City Hall bathed in rainbow floodlights, part of the current route is the same one used in the 1977 Anita Bryant protest march that is widely viewed as the start of Houston’s LGBTQ movement.

J.D. Doyle, an LGBTQ historian, says Houston’s actual first Pride parade has been largely lost to history. It was held in 1976, and sponsored by the University of Houston’s Gay Activist Alliance. It started and ended downtown at the since-demolished Exile Bar. Participants marched for 19 blocks, with many onlookers joining them.

In 1977, the Bryant protest replaced the parade, and in 1978, “Town Meeting I” was the focal point. In 1979, the first major Pride parade commemorating the June 1969 Stonewall Riots was staged in Montrose with a grand marshal, floats, and the like. →



### End of an Era

Francisco “Frankie” Quijano (r) served as president and CEO of Pride Houston for seven years. His husband, Abijah Kratochvil, was a member of the organization’s board.

continued from previous page

**The Future of Pride**

Looking ahead, Roberts says she wants to see Pride Houston “become the organization of the community again.”

“We do so much work to put on the celebration every single year, but that’s only a part of our responsibility,” she says. “Part of our initiative is to build strong relationships with other Prides across the state and around the nation. We can also establish better relationships with every facet of our community—especially members of color and the transgender community that often go unserved.

“I think we’d all like to get to a place where Pride events aren’t relevant, but we aren’t there yet,” Roberts adds. “I encourage our community to be more involved—to vote, to stay informed, to know their rights. I want us to have voices and to be heard.”

Roberts says Pride is also an opportunity to celebrate on behalf of LGBTQ people in other countries who are prohibited by law from doing so.

“It also gives us the chance to remind every elected official that they represent us, too,” she says. “One reason I am so passionate about Pride is because 364 days of the year we fight for equality, and this celebration gives us that



**Proud Crowd**

In addition to Roberts, the current Pride Houston board is made up of observer Dan Cato (from left), secretary Jeremy Fain, and treasurer Dustin Sheffield.

one day to actually let go and be who we are.”

Including Roberts, the current Pride board has three voting members and one observer.

Dustin Sheffield serves as treasurer. He grew up in Pearland and now lives in Spring. With a degree in business administration and accounting from the University of Houston, Sheffield has most recently worked as a parts manager for a heavy-machinery company.

Jeremy Fain, who serves as secretary, migrated to Houston from Midland. He is a local real-estate agent and a music professor at Lone Star College.

Dan Cato, who serves as Pride’s marketing

director and board observer, grew up in Nashville and studied economics at the University of Houston. He is the associate director of enrollment communications for UH-Clear Lake.

Pride Houston’s board can have up to 15 members. Board applications are accepted in July and August, with interviews and decisions in September.

The organization welcomes all community members who would like to apply. For more information, visit [PrideHouston.org](http://PrideHouston.org).

*Brandon Wolf is a regular contributor to OUTSMART magazine.*

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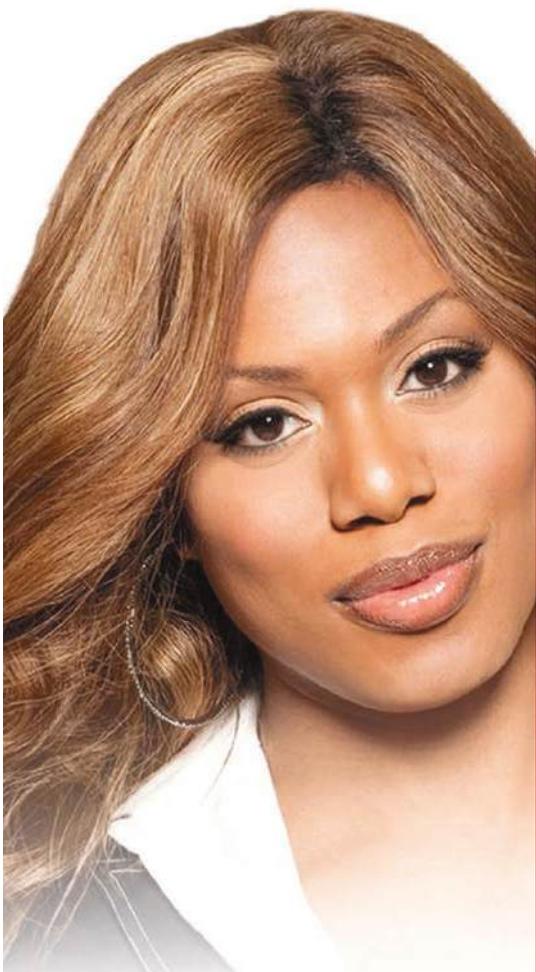
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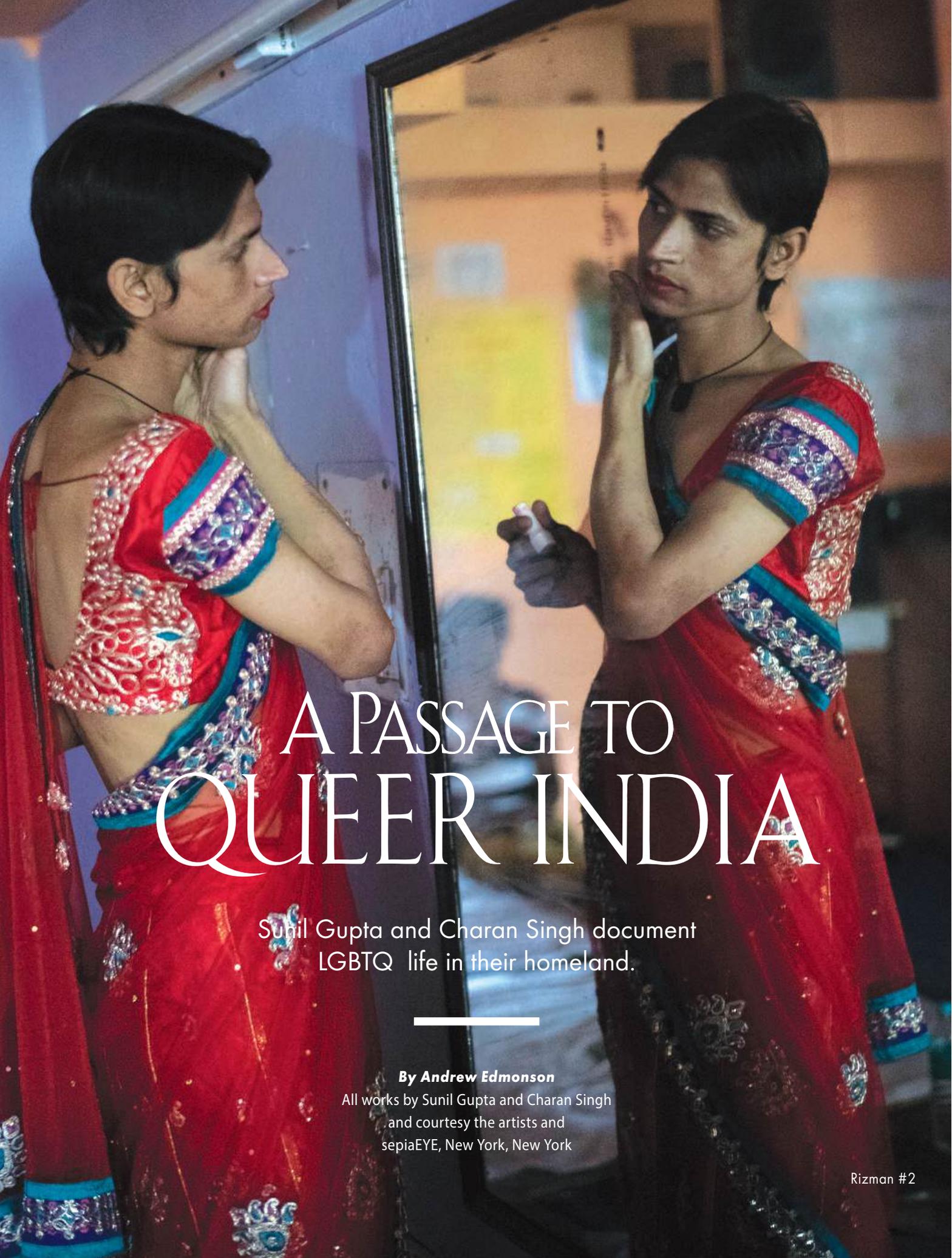
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# A PASSAGE TO QUEER INDIA

Sunil Gupta and Charan Singh document  
LGBTQ life in their homeland.

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**By Andrew Edmonson**

All works by Sunil Gupta and Charan Singh  
and courtesy the artists and  
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S

unil Gupta is having his Texas moment.

Three decades after his first visit to the Lone Star State, the acclaimed Indian photographer, curator, and activist will dominate Houston's spring cultural scene in 2018.

Dissent and Desire, the exhibition Gupta photographed with his partner in art and life, Charan Singh, is on display through April 29 at the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston (CAMH). Featuring 48 photographs with companion first-person texts, *Dissent and Desire* beautifully captures hidden moments of pain, struggle, and joy in the lives of 17 members of India's LGBTQ community as they navigate a society that can be deeply homophobic.

Beginning March 10, Gupta will also serve as lead curator for Fotofest's 2018 Biennial, INDIA – Contemporary Photography and New Media Art, a six-week showcase of 48 artists at venues including the Asia Society Texas Center; the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; and Fotofest's home in three converted warehouses in the Washington Avenue Arts District. Gupta collaborated with Fotofest executive director Steven Evans in curating the festival.

Fotofest bills the Biennial as "one of the largest exhibitions of contemporary photography by artists of Indian origin to be presented in the United States."

Gupta tells *OUTSMART* that this will be the largest exhibition he has ever curated, and that he has been working on it for just over a year.

"It's been a lifelong passion to make India more accessible and to bring it out in the world—especially in my field of photography," Gupta says. "In the early years, India was [perceived by Westerners as] a very mysterious place. Very few people I met had any idea about it, other than it was where hippies went, it was where drugs came from, or possibly that it was in dire need of development funds."

The 2018 Fotofest Biennial will feature works by artists who examine the tensions currently roiling India: gender and sexuality, land rights, the environment, human settlement and migration, and caste and class divisions.

"Indian society is very contradictory, like many others," Gupta says. "Whilst it is aspirational on an international stage, there is still a hanging-on to age-old barriers to social advancement such as caste, gender, and sexuality."

But this may be a year in which legal barriers based on sexuality fall in India. In January, the country's supreme court ordered a review of Section 377, a colonial British law dating to 1861 that criminalizes sex between men, with a penalty of ten years in jail. The three judges who initially reviewed the case observed that Indians who are LGBTQ "should never remain in a state of fear" and that "societal morality also changes from age to age."

The Supreme Court of India struck down Section 377 in 2009, but reversed itself in 2013 in a surging wave of homophobia. On August 24, 2017, the court gave the LGBTQ community some relief under a right-to-privacy law, but did not overturn Section 377.

"The earlier wording of the law, and its reference to 'the right to privacy,' is problematic in that it is a right that's not available to a vast majority of Indians who live in joint families and don't necessarily have a private bedroom," Gupta says. "Furthermore, there is a lot of discussion and debate in India about the very definitions of LGBTQ people."

Singh and Gupta have chronicled this era of transformation, according to Saleem Kidwai, an Indian historian and gay-studies scholar.

"A visible queer community has emerged in Delhi over the past two decades," Kidwai says. "What was silent and private has emerged into the public sphere. Gupta and Singh's work bears testimony to this."

Gupta is one of India's foremost living photographers, says Bill Arning, director of CAMH. As a social-documentary photographer capturing LGBTQ lives, Gupta has few rivals in the scope and depth of his work, which spans four decades and three continents.

Born in New Delhi in 1953, Gupta spent the first 15 years of his life in India before his parents migrated to Canada. In 1976, he moved to New York City.

"I came to New York to be with a partner. To make it plausible to my parents, I enrolled in an MBA program at a local university," he

recalls. "But it was really boring, so I enrolled in photography classes at the New School with Lisette Model, Philippe Halsman, and George Tice.

"It was Lisette who said, 'Darling, you should drop the finance and do photography.' And I said, 'But who is going to pay the rent?'"

While in Gotham, Gupta produced an iconic series of images, *Christopher Street, New York 1976*, which captured gay men strolling, cruising, and socializing on the streets of Manhattan in the heady early days of gay liberation. In addition to displaying Gupta's natural aptitude for street photography, the work survives as an important documentation of gay-male life before the catastrophe of AIDS. It also established a key characteristic of much of Gupta's work for the next five decades: capturing the LGBTQ community in their public spaces.

In the early 1980s, Gupta travelled back to Delhi to produce *Exiles*, which captured images of deeply closeted gay men who were almost invisible in India's larger homophobic society. "At the time, they seemed particularly vulnerable as a group, and didn't have a recognizable place in society," Gupta recalls. "As a gay man, I felt I couldn't live in such a repressive atmosphere. Now there is a claim for more visibility, but there is still a shortage of cultural production."

In the United Kingdom in 1988, Margaret Thatcher's conservative government unleashed Clause 28, an attack on Britain's queer community that prohibited local authorities from "promoting" homosexuality or gay "pretended family relationships." Gupta struck back with a series of photos of same-sex couples called "Pretended" Family Relationships, featuring text by his then-partner, poet Stephen Dodd, juxtaposed with images taken at public protests against Clause 28 in London.

In 1995, Gupta was devastated to discover that he was HIV-positive. He spent many years coming to grips with the diagnosis. True to form, he turned to his art to help process his grief and fear, which ultimately led him to create a work called *Love, Undetectable*. "It was a turning point to think of using my own body as subject matter—to actually come to terms with its physical condition, to love it again," he recalls. →



Over the years, my HIV status has become normalized,” he adds. “I’m very fortunate to live in the UK. I have access to free healthcare and free medication, and my hospital is a research center. For some

time now, my test results have stabilized, and it has been a while since the virus manifested itself in any kind of debilitating way. I have been lucky to have had a chance to restart my career, as it is true there was a time in the late 1990s when I did feel defeated by HIV.”

Another turning point came in 2009 when Gupta met Singh at an AIDS conference. Neither expected the encounter to blossom into a relationship.

“I never thought our meeting would have a future,” Singh remembers, “considering our backgrounds (both social and economic), nationalities, the illegalities of our desires and love, and the world we were occupying.”

Born in India in 1978, Singh is also an activist whose experiences have deeply impacted the artistic themes of his work. From 1998 to 2012, he facilitated groups for men who have sex with men, and he also served as an educa-

tor and program manager for India’s national AIDS prevention project.

“Being part of the local community gives my [work a relevance] that is far beyond that of art and academic discourse,” Singh says. “It provides me an understanding of the language that is being shared in these spaces—[a language that can] tell a nuanced version of a story that [usually dwells on] a largely victimized community.”

In 2012, Singh moved to London to pursue master’s and doctoral degrees in photography at the Royal College of Art.

Houston had its first glimpse of Singh’s work in 2015 when Fotofest presented his series *Kothis, Hijras, Giriyas and Others* as part of the larger exhibition *I Am a Camera*.

“*Kothis* (effeminate, underprivileged, homosexual men), *Hijras* (transgender people), and *Giriyas* (partners of *kothis* and *hijras*) are indigenous terms used by queer working-class and transgender men, in their own dialect, to define their different and particular sexual identities,” Singh wrote of the exhibit on Fotofest’s website. “I made these pictures because this subculture is rarely seen outside of its HIV/AIDS victim narratives.”

In *Dissent and Desire*, Singh dives deeper

into the lives of *Hijras* by capturing them outside the portrait studios, in their homes, and going about their business in the streets of Delhi. In texts accompanying the photos, they share stories of alienation from family, physical abuse, harassment by police, and employment discrimination.

Singh’s works resonate deeply with Arning, who has been CAMH’s director since 2009.

“By being so intimate with the *Hijra* community,” Arning says, “Singh makes many of us who post ‘I support trans rights’ on Facebook admit the shallowness of our knowledge, and learn that this category is older and more complicated and more spiritual than we generally see in queer media.”

On March 3, Gupta and Singh will join Arning and CAMH’s assistant curator, Patricia Restrepo, for a conversation about *Dissent and Desire*, which is free and open to the public.

For more information on the exhibits, visit [camh.org/event/dissent-and-desire](http://camh.org/event/dissent-and-desire) or [fotofest.org](http://fotofest.org).

*Andrew Edmonson has written about the arts for the Houston Chronicle, OUTSMART magazine, Houston Ballet News, and the Houston Voice.*



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**“I could just read books and watch movies, and I would enjoy them, but that wouldn’t make me feel as good as helping other people.”**

# Coming Out in Retirement

Recovery Houston leader Blaise Mladenka doesn't shy away from talking about his husband.

By Shirley Knight

EDITOR'S NOTE: *This article is part of an occasional series on the LGBTQ heroes of Tropical Storm Harvey, who were the subject of OUTSMART's October 2017 issue. For more, visit [TinyURL.com/LGBTQharvey](http://TinyURL.com/LGBTQharvey).*

**W**hen Tropical Storm Harvey's torrential rains finally began to subside, Blaise Mladenka had only one thought: "I just have to do something."

In the six months since the storm, the 69-year-old Mladenka has led volunteer teams and organized efforts on behalf of Recovery Houston, a grassroots organization providing assistance to affected homeowners. In the first 30 days, he volunteered in 27 homes.

And Mladenka has done it all in his husband Jeff Bricker's pickup truck—which is proudly emblazoned with a Human Rights Campaign equality sticker.

"I have no problems referring to my husband these days," Mladenka says. "I've been dropping that with volunteers who come in from other places, and it's liberating. I'm really pleased that for most people, being gay is OK."

"This guy from Colorado, I couldn't read him very well," Mladenka recalls of one volunteer. "So at one point, I referred to my husband's truck. Then, when we were sitting having lunch, the volunteer said, 'You know, I've always wondered: why do gay people refer to people as straight? It's not like gay people are crooked.'"

"I thought that was really neat. And after that, we were able to talk about relationships and things like that."

Mladenka, who is retired from a career in special educa-

tion, initially signed up to volunteer with the Red Cross. But while waiting for an assignment, he went on the NextDoor website and saw a listing for Recovery Houston, which was launched by Kat Creech, Jason Fajkus, and Kim Comer with the help of numerous volunteers.

At the height of the recovery effort, Mladenka was "mucking out" houses—removing wet and damaged items, including sheetrock and insulation—four days a week.

"Sometimes I would wake up and think, 'Oh God, I have to go muck out a house,'" Mlad-

enka recalls, "but then when I got there and was doing it, I felt really good."

As a Recovery Houston team leader, Mladenka communicated with homeowners and assessed their needs, collected and transported tools and supplies, and organized and trained volunteers. He says he led crews of up to 50 people, from as far away as California and Boston.

"I am really, really impressed with all the people who have come to help," Mladenka says. "At first, I was impressed that 100 volunteers showed up on Labor Day weekend, and then

I started realizing that we had people coming from other parts of the state and from other states. People were taking their vacations to come here and help us."

Mladenka also marvels at the gratitude of homeowners who lost everything.

"I'm thinking to myself, 'We're throwing your stuff out on the street, and here you are being so grateful,'" he says. "It blows me away. I walk into my house and think, if this happened to me, I might just run and leave it all behind."

Mladenka recalls people standing in their yards in front of everything they owned giving thumbs-up signs. He remembers a man in a wheelchair picking up sheetrock scrap, saying he needed to do something.

Some homeowners were decisive about discarding things. →



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In the first 30 days after Tropical Storm Harvey, Blaise Mladenka volunteered in 27 homes—removing wet and damaged items including sheetrock and insulation.



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**COMING OUT IN RETIREMENT**

*continued from previous page*

Others needed time to sit and cry. Most got emotionally and physically drained to the point that they could no longer make decisions. "Some are really in a state of not knowing what to do next," Mladenka says, "so we say, 'We can help you.'"

Helping people seems to be part of Mladenka's nature. He says it may have been ingrained in him as a child by his mother's annual fundraising drives for cancer prevention in their small town.

"I think maybe that's who I am," he says. "I could just read books and watch movies, and I would enjoy them, but that wouldn't make me feel as good as helping other people."

For the last 18 years of his professional career, Mladenka worked with various school districts matching special-needs children with technology such as communication devices.

He spent his childhood doing chores on his family's farm in Wied, between Houston and San Antonio, where they picked cotton and corn and raised dairy cows.

When it was time for high school, Mladenka left the farm to attend Catholic seminary in San Antonio, intending to become

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a priest. "This was really good for me," he says, "because I found out that not everyone thinks like we do in Shiner."

While attending the University of Houston, Mladenka says, "I accidentally landed in a speech-therapy class, and I found I was fascinated." He transferred to the University of Texas in Austin to major in speech therapy before earning a master's degree in early-childhood special education with a certificate in deaf education.

At the time, Mladenka was engaged to a woman. "I was really naive," he says. "My dear, sweet sister, who is a nun, sat me down and said, 'I watch you with your male friends, and I watch you with your fiancée, and I want you to think about this: maybe you're gay.'"

Mladenka says he immediately called a gay friend in Oklahoma, who told him, "Meet me in Dallas." There, they went to a gay bar and obtained recommendations for places to go in Austin, which included a bar called the Pearl Street Warehouse.

"I tried to go a couple of times, and finally I did. I was sort of standing in the corner," Mladenka recalls. A man struck up a conversation with him, "and he's still one of my best friends forever."

While in his first same-sex relationship, Mladenka came out to his mother, who told him she already knew. "Things became easier then," he says.

Mladenka and Bricker, who've been together for 26 years, have an adopted son who is now 19. In 2014, they were married in New York's Central Park surrounded by 40 friends and family members. "I don't think people have to get married, but I'm glad we did," Mladenka says. "Our theme was *Imagine*," he recalls. "I never imagined I could be married, and now I am."

When he's not helping storm victims, Mladenka supports various other social causes and is active in politics.

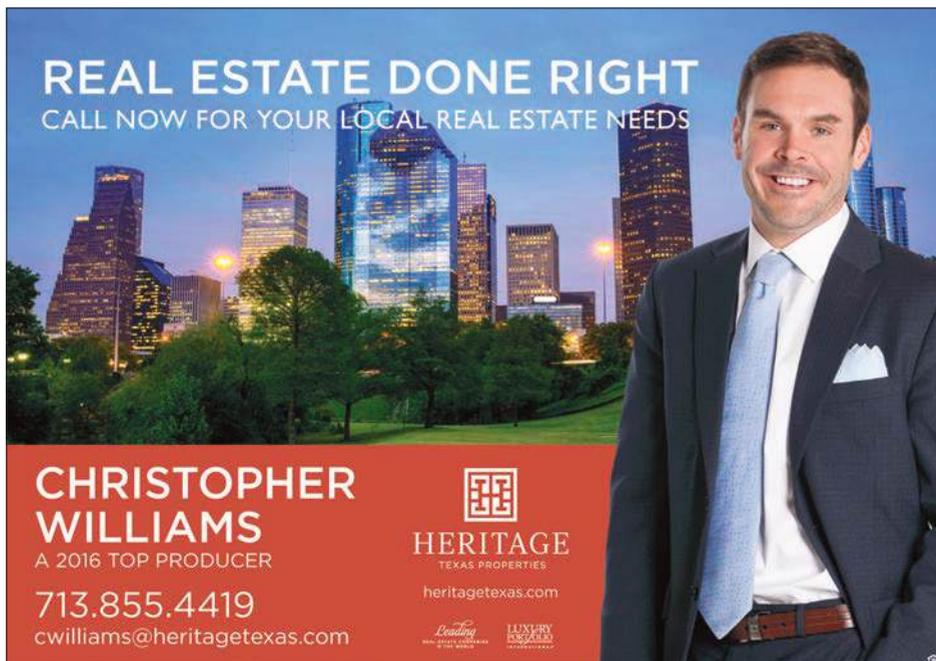
"We've come a long way, and there are people who want to stop us—not just from being gay, but from caring about other people, and sharing the wealth, and taking care of the environment," Mladenka says.

"We still can make progress," he adds. "Little by little, things are happening. I would say to Millennials, 'Listen up, we can still save this planet.' There will always be bad things happening. There will always be people who are downtrodden, but we can keep making things happen. That's what we're here for, to make things better."

*Shirley Knight, the founder of AwakeNow.org, is a frequent contributor to OutSmart magazine.*

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### Balancing Act

In her new book, comedian Paula Poundstone explains why there's a difference between enjoying something, and something making you happy.

# Checking in to the Poundstone Institute

Comedian wants to help treat America's Donald Trump blues.

By **Gregg Shapiro**

Photo by Michael Schwartz

Comedian Paula Poundstone has been making us laugh for almost 40 years. Her distinctive deadpan delivery style, as well as her colorful suits and ties, have made her a favorite in clubs, theaters, and on TV talk shows. The author of two books, her comedic persona has also earned her a place on NPR's *Wait Wait... Don't Tell Me!* news quiz show as a popular panelist. In 2017, she debuted her own NPR podcast, *Live from the Poundstone Institute*, which is alternately hilarious and informative. I had the pleasure of speaking with Poundstone as she was beginning her six-month show tour last month. Although the tour is not scheduled to stop in Houston, she comes to Austin on April 6.

**Gregg Shapiro: We are speaking a couple of days into the new year, 2018. Where do you stand on new year's resolutions, pro or con? →**

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## CHECKING IN TO THE POUNDSTONE INSTITUTE

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Paula Poundstone: I can't speak for the others, but for me, I don't think it helps. It's like the grocery store I go to that insists on giving me coupons. I never have those coupons with me and remember to use them when I go back. I tape them to the white board in the kitchen where we write things that we're out of. I put them in my back pocket. I transfer them from one pair of pants to another. Sometimes I wash them in the laundry. No matter what I do, I never have them with me when I go [to the store]. It would be better not to give them to me, because it just makes me feel bad about myself every time I get to the register. To some degree, [that's how it is with] new year's resolutions for me. I feel lousy because, "Oh, I blew that already!" I suppose, to some degree, I have a resolution for every day. I'm a big list maker.

### As long as you can get through that list . . .

It's funny, I think once in my lifetime have I ever gotten through an entire list. That's probably because I made it wussier that day. My lists tend to go from "sift the litter boxes" to "end world hunger," all on the same list.

### It's good to have both realistic and unrealistic goals.

Yes—I have some that just roll over to the next day.

### Your second book, *The Totally Unscientific Study of the Search for Human Happiness*, was published in 2017. Would you say that writing books could be considered a natural progression or extension for someone who writes comedy, or is it a different animal?

I think, to some degree, it is a different animal. For one thing, it just plain requires more discipline, which is why I've written two books in my entire life. I don't have that kind of discipline.

In fairness, I'm not a writer for a living. If my research on Dickens is correct, I believe he wrote for two weeks, then didn't, then did again for two weeks. He went for these great long walks where I'm sure he did most of his writing—and it was with a quill and shit. I'm sure those two weeks of writing were secretarial work—that he had notes, at least in his head. I'm sure he crafted those stories while he walked. I don't have that kind of time to set aside.

### Do you have favorite fellow comedians who are also writers—people you have possibly looked to as you developed your own process for the book?

No. There are other comics who are writers. I don't go see other comics and I don't read [books by] other comics. The thing is, when you go onstage, you want to know that

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everything you're saying comes from you. I'm a parrot. If I hear something in one place, I have a tendency to somehow [repeat it], and then I can't remember where I got it. Then I'm like, "Well, I thought it was mine." It's best that I dam up that stream. Mostly, as a reader, I read non-fiction, not comedy. I'm looking at my stack of books waiting for me here. One is *What Happened* by Hillary Clinton. [Another is] *The Shallows* by Nicholas Carr, about the effects of computer screens on the brain. I read a lot about that, because it's affected my family badly. Another is Phil Klay's *Redeployment*. Although they are short stories about service guys, they're fiction based on fact.

**In an NPR interview that you did around the time your book was published, you said that there's a "difference between enjoying something and something making you happy." Do you think that that is your book's ultimate message?**

Yes. If you just take the example of the Lamborghini and working out. Never in my life have I said to myself, "Boy, I'd like to do that" when I've seen someone exercising. But sometimes you see someone in a fancy sports car and you go, "Wow! I wonder what that's like?" There's barely a moment of working out that I could say I ever enjoyed. The guy that I did the get-fit experiment with—it was so f-king grueling that I can barely describe it. It was like being beaten with sticks. It was one of the most successful experiments in the book, in terms of providing happiness. The Lamborghini, I think it's safe to say, was a giant fail in the area of happiness. Not that it wasn't enjoyable. But I don't think there's any great biochemical process taking place. It's never going to say it in a Hallmark card, but happiness is a biochemical process. I think, from the start, that was the question I was addressing in the book: "What could I do that would give me a bounce, so that when I returned to my regular life of raising a house full of kids and animals and struggling with my work, that I'd still feel on an even keel, at least, as I did those things?"

**While the book is a "totally unscientific" study, science does come into play in your *Live from the Poundstone Institute* podcast. As school subjects go, where did science rank in your education?**

Aw, I sucked. In fact, for my seventh-grade science teacher Mrs. Boatman, we had to pick an element and do a report on it. I picked tin. All the things we thought of as tin weren't. Tin cans, tin pie plates—they were all aluminum by that point. I had all of these visual aids. I had a pie plate and I'd say, "Well, this isn't tin; it's aluminum." I'd come to something else and I'd say, "Well, this isn't actually tin, either—it's aluminum." It was making my class my laugh. We enjoyed the presentation. Afterward, when Mrs. Boatman announced the grades, which she delighted in doing, she said, "Well, if I →



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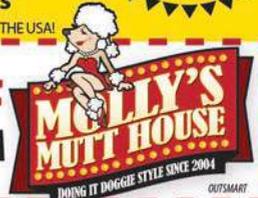


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## CHECKING IN TO THE POUNDSTONE INSTITUTE

continued from previous page

was giving you a grade for entertainment, it would be an A. But for science . . .” I can’t remember if it was a B or C, but my entertainment grade was much higher. Maybe she steered me in the right direction. Maybe I’d be an astronaut now if it wasn’t for Mrs. Boatman leaning heavily on the comedy.

### Speaking of NPR, before becoming a panelist on *Wait Wait . . . Don’t Tell Me!* and then having your *Live from the Poundstone Institute* podcast, how much did NPR figure into your daily life?

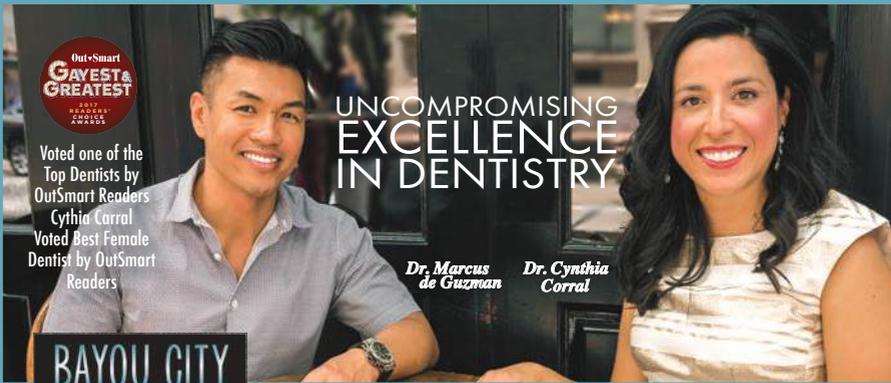
For many years, I listened to *Morning Edition*. In the car and at home, I didn’t listen to any stations other than Public Radio. In fact, I used to wear a KCRW jacket because I made a fine donation. I definitely started most mornings off with *Morning Edition* because I trust their news. That has become an issue more and more in current days than it was years ago—the whole idea that some people were telling you shit that wasn’t true. But that comes more from our president and Fox News.

### I’m glad you mentioned the president, because I was wondering if Trump has had an impact on your comedy, one way or another?

I think it has. I talk about him here or there. There are nights when I don’t, necessarily. I think it’s had an impact on the audience, for sure. People come up to me over and over again and say, “Oh, it was so good to go out and laugh!” He has single-handedly depressed an entire nation, if not the world. He’s really bummed people out. This idea that the leader lies to you and that we’re being told on a daily basis that we’re closer to nuclear war than we’ve ever been. The idea that we ended up with this guy, I think it’s depressed the hell out of everyone. I’ll tell you the industry it has been great for is therapists. I have friends who are therapists, and they tell me that their offices are filled with people who want to talk about Trump.

### As a parent, do you see it having an affect on your kids?

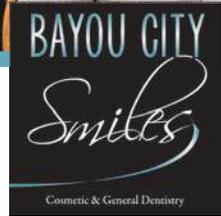
They’re all young adults now, but I haven’t seen them gravitating toward watching politics or the news carefully. They will, but they’re not really there yet. I think it puts people off from taking an interest, if it wasn’t already in their veins to begin with. Some young people are fascinated with it from the start. I think that the helplessness that you feel—it’s easier not to watch than to watch. I was telling my daughter last night that I got involved watching the news during the Iran-Contra scandal. The televised hearings were so interesting that I started watching and following who all of the players were. I had a deck of Iran-Contra trading



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cards. It had cartoon images of the characters on one side, and an explanation of who they were on the other. I relied on those as I watched the hearings.

**You have four dates on your schedule that take you all the way into July. What are the best and worst parts of being on the road for months at a time?**

Luckily I'm not a band, so I don't go out in a van and just stay out. I would not do well with that. But I go out for a few nights and then I come home. Hopefully, it's weekly. I like to work as much as I can, but I wouldn't enjoy being out for a month at a time. The audience, the audience, the audience! I live a strange, unbalanced life [laughs] of being basically by myself in a hotel room for a lot of time. Then I go out to be with a crowd [laughs], and then I go back to being ridiculously alone. But I love the audience. 2017 was a diabolically bad year in many ways, and yet I worked a lot. I was out with crowds of people, laughing about the things that were difficult. I feel bad for people who don't have that. They're going through the same difficult things I'm going through, but they just don't get to laugh about it a few nights a week. It is really healing. It's the thing that keeps me sane—and, dare I say, somewhat happy.

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



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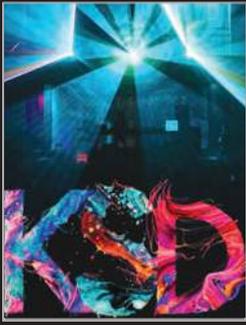
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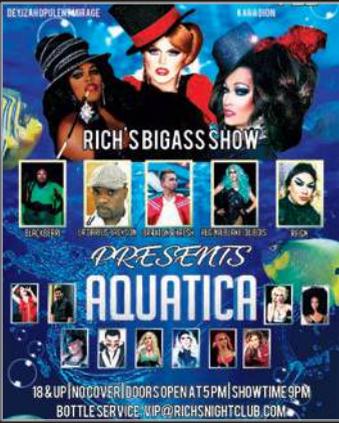
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# There She Is, Miss Richfield 1981

'All-American beauty queen' headlines 65th Diana Awards.

By Don Maines

**A** Bible-thumping, flag-waving "pageant girl" will hop a Greyhound bus from Minnesota soon to headline LGBTQ Houston's first truly bougie event of 2018.

"Miss Richfield 1981 is a perfect fit for the spirit of the occasion," says Brian H. Teichman, chair of the 65th annual Diana Awards, set for March 10 at the Hilton Houston Post Oak. "She is an internationally loved celebrity with the humor and ability to get the crowd energized into the show."

Miss Richfield's alter ego, Russ King, says he began performing the wacky character at an employee-appreciation party for the 60-member staff of the Minnesota AIDS Project, where he served as communications director. "I thought I should be a beauty-pageant winner," says King, recalling how he and his family loved to gather around the TV each year to watch the Miss America pageant.

"We were a family of all boys—I have three older brothers—and I would have to pretend that I wasn't *as* excited, but I *really* loved it," he says. "As a kid, I knew that I was different. When you're gay, you're more in tune with things." Like old-school beauty pageants, for example.

Per King's backstory, his character was an also-ran at the 1981 Miss Richfield, Minnesota, pageant until the frontrunner "lost control of her three flaming batons; the accident took her out, along with all of the other contestants."

"That left only me," King says, "so I won, and I have dedicated my life to the friendly citizens and merchants of my hometown," a once-*tony* suburb of Minneapolis.

Three Minnesotans have been crowned Miss America, but none ranks as King's favorite among the almost 100 women who have won the granddaddy of all beauty pageants. "Very clearly, the one I love the most is Vonda Kay Van Dyke, Miss America 1965," King says. "She was the first and only one to win both Miss America and Miss Congeniality. My character loves that about her. You know she's



## Hearty Laughs

Russ King says his character, Miss Richfield 1981, was an also-ran at a beauty pageant in his hometown until the frontrunner lost control of her flaming batons, taking out all of the other contestants.

written two books?"

In *That Girl in Your Mirror* (1966), Van Dyke revealed her beauty secret as "that inner sparkle only Christ can give." In the 1967 follow-up, *Dear Vonda Kay*, Van Dyke fielded letters from teenage girls on topics such as smoking, drinking, and boys.

"I even got to meet her. She was married to a pastor in the Twin Cities, so [as a reporter] I did a story on her. Oh my God, that was . . ." King says, before cutting himself off and explaining that Miss Richfield conducts herself as a proper, aging beauty queen.

"She doesn't swear," King says. "There is no profanity in her act. She should always resonate the qualities you think of in an all-American beauty queen."

However, he concedes, "she is crazy and

inappropriate, and there are sexual innuendos, but she is never filthy. When I first started in 1996, I felt like Miss Richfield should comport herself a certain way. She should be clean. In bars, that made me different. It was really a way to separate myself from other entertainers. It made me different, and it has served me well. You can bring teenagers to my show—even younger kids. That's not to say that I have anything against *other* people using profanity."

Of course, that depends on the context. King says he was not pleased about news reports in December saying that profanity, including "the C-word," cropped up in the emails of men running the Miss America pageant. Their correspondence also disparaged Minnesota's 1989 Miss America, Gretchen Carlson, an ex-*Fox News* anchor, as "a snake." →



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## THERE SHE IS, MISS RICHFIELD 1981

*continued from previous page*

“That was such a disappointment,” King says. “It was evidence that a woman should be running our country and the pageant.”

Well, wouldn't you know, the men resigned, and on January 1, Carlson was selected to chair the Miss America Organization's board of directors. Also seated on the board were former Miss America titleholders Laura Kaepler Fleiss, Heather French, and Kate Shindle.

Life is funny like that, as in the way the Diana Awards were born with a touch of kismet.

“In 1953, a gathering of friends unknowingly created what would become the Diana Foundation,” Teichman says. “It was the evening of the first television broadcast of the Academy Awards, and reception was lost. The group decided to present a gag award while waiting for the broadcast signal to return. The annual awards party's guest list grew for the next several decades, moving from private homes to hotel ballrooms and the largest theaters in Houston. AIDS-related deaths nearly ended the club, but the show would go on. The Diana Foundation has become the oldest, continually active gay organization in the United States operating as a nonprofit.”

The sapphire-anniversary 65th annual Diana Awards Show will be held “in the spirit of the original camaraderie of our founding, to celebrate ‘That's What Friends Are For,’” Teichman adds.

“The awards are a roast [of notable Houston personalities],” he says. “They are handed out for behavior that was not perfect.”

In addition to the humorous honors, a more serious award will be presented to honor openly gay Harris County district attorney Kim Ogg “for outstanding contributions to the LGBT community.”

“Only 15 individuals have been presented this accolade,” Teichman says, noting that, as Harris County's highest-ranking law enforcement official, Ogg oversees more than 600 employees and a budget of \$68 million. “Kim's election is a mission of dedication to protecting Harris County citizens from violence and discrimination.”

The 65th annual Diana Awards will benefit Bayou City Performing Arts, the Botts Collection, Dalton Dehart Photographic Foundation, Out for Education, University of Houston LGBTQ Resource Center, and University of Houston Libraries. While the Diana Foundation is limited to 100 members in any given year, the Diana Awards are open to the public.

**What:** 65th annual Diana Awards

**When:** March 10, 6–11 p.m.

**Where:** Hilton Houston Post Oak, 2001 Post Oak Blvd.

**Info:** [tinyurl.com/dianas2018](http://tinyurl.com/dianas2018)

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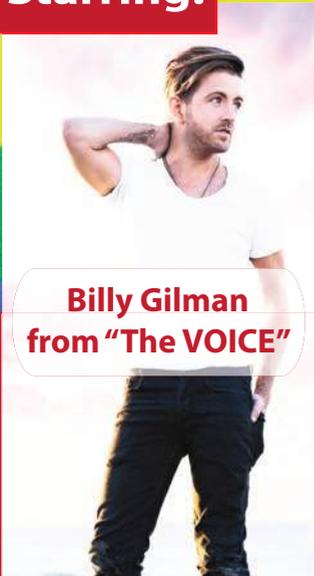
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# Advocate in Chief

## Houston's Rebecca Robertson joins growing Equality Texas staff.

By Ryan M. Leach

**G**rowing up as the daughter of a Southern Baptist preacher in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, Rebecca Robertson says the LGBTQ community was not well regarded in her evangelical household.

However, Robertson's family did instill in her a strong sense of standing up for what she believed in, and heeding the call to action.

"Little did my dad know that I would channel that message into fighting for [LGBTQ] civil rights and civil liberties," Robertson says. "I think that experience of growing up [in a conservative family] allowed me to have greater empathy for folks."

Robertson, a Houston attorney, was named chief programs officer for Equality Texas in December. Prior to joining the statewide LGBTQ advocacy organization, she spent six years as legal and policy director for the American Civil Liberties Union of Texas. She says she decided to join Equality Texas in the newly created position after working shoulder-to-shoulder with their staff in Austin as they fought for equality at the Capitol.

"What I love about the work Equality Texas does—and does better than any other organization—is that it does it with a Texas voice, Texas know-how, Texas volunteers, and Texas relationships," Robertson says. "We won't win this fight if Equality Texas is not the strongest it can be. All of the national organizations in the world won't move the needle in this state if Equality Texas is not first-rate."

Robertson is only the latest addition to the organization's growing staff, which has tripled its annual operating budget from roughly \$500,000 in 2014 to an expected \$1.5 million in 2018. Although Equality Texas' fundraising has benefitted to some extent from anti-LGBTQ attacks in the Legislature, much of the organization's growth is the result of a strategic plan they implemented in 2014. That plan has allowed the organization to establish an executive team that includes a chief development officer hired in 2016, and now Robertson



### Married to the Movement

Rebecca Robertson (far right) is shown celebrating nationwide marriage equality at the Texas Capitol in 2015. Twelve years before, Robertson was part of the legal team that worked on *Lawrence v. Texas*, which struck down the nation's sodomy laws.

as chief programs officer.

Robertson's path to Equality Texas seems to have been almost inevitable.

The 54-year-old moved to Houston when she was 15, before attending Rice University and Harvard Law School. In 1995, she went to work for the Houston-based law firm Baker Botts, where her case work focused primarily on securities litigation. Her pro bono work, however, included civil rights cases, and she was lucky enough to feel comfortable being out at work.

"I think people sometimes think Baker Botts is this very conservative firm, but I always found it to be an incredibly welcoming place, even though it was not a time when people thought you could [advance to the level of] partner as an out attorney," Robertson says. "I decided to leave the firm because I realized that I didn't go to law school to do [securities litigation]. I came to a place where I needed to start dedicating myself to [civil rights and civil liberties] full time."

While at Baker Botts, Robertson advanced LGBTQ equality by setting up legal clinics for gay men living with AIDS who were planning for their own deaths. She also served on the legal team that worked on *Lawrence v. Texas*, the Supreme Court case that overturned the nation's anti-sodomy laws in 2003.

Robertson and her partner of 27 years, Marty Orozco, were married in 2014. Orozco is also an attorney for Lone Star Legal Aid, where she works on environmental justice and

fair housing. They live in Houston and plan to remain here, despite Equality Texas' main offices being located in Austin.

Robertson will oversee the group's public education, community organizing, and collaboration programs, including government relations, direct lobbying, and electoral work through the Texas Equity PAC. She will have her work cut out for her as Texans look to the 2018 elections and the 2019 legislative session.

Robertson says anti-LGBTQ attacks in the 2017 Legislature, as well as the repeal of the Houston Equal Rights Ordinance eighteen months prior, were a wake-up call for LGBTQ advocates.

"The 2017 legislative session and, to an extent, HERO [the Houston Equal Rights Ordinance], taught us that we need to engage more.

"Texans are fair-minded people," she says. "They believe that you should have a right to earn a living, a right to having a place to live, and a right to access public services," she says.

However, Robertson adds, "Many Texans think that politics is 'not for me,' and we have to change that. It is that attitude that makes it easy for [lieutenant governor] Dan Patrick to focus on bathrooms rather than the real and serious problems that the Legislature should be focused on."

*Ryan Leach is a board member for Equality Texas and a regular contributor to OUTSMART.*



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# Born to Run

Twenty-year-old Justin Mosley eyes justice of the peace seat in conservative Lufkin.

By Marene Gustin

*EDITOR'S NOTE: This article is part of "Out for Change in 2018," a monthly series on LGBTQ candidates in Texas, who were the subject of our January issue. For more, visit [tinyurl.com/outforchange2018](http://tinyurl.com/outforchange2018).*

As an openly gay man in conservative East Texas, Justin Mosley hasn't always had the full support of his family.

"At first, my family thought it was a phase I would grow out of," Mosley says of his sexual orientation. "Now, we just don't talk about it much, except for my mom. She was the first in the family to support me."

However, now that Mosley is running for justice of the peace in Angelina County's Precinct 2, he's confident that even his more conservative family members will get behind him—at least at the ballot box.

"It will probably be the first time they vote for a Democrat," he says.

Mosley, 20, is among the youngest candidates for public office in Texas this year. He's also one of 48 openly LGBTQ candidates statewide, which is by far the most in history.

Asked about his coming-out experience in Lufkin, Mosley says he has also encountered homophobia beyond his family.

"Some kids spray-painted 'faggot' on my driveway during high school," says Mosley, now a freshman at Angelina College. "But other kids stood up for me when I got bullied for being gay."

Mosley has been active in the local Democratic Party and has always planned on a career in politics. He wants to major in political science after finishing community college. But it wasn't until recently that he decided to run for justice of the peace after learning that the incumbent, Republican Donnie Puckett, was running unopposed.

The duties of a justice of the peace include



**Baby Blue**  
Democrat Justin Mosley, 20, is among the youngest candidates on the ballot in Texas this year.

performing marriages, handling minor criminal and civil cases, and issuing warrants and eviction notices.

"One of my goals is to perform same-sex marriages," Mosley says. "But even if I don't win, I want to get younger and more diverse people out voting. If we want change, we have to do it ourselves."

Mosley believes he has a 50/50 chance of winning, but that may be optimistic in a county that voted 72 percent for President Trump. Mosley is unopposed in the Democratic primary, so he will be on the general-election ballot in November. In the meantime, he has a lot of work to do.

"I'm doing social media now, but I plan on block-walking and fund-raising," Mosley says. He hopes to raise between \$1,000 and \$1,500, which he thinks will be adequate since he has no paid staff.

Angelina County is home to about 87,000 residents. According to the most recent census, the population is more than 70 percent white, with a median age of 34. Mosley says the majority of county elected officials are white Republican men. Although he has faced anti-gay bias in his private life, his sexual orientation has not yet come up in the campaign.

"I've learned it can be a challenge to get people who are different from you on your

side," he says.

Win or lose, the campaign experience will be invaluable to Mosley since he eventually plans to leave his hometown and head to Austin, where he will likely run for higher office. But right now, his focus is on making a difference in the lives of fellow East Texans.

"I want to make sure the justice system is equal for everyone," he says. "I don't like the way our country is going right now, and I want to try and start changing that. When elected justice of the peace, I will improve the efficiency of the courts and fight for a fair, level playing field for non-attorneys in my courtroom. I will ensure an equal, balanced courtroom, and will give everyone a fair trial."

Outside of politics, Mosley describes himself as a typical 20-year-old college student. He loves aviation and has three dogs—two Havanese and a Chihuahua. He's dating someone in Los Angeles, but admits that a long-distance romance between two very busy people takes work. And right now, he has his work cut out for him.

"If we can't turn Texas blue in 2018, I'll keep trying," he says emphatically. "If it can happen in Alabama, it can happen here."

Marene Gustin is a regular contributor to *OUTSMART* magazine.

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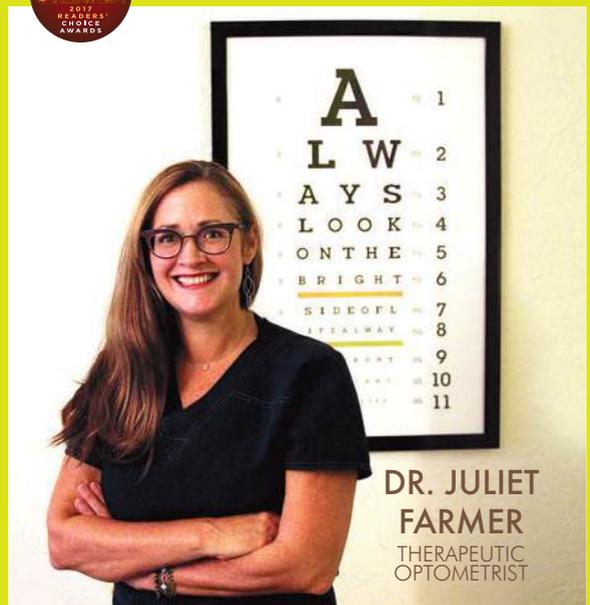
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# Color Commentary

Houston-based podcast celebrates black and brown LGBTQ communities.

By Lourdes Zavaleta

**A** lack of media representation makes it difficult for queer people of color to find their place in the LGBTQ community, according to Houston comedian Mai Ha.

“The queer community that people recognize is whitewashed,” says Ha, an Asian-American who identifies as gender non-binary. “As a black or brown person, it can feel like there is no room for you.”

Ha is the producer of *Veer Queer*, a Houston-based podcast aimed at amplifying the voices of queer people of color. Hosted by Endesha Haynes and Bianca Gomez, *Veer Queer* launches its second season this month.

In addition to the challenges faced by non-white queer people, Haynes and Gomez use their podcast to discuss local and national issues affecting the LGBTQ community.

“I was always struggling with my sexuality growing up,” says Gomez, a Latina bisexual who works in marketing for Families Empowered, a Houston nonprofit.

Gomez, who (like Ha and Haynes) didn’t come out until her early 20s, adds that she believes popular TV shows such as *The L Word* falsely and negatively portrayed the lives of queer folks. “Had there been more mainstream queer media available to me, I think I would have had an easier time navigating it.”

Only a handful of podcasts in the U.S. focus on the experiences of queer people of color. Two of them are based in Austin—*Foul Mouthed Musicology* and *Crown them Royal*, which are both run by gay men. *Veer Queer* is the only LGBTQ podcast in Houston for people of color.

Haynes, an African-American freelance writer, says *Veer Queer* has given her a space in which to openly express herself.

“We have conversations about topics that people rarely hear about—especially not the in-depth details that we go into,” Haynes says. “We use our personal experiences to show



Endesha Haynes, left, and Bianca Gomez are co-hosts of *Veer Queer*, which launches its second season in February.

people that it is OK to be who they are. Doing this is very powerful, especially right now.”

In its pilot episode, “Get Out ‘n Stay Out,” *Veer Queer* addressed coming out in the South. Haynes, who identifies as a queer woman, says she had difficulties coming out, in part because of her physical appearance.

“Because of my femininity, people told me I was straight and pursuing women as a phase,” Haynes says. “I struggled trying to unlearn everything that I was taught about relationships, religion, sex, and gender.”

In season 2, Haynes hopes to touch more on queer validity, a theme that stems from the murders of four black lesbians in one week in December.

“The shootings shook me to my core,” Haynes says. “Women of color don’t really get enough recognition as it is. At least one episode will honor those women, so our listeners know how much they mattered.”

Ha says listener response to season 1, which ran biweekly from August to November 2017, was overwhelmingly positive.

“We chose the name because we wanted people to know what the show was about just by reading the title,” Ha says.

Using the word *queer* was important to Ha, Gomez, and Haynes because it encompasses their sexualities and gender identities. However, Ha says some listeners have been angered by the word because it was once used to slander LGBTQ people.

“Some people still don’t like the word, so they have left us comments telling us not to use it,” Ha says. “We don’t want to push it on

anyone, but we are LGBTQ folks who want to reclaim it. The word is coming from a positive place.”

There are seven episodes of *Veer Queer* online, each running about 45 minutes. Aside from the last episode, the podcast was recorded at the Mocking Bird Network, a recording studio owned by Houston voice-actress Brenda Valdiva. Episode 7 was recorded live at Houston’s Zine Fest, an event dedicated to promoting underground and alternative magazines and mini-comics.

Every episode has been moderated by Ha and features young queer folks of color from Houston. Trans porn actor Valentia Mia spoke to *Veer Queer* about dating and the stigmas surrounding sex work in episode 2, which is titled “Shiver Me (Why does) Tinder (Suck).” Other topics from season 1 include the queer media, being queer and undocumented, and LGBTQ networking.

Ha says that anti-LGBTQ legislation and Donald Trump’s presidency prompted *Veer Queer* to focus heavily on events that affect the entire nation, rather than being Houston-specific.

“With [Trump] being in office, we had to find a balance of being fun while also spreading awareness,” Ha says.

Season 2 of *Veer Queer* will be uploaded biweekly through the spring. The show is available now on iTunes and the Mocking Bird Network.

Lourdes Zavaleta is a regular contributor to *OUTSMART* magazine.

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# Black Gay Power

Harrison Guy aims to unify and strengthen his “fragmented” community.

By Lourdes Zavaleta

When he moved to Houston in 2000, Harrison Guy worked as a data analyst for the Donald R. Watkins Foundation, an HIV clinic that often had to deliver news of an HIV-positive diagnosis to patients. Although some came in under tough circumstances, he saw that for many, the foundation was a place of refuge and empowerment.

Guy’s position inspired him to begin advocating for Houston’s black LGBTQ population through entertainment, education, and politics. On March 26, he will launch Gatekeepers, a nonprofit aimed at providing black gay men with a safe space that can strengthen their community.

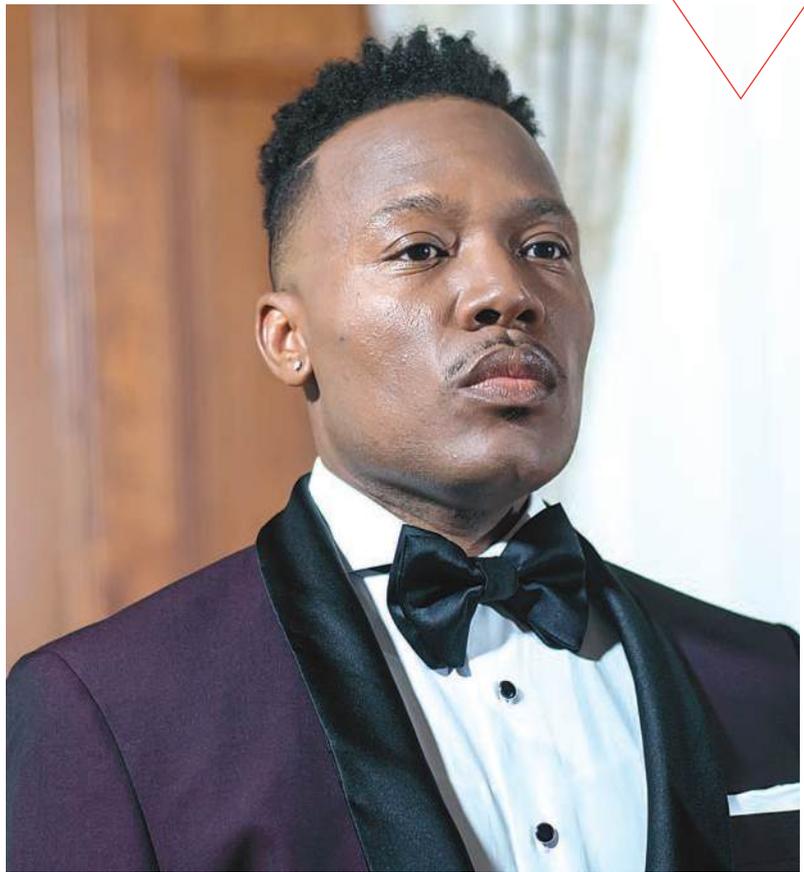
“The black LGBTQ community oftentimes feels very fragmented,” Guy says. “I am creating something that will tackle those challenges—[a place] where black gay men can fellowship, learn, and grow on their own terms.”

Guy, who will lead Gatekeepers as president, plans to recruit a leadership team after the organization’s launch date, which falls on the birthday of the late black gay activist Charles Law. Law, the founder of Houston Committee, a professional organization for black gay men, spoke at the National March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights in 1979.

Guy is also in talks with Houston’s established LGBTQ organizations about becoming sponsors of Gatekeepers, which would allow the organization to build a solid fiscal foundation.

Programming will include activities for both couples and singles. Guy says Gatekeepers will promote the successes of emerging leaders through the Charles Law Vanguard, in addition to awarding annual scholarships in honor of community members lost to domestic violence.

LGBT Detroit, a nonprofit that has served the black LGBTQ population of Detroit and its surrounding areas since 1994, has been an



## His Brothers’ (Gate)keepers

Harrison Guy hopes Gatekeepers will become ‘a hub for black gay excellence.’

inspiration for Guy ever since he read a story about it online. LGBT Detroit aims to implement programs, services, projects, and special events in partnership with social-justice organizations with similar missions.

“The article explained the organization as something very similar to what I had been dreaming up for Houston,” Guy recalls. “So I printed it out, read it often, and kept it in my journal.”

A month later, Guy ran into Curtis Lipscomb, the founder and executive director of LGBT Detroit, at Out on the Hill, a black leadership summit in Washington DC. After Lipscomb talked with Guy about his idea all weekend, Guy left the event motivated to start his own project.

“I couldn’t contain my excitement,” Guy recalls. “I was so inspired and ready to work. As soon as I got home, I sent Curtis cookies with the LGBT Detroit logo on them as a thank-you.”

Born and raised in LaMarque, Guy is the founder and artistic director of Urban Souls Dance Company, a Houston contemporary-arts nonprofit. He also works in finance at the University of Houston and is married to Adrian Homer, a vocational rehabilitation counselor for the State of Texas.

While still at the Watkins clinic, Guy found his place in Houston’s LGBTQ community by

working part-time at local black gay bars and clubs. He briefly served as show director of the Black Diamonds Drag Revue at Club Bartini. Guy says that in these spaces, he made connections with folks who still impact his life.

“I had the chance to meet and interact with every person who came out to party,” Guy recalls. “Many friendships were formed, and some I still cherish today.”

Today, Guy is the co-chair of Mayor Sylvester Turner’s LGBTQ Advisory Board, and a member of the Houston GLBT Political Caucus. He is also the southern regional director for Delta Phi Upsilon Fraternity, Inc., a Greek-lettered fraternity for black gay men.

Guy says it has always been his dream to create his own space to help gay black men navigate the LGBTQ community. He hopes that the launch of his organization will do just that.

“Gatekeepers believes that black gay men deserve to live full, complete lives in the light,” Guy says. “Ultimately, I want this to be a hub for black gay excellence.”

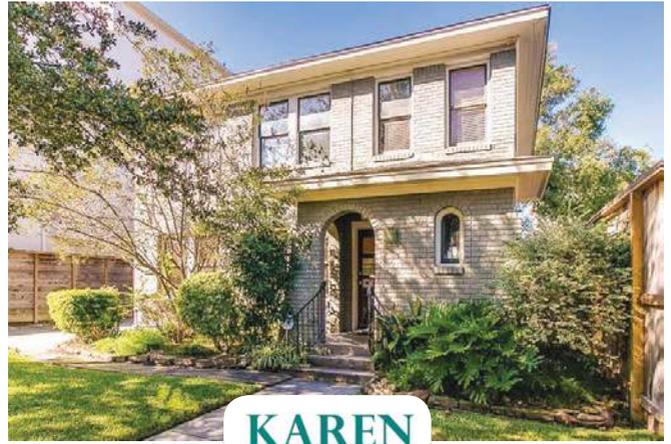
For more information about Gatekeepers, contact Guy by email at [mrharrisonguy@gmail.com](mailto:mrharrisonguy@gmail.com) or by phone at 832.687.3928.

*Lourdes Zavaleta is a regular contributor to OUTSMART magazine.*

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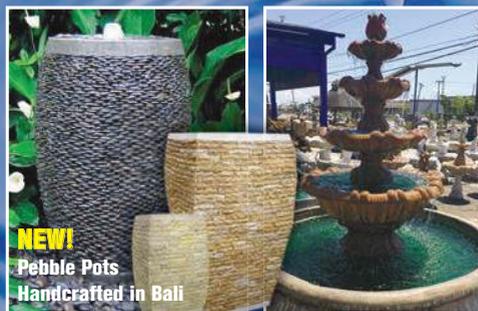
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# Fluid Foremother

Suzanne Vega brings queer pioneer Carson McCullers to life.

By Neil Ellis Orts

**A** singer/songwriter whose career spans over three decades, Suzanne Vega is perhaps best known for her 1980s hits, including “Luka” and “Tom’s Diner.”

Now, you can add playwright and actress to Vega’s résumé.

From February 9 through March 11, Houston’s Alley Theatre premieres Vega’s one-woman show about Carson McCullers, the bisexual and gender-fluid mid-20th century American author.

Vega wrote both the script and lyrics to *Lover/Beloved: An Evening with Carson McCullers*, which features music composed by Duncan Sheik (*Spring Awakening*, *American Psycho*).

Most famous for *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*, *The Ballad of the Sad Café*, and *Member of the Wedding* (which she also adapted for the stage), McCullers was married twice to the same man, but also had romantic feelings for women. She dressed mostly in men’s clothing and sometimes said she felt more like a man than a woman. After suffering two crippling strokes in her 30s, McCullers died at the age of 50 in 1967.

OUTSMART recently sat down with Vega to discuss her upcoming show.

**Neil Ellis Orts: The format of the show is two lectures given by McCullers—one early in her career, and one shortly before her death at the age of 50. Are you using actual lectures she gave as a basis?**  
Suzanne Vega: She did at least one lecture at the 92nd Street Y in the mid-1950s with Tennessee Williams, but the lecture dates in the play are fictional.

**This is your third iteration of the show, and earlier iterations did not use this lecture format.**

No, and they weren’t as satisfying. Because she [was] such a solitary character—she spent a lot



**Trans Scribe**  
Suzanne Vega says Carson McCullers was both bisexual and “to some degree transgender.”

of time in her room, writing—I wanted to have her face an audience, which was a terrifying activity for her. I felt there was an inherent drama in the situation of her being on a stage and having to face a group of strangers. I love the idea that she has to reach over the footlights and make a connection with these strangers, which is both thrilling and terrifying.

**Last year, you released a concept album with much of the music from the play. One song comes up a lot in your interviews, so here it is again: “Harper Lee,” a song about professional envy. Do you have similar feelings about other singer-songwriters?**

[*Laughing*] Uh, sure. I am not a saint, and of course I’ve had my moments like that. But [the song also has] a fair amount of my stepfather, Ed Vega, who was a writer. So I would hear all his comments at the dinner table as to who won the Pulitzer, and his feelings [about that]. I think it’s very natural. And the thing is, she loved a lot of those people, too. She was very good friends with Truman Capote. She had a huge crush on Katherine Anne Porter. You love them and you hate them. It’s part of life.

**This show was not always intended as a starring vehicle for you. How did you end up as the one to perform it? →**

## FLUID FOREMOTHER

continued from previous page

The process was very simple. Gregory Boyd looked at me and said, "Would you like to do it?" And I said, "Gosh, yeah!" I had it all set up for someone else to do, and he said there was nothing wrong with the other person, but he saw something interesting in the way I was doing it. So I'm thrilled to be able to do it, and I'll also be thrilled when it comes time to hand it over to someone else. I have ideas. I'd especially love to see someone else—say, a transgender actor—do the first act. It could be male-to-female or female-to-male, because she lived on that line and considered herself "dual-natured," as she put it. In the second act, she's paralyzed. If I could find a person who could sing and act and had something of her disability, I think that would be exciting to see on stage. So I hope this play goes way beyond what I can do with it.

**She spoke and wrote about her queerness, but I have to wonder what vocabulary she would use today, since the language around sexuality and gender identity has grown so much since she lived.**

Sure, she would have used different language, but it all means the same thing. She was both bisexual and to some degree transgender. She felt herself as a man. She loved her husband, but she also was in love with any number of women. So in both her sexuality and her gender, it was all quite fluid.

**I feel like there is so much longing in most of her work. Do you feel that, too?**

Yeah, I think she definitely felt that. I think a lot of it came from her illnesses. But then again, if you look at pictures of her as a child, she seems to have had that from pretty early on—way before she became sick. There's a photograph of her at some kind of party sitting on a horse, sort of posing on a pony, and she looks absolutely miserable. It really is her look, already developed—and she's like four or five or something like that.

So I think she was just born with a kind of attitude that was exacerbated by things that happened to her in her life. That's probably also why I'm drawn to her [and] identify with her. I have also been a person who takes care of people—whenever's around. I was the oldest of four children and my parents were very young, so I tried to look after whoever needed looking after. I also feel her need, and in a sense try to help. So it's both that I identify with her, and that I'm also trying to help her, to get her word out beyond the grave.

*Neil Ellis Orts is a writer and performer. He is directing The Quality of Life at the Company OnStage this spring. His novella, Cary and John, was published in 2014. Carson McCullers is his favorite writer.*

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# Ready to Rock

## AIDS Walk Houston adds concert, hopes for sunshine.

By Marene Gustin

If you attended last year's AIDS Walk Houston, you may have gotten a free umbrella for the Red Umbrella Stroll portion of the 2017 event. It was a spoof on the fact that it almost always rains on the day of the 29-year-old fundraiser.

"We didn't buy umbrellas this year, so it can't rain. It just can't," says Kelly Young, CEO of AIDS Foundation Houston, which sponsors the walk scheduled for March 4 this year.

Lack of red umbrellas aside, there's something else different in 2018: the free Rock the Walk concert downtown, after the walk finishes at 2 p.m. The concert will feature Bun B, Paul Wall and Los Skarnales, along with DJ Gracie Chavez.

"We wanted this to be a positive celebration—besides being just a remembrance," Young says. "So participants can stay and listen to some great music and enjoy the food trucks and sponsor booths." It should be a fun way to relax after the 3K walk.

Last year, the walk raised \$400,000 for 10 HIV/AIDS organizations. This year, AFH hopes to raise \$450,000 and attract 10,000 walkers. The beneficiaries for 2018 are Avenue 360 Health and Wellness, Baylor Teen Health Clinic, Brentwood Community Foundation, Change Happens, Fundación Latinoamericana de Acción Social (F.L.A.S.), Harris County Hospital Foundation, Individuals Providing a Positive Presence (IPPP), Lazarus House, Resurrection MCC, and The Truth Project.

Each of those organizations will hand out VIP passes for the Rock the Walk concert to the first 1,500 people who undergo HIV tests. Check out [aidshelp.org](http://aidshelp.org) for information and testing locations, as well as updated information on the musical acts.

"It's a blessing to be part of the AIDS Walk," says Elia Chinó, executive director and founder of F.L.A.S.

Since 1994, F.L.A.S. has been a mainstay in the Latino community, providing testing, counseling, and education on HIV/AIDS, as well as health programs and social services.

"For the last several years we have been honored to help the AIDS Foundation raise

### Stepped-up Goal

AIDS Walk Houston, shown in 2015, raised \$400,000 for local HIV/AIDS organizations in 2017. This year, organizers hope to raise \$450,000 and draw 10,000 people.



money through the walk, and of course we appreciate the funds. It allows us to provide more service to the community," Chino says. "I've been an advocate for 25 years. The disease affects Latinos, and particularly young people, more than other populations."

In 2015, Hispanics and Latinos accounted for about one quarter of all new HIV/AIDS diagnoses, even though they only account for 18 percent of the U.S. population, according to the Centers for Disease Control. And youth, ages 18 to 24, account for 22 percent of all new cases. One of the primary reasons is lack of education. In 2014, the CDC's School Health Policies and Practices Study reported that only 41 percent of U.S. schools required students to learn about HIV/AIDS prevention. That was down from 64 percent in 2000.

Chino's organization is using a new tool to educate young Latinos: telenovelas. She says F.L.A.S. has its own YouTube channel for the Spanish-language soap operas that feature characters with HIV/AIDS.

"It's a way to get the information on prevention and care out there to the younger generation," she says.

Young agrees. "Education is so important right now. I think on a federal level, we know funding is going to be unstable, so it is important that we focus on what we can do locally. There is no fluff in HIV/AIDS funding, so it

is important that we concentrate on what we know works. First, get people tested, then get those at risk on PrEP (Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis), and finally, get those with HIV/AIDS on medication and proper care. If the community comes together, we can eradicate the disease. It is possible."

In 2016, the United Nations adopted a resolution entitled Political Declaration on HIV and AIDS: On the Fast Track to Accelerating the Fight against HIV and to Ending the AIDS Epidemic by 2030. But delegates agreed it will require innovative funding solutions, as well as the cooperation of governments, citizens, and the private sector.

In the meantime, Young is focusing on the walk. "It's my favorite event of the year. We are hoping for rain, so maybe it will be sunny this year."

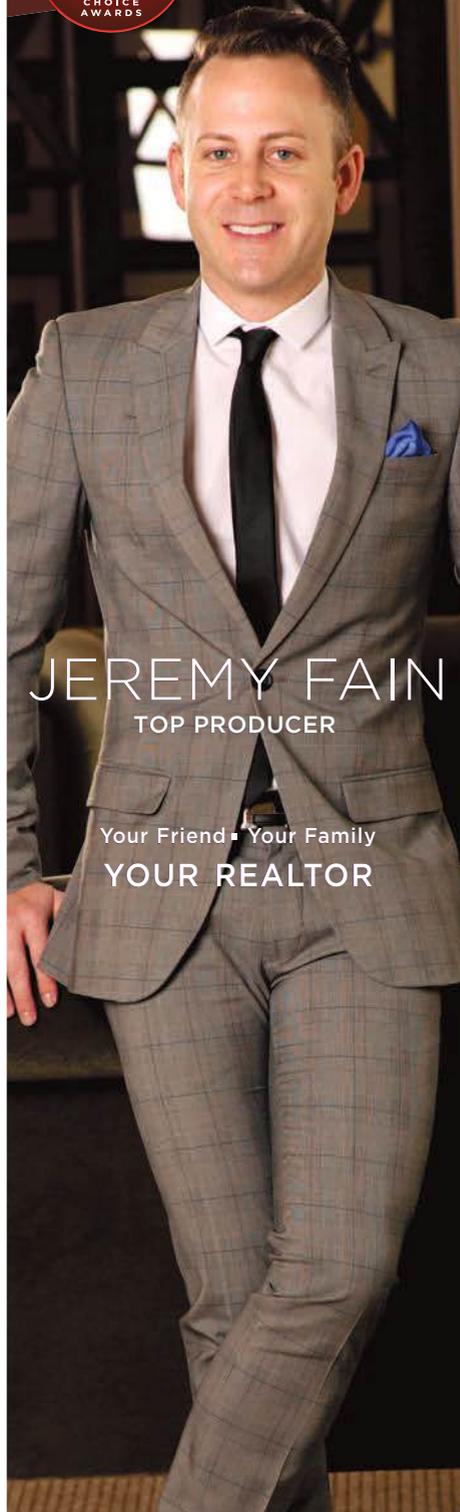
Maybe you should bring your own umbrella, just in case.

**What:** 29th annual AIDS Walk Houston  
**Where:** Sam Houston Park, 1000 Bagby St.  
**When:** Registration begins at noon on March 4, followed by the walk at 1 p.m. and the Rock the Walk concert at 2 p.m.  
**Info:** [aidshelp.org](http://aidshelp.org)

Marene Gustin is a regular contributor to *OUTSMART* magazine.



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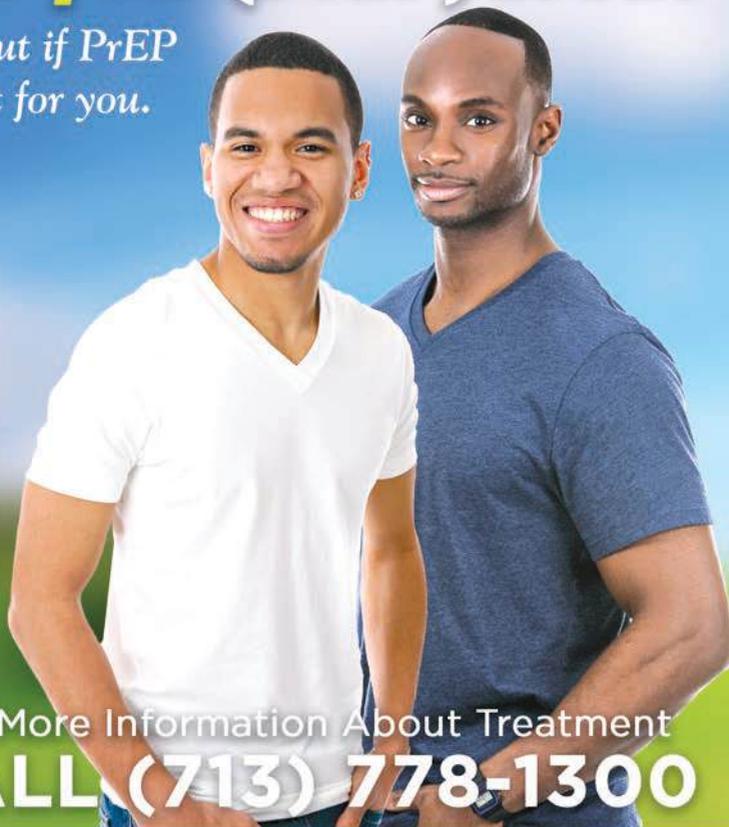
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# ‘It’s Going to Get Worse’

Gilead taps UH to help fight rising HIV/AIDS rates in the South.

By **Marene Gustin**

**F**or the first time since the influenza epidemic of 1962–’63, the life expectancy of Americans decreased for a second consecutive year in 2016.

Although this decrease was fueled largely by the opioid epidemic, it also marked the first one-year drop in life expectancy since 1993, during the worst of the AIDS crisis. And experts say the latter statistic could be an omen.

The rate of new HIV infections is increasing in Southern states (including Texas), and it now rivals levels from the 1980s, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). In Texas, where an estimated 86,000 people are living with HIV, there were 4,493 new diagnoses recorded in 2016.

“And I absolutely think it’s going to get worse,” says Samira Ali, assistant professor and HIV researcher at the University of Houston’s Graduate College of Social Work (GCSW).

In December, Gilead Sciences, Inc., tapped GCSW as one of three coordinating centers for the drug company’s unprecedented 10-year, \$100 million “Commitment to Partnership in Addressing HIV/AIDS in Southern States,” also known as the COMPASS Initiative.

“A group of us from Gilead traveled around the Southern states to listen to patients and stakeholders about how we could make a difference,” says Doug Brooks, senior director for community engagement at Gilead Sciences, which has long been at the forefront of HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment.

“We found that what was needed in these regions was a three-pronged approach: capacity building and shared knowledge; well-being, mental-health, and trauma-informed care; and awareness, education, and anti-stigma campaigns,” says Brooks, who previously served as director of the Office of National AIDS Policy under the Obama administration. “But as significant as our commitment is, we cannot



**Renewed Crisis**

Gilead’s Doug Brooks (l) and the University of Houston’s Samira Ali say testing and prevention remain key to combating HIV/AIDS, which is spreading at rates not seen since the 1980s in Texas and other Southern states.

solve this crisis alone without comprehensive access to care.”

Following an invitation-only request for proposals, Gilead Sciences selected Emory University’s Rollins School of Public Health, the Southern AIDS Coalition, and GCSW to participate in the COMPASS Initiative.

“We will be providing flow-through grants for community-based nonprofits, and providing technical assistance,” says GCSW’s Ali. “Am I excited about the initiative? Certainly—but I’m also sad that we’re still fighting this 30 years later.”

So what is causing the increase in new HIV infections in the Lone Star State?

“It’s several things: racial inequity, poverty, stigma, and sub-par sex education in public schools,” Ali says, adding that immigration status also plays a role.

“I’ve done a lot of work on the ground for ten years, and what I hear is that there is a lack of resources,” she adds. “In Texas, support for community health is not a priority.”

Ali cites recent cuts to federal initiatives such as the Affordable Care Act and the Children’s Health Insurance Program, as well as the non-expansion of Medicaid in Texas. She says she hears from many who are forced to choose between paying for healthcare and buying groceries.

“And we hear from young people that they

don’t know about AIDS, or how you get it, and that it is treatable,” Ali says.

In Texas and the other eight states studied by Gilead, HIV/AIDS disproportionately affects people of color and the LGBTQ community. Infection from drug use has declined, while transmission among men who have sex with men is on the rise.

Due to a lack of affordable health care and the stigma surrounding HIV/AIDS, many people still don’t get tested, Ali says.

In 2015, the CDC recommended that all patients, not just those at high risk, receive HIV tests. In 2017, state Representative Gene Wu (D-Houston) authored House Bill 717, which would have required healthcare providers who take blood samples to conduct HIV tests unless patients opt out. But Wu’s bill didn’t make it out of committee.

Brooks agrees that while additional medical advances may be on the horizon, testing and prevention remain critical.

“Researchers around the world are looking for methods of intermittent dosing,” Brooks says, adding that this would eliminate the need for daily medication to combat HIV. “That will be the next big thing, but we still need to stop the increasing rates of new infections.”

*Marene Gustin is a regular contributor to OUTSMART magazine.*

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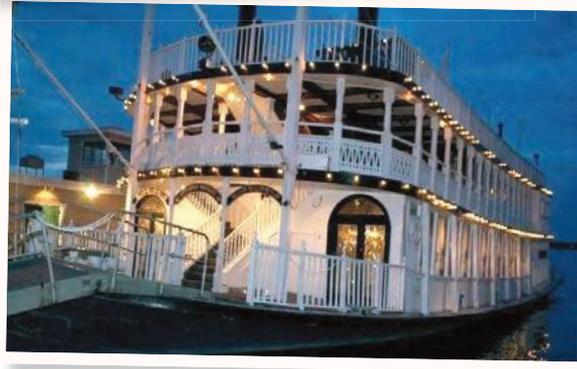
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# Sweet Spots

The best places in Houston to take your Valentine.

By Joanna O'Leary

Sorry, Ali MacGraw—love means always having to say you're sorry, especially if you're in a relationship and you're not doing your part to keep the flame burning. So even if you and your beloved consider Valentine's Day to be just a Hallmark holiday and loathe joining the unwashed masses in their schmaltzy exchanges of chocolates and roses, take the opportunity to do something romantic on one of the other 364 days of the year. Houston ain't Paris, but Space City does have some attractions that rival those in the City of Lights in their ability to (re)ignite the passion.

An elite university may not be the first location that comes to mind for wooing your inamorata/o; however, Rice University—and specifically its **James Turrell Skyspace**—is an exception. There is something cosmically soothing about watching the gorgeous, muted hues of this light installation complement nature's sunrises and sunsets—a feeling that is only intensified with a companion. If you and your better half are “morning people,” take in the dawn viewing before heading to a champagne breakfast. Night-owl couples should make reservations for the dusk show, then grab cocktails or beers in Rice Village.

Other al fresco spots in Houston can be the key to a fine romance, albeit one with kisses. Find ardor under the arbor via a slow afternoon stroll through the magnificent **Centennial Gardens**. As you take the time to admire prosperous sustainable vegetable and herb plots, lush rose bushes, and a lovely sculpture promenade, reflect on what you admire about

each other and recommit to making more time for other terrific natural spaces in the city you both call home.

A popular site for marriage proposals, as well as the most photographed attraction in Houston, the Williams Tower's 64-foot-tall **Water Wall** is a stunning vertical fountain designed to create a relaxing, gushing sound in concert with its urban backdrop. Surrounding the **Water Wall** are hundreds of live oak trees that provide a cooling respite for visitors in the warmer months. Even if you said your “I do's” long ago or are so “not there yet,” a stroll or a picnic at the Water Wall is a welcome way to spend an afternoon with your life partner or current flame.

There is magic in the moonlight at downtown's **Discovery Green**, which hosts great date-night events such as movies, concerts, festivals, and many other activities made for two. In the summer, strip down and splash alongside the kids at the Gateway Fountain, or enjoy a paddleboat ride on Kinder Lake. In the winter, skate hand-in-hand on the man-made ice rink before warming up with some adult beverages and appetizers at The Grove.

Listening to any of the **Houston Grand Opera's** soloists belt out a mesmerizing aria is enough to give you goosebumps, and the delight is doubled when your soul mate is seated next to you. For a particularly romantic experience, my show of choice from the 2018 season

is *West Side Story*, for its balance of amorous ballads, high-energy dance numbers, and all-too-relevant social themes.

Finally, celebrate the pleasures of the flesh in more than one way by starting your evening with a meal of wild game and other braised and roasted animal proteins at the **Rainbow Lodge**, where the combination of rustic decor, soft light, working fireplaces, and fine linens makes it one of the most romantic dining locations in Houston. Or for a romantic feast that is also actually moving, I suggest making the short trek to Willis for one of **Southern Empress Cruises' Lake Conroe** dinner or cocktail cruises aboard their replica of a 19th-century Mississippi steamship. While the buffet of classic American grub is nothing to write home about, the sunset views enjoyed with a martini in hand will have you raving for decades following the conclusion of your voyage.

Finally, sometimes the simplest gestures are the sweetest—literally, in the case of just treating your sweetheart to a shared dessert at either location of **The Chocolate Bar**. Cheat on your diets (rather than on each other!) by sharing a giant slice of chocolate cake, or stealing bites from each other's confections. Remember: calories consumed in the name of love don't count.

Joanna O'Leary is a regular contributor to *OUTSMART* magazine.

**Heart of Town**  
Cupid has been known to manifest at Williams Tower's Water Wall (clockwise from top left), The Chocolate Bar, and Lake Conroe.

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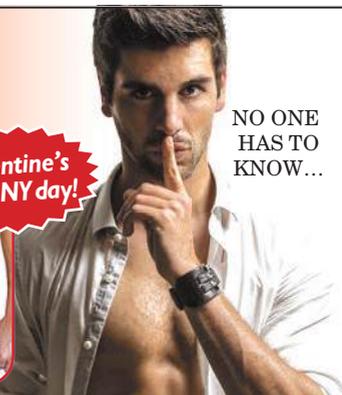
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# Hooked on Horns

For Bar-B-Que committee member Shawn Cummins, the Houston Rodeo is a way of life.

By Jenny Block

The Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo is a massive endeavor that runs on the power of more than 33,000 volunteers. For the last two years, this figure has included a group that put on an LGBTQ-themed event called Out at the Rodeo.

Unfortunately, as of press time, Out at the Rodeo was not scheduled to take place in 2018. But that doesn't mean the LGBTQ community will not be involved in the world's largest rodeo, which runs February 27 through March 18.

One of those community members is 45-year-old Shawn Cummins. Born and raised in Houston, Cummins is a die-hard rodeo volunteer of 16 years. The only thing she loves more is her family. And, this June, Cummins will marry her partner of twelve-and-a-half years, Darla Dean.

Together, Cummins and Dean have three children—a 13-year-old son, Kody, and two daughters, 21-year-old Shelbi and 23-year-old Rylee. A stay-at-home mom who lives on Galveston Bay, Cummins lives for spending time on the water, traveling, and—of course—volunteering every year at the rodeo.

"I make a joke about being born on the parking lot," she says. "But I have been going to the rodeo since I was a little girl. There is no other organization I would rather volunteer with."

Cummins currently serves as a contestant supervisor for the World's Championship Bar-B-Que Contest, which boasted 226,369 guests in 2017.

"My job is to supervise the group of cook teams I am given," she says. "I absolutely love my job, because I get to meet awesome people every year, eat great food, and have a lot of fun."

For Cummins, the rodeo is a family affair. She says her mother has been involved in the event for almost 40 years, serving on various



## Seasoned Veteran

Shawn Cummins is in her 16th year volunteering at the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo, where she will serve as a contestant supervisor for the World's Championship Bar-B-Que Contest.

committees and as an auction buyer of swine and steer. Cummins' fondest rodeo memories are from her childhood, when the event was held in the Astrodome. She says she got to meet several entertainers in person, including Reba McEntire.

"I [also] remember playing in the area where they kept the stage before they moved it into the center for the concert. George Strait, his wife, and their son were hanging out by the stage watching the rodeo, and I got to meet them and play with their son," she says.

Naturally, Cummins says, her children have also enjoyed the rodeo.

"What kid doesn't love a carnival?" she says. "They always loved going through Agventure, then sitting and watching the rodeo. I always made sure to get to our seats early so they could get the full experience, from the grand entry to the final song of the concert. Darla loves it as well. She comes out and helps during Bar-B-Que and loves judging the Dutch Oven Dessert contest."

Last year, 2.6 million people attended the three-week-long extravaganza of performances, rides, games, exhibits, auctions, shopping, competitions, and more.

This year, Garth Brooks will open and close

the rodeo. Other scheduled performers include Alessia Cara, Kelsea Ballerini, Keith Urban, Little Big Town, Blake Shelton, Leon Bridges, Rascal Flatts, and the Zac Brown Band.

The event has a massive economic impact on the City of Houston, creating 7,265 full-time-equivalent jobs and increasing tax revenue by more than \$27 million.

But it also has an incredible charitable impact. Since 1932, when the rodeo began, it has committed more than \$450 million to Texas youth. As we speak, more than 2,000 students are on scholarships at Texas colleges and universities, thanks to the rodeo.

"There is something for everyone, from the carnival to the food to the bull-riding to the concerts," Cummins says. "And, it benefits the youth of Texas. We are one big happy family, and we love helping kids go to college. Join us. We would love to have you."

**What:** Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo  
**When:** February 27–March 18  
**Where:** NRG Park, 1 NRG Park  
**Info:** RodeoHouston.com

*Jenny Block is a regular contributor to OUTSMART magazine.*



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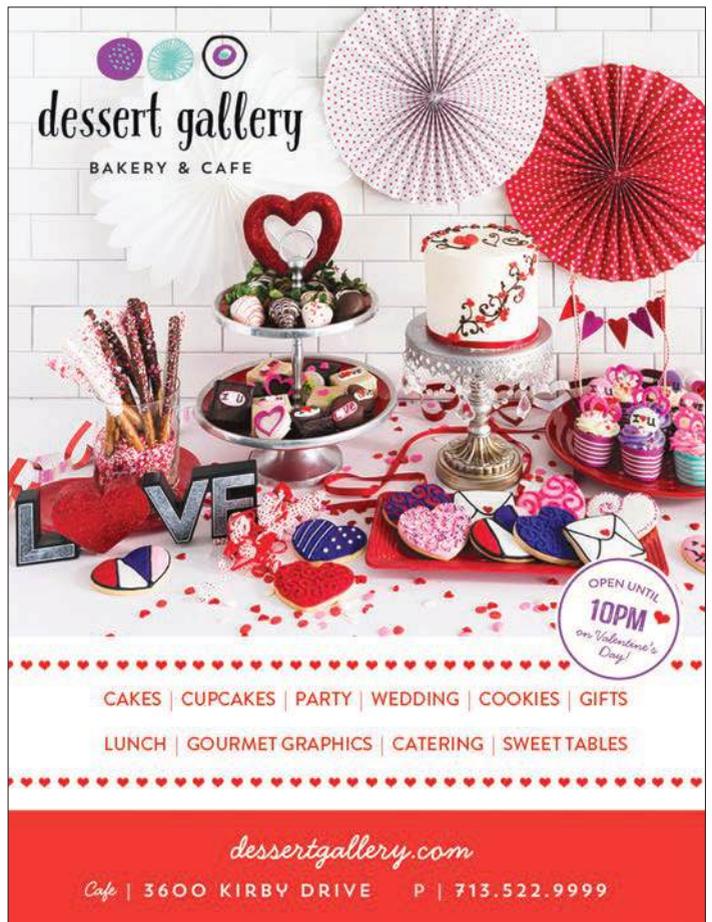
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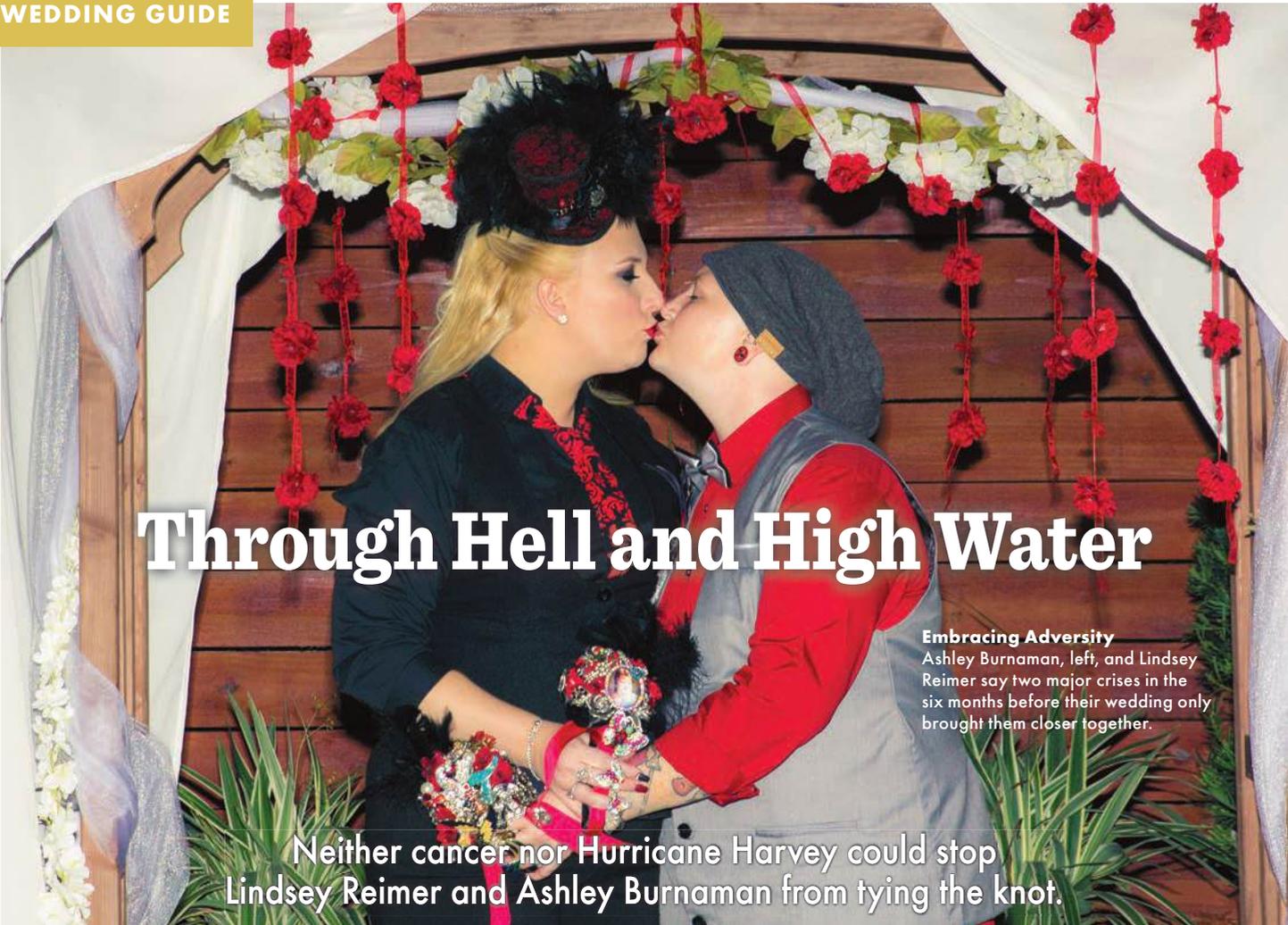


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# Through Hell and High Water

## Embracing Adversity

Ashley Burnaman, left, and Lindsey Reimer say two major crises in the six months before their wedding only brought them closer together.

Neither cancer nor Hurricane Harvey could stop Lindsey Reimer and Ashley Burnaman from tying the knot.

By Jenny Block

If you think “love conquers all” is just a silly expression, consider the case of Lindsey Reimer and Ashley Burnaman.

Reimer, 34, and Burnaman, 30, were married on October 28, 2017. But getting to their big day was anything but easy.

First, in the summer of 2017, Reimer was diagnosed with ovarian cancer. Then in August, the couple lost their home to Tropical Storm Harvey. Those back-to-back disasters threatened to change everything, but the couple refused to let that happen.

In the wake of Reimer’s cancer diagnosis, Burnaman wasn’t sure what would be best for her fiancée.

“With our wedding rapidly approaching, I asked her if she wanted to postpone it because she was self-conscious of her hair loss,” Burnaman says. “She insisted that we keep the date and keep things as ‘normal’ as possible. I feel like us pulling off our wedding was literally an act of God, especially considering we have two kids and three dogs.”

Despite it all, the wedding went off ex-

actly as planned. The couple was married at Shafaii Hall & Garden in Houston, with their friend Jess officiating. The event facility has “a beautiful garden to get married in, and then an extravagant hall right on the other side of the glass wall to have the reception,” Burnaman says, adding that they were not the first same-sex couple to marry there.

**“We have been through so much together in the last four years. I have come to admire her more now than I ever did before. I am honored to call her my wife.”**

Reimer wrote their wedding vows, as well as their vows to their children. “It was so beautiful and heartfelt,” Burnaman says. “Our children adore Lindsey, and they started to get emotional when she was reading them her vows.”

Burnaman wanted Reimer to have the incredible moment of her dad escorting her down the aisle and everyone standing for her. “Lindsey is very special to me, and I wanted

the focus to be on her,” Burnaman said.

“Everything turned out so beautifully,” she adds. “All of our friends and family were there to show us so much love and support. She is the woman of my dreams, so the least I could do is give her the wedding of her dreams.” After the wedding, they took off for a honeymoon in the Caribbean.

Their wedding was the culmination of a love story that can only be described as *kismet*. Even though Reimer and Burnaman grew up on the same street, they didn’t meet until 19 years later—at the Waffle House where they both worked.

“Lindsey also specializes in custom cakes,” Burnaman recalls. “I wanted so badly to see her outside of work. So I found her business page on Facebook and texted the number listed. I set up a consultation, and when I went to the appointment, I found it was Lindsey’s mother. Lindsey and her mom were in the cake business together. I almost paid \$85 for a cake I didn’t need, just to see this girl.”

After meeting with Reimer’s mom, Burna-

man received a text from an unknown number. “Lo and behold, it was Lindsey. Her mother called Lindsey immediately to update her on the cake order she just booked. Lindsey sent me a text, and I called her. I insisted on seeing her that night to discuss my very ‘detailed’ cake order.” They went to a diner and stayed up until 2 a.m. talking.

“Not once was the cake mentioned,” Ashley says with a laugh. “After that, we were inseparable. After a couple of weeks I admitted to not needing the cake, and that it was all a ruse just to see her—but I was totally willing to pay for the cake and for taking up their time.”

It didn’t take Burnaman two weeks to admit to herself that she wanted to marry Reimer. “We were out shopping and Lindsey reached for my hand, and I just knew I wanted to spend forever with her.”

In the most wildly romantic fashion, just about a year later, Burnaman proposed. It was Reimer’s birthday, and Burnaman organized friends and family at different locations meaningful to the couple. She gave each person a card with a clue to the next location. Reimer’s last stop was their home, where their friends and family were waiting.

“When she came up the driveway, it was lined with candles and rose petals,” Burnaman recalls. “I was singing, and our friend was playing the guitar. Then I brought Lindsey into the house, and there was her birthday cake. I confessed my undying love for her and turned the cake around. It said ‘Will you marry me?’ on it. I got down on one knee and put the ring on her finger. She immediately said yes.”

Burnaman calls Reimer “an incredibly strong and beautiful person, inside and out.

“We have been through so much together in the last four years. I have come to admire her more now than I ever did before,” she says. “Lindsey is a wonderful mother, a hard worker, and—the best part—she makes me want to be a better person. I am honored to call her my wife.”

Reimer’s thoughts on Ashley are equally adoring. “Ashley is my love, my best friend, wife, and number-one supporter,” Reimer says. “She picks me up when I am down or at my worst. She has opened my heart to love, and to me that is the most special part—her love. I gained two beautiful children to love and care for. It has made me less selfish and more loving. I adore my family, and I’ve never been prouder.”

“We have overcome Hurricane Harvey. We are beating cancer. Our wedding and honeymoon was so incredible, and now we have our new home,” Burnaman says. “We have been through so much these past few months, and you know what? As cliché as it sounds, it has only brought us closer together.”

*Jenny Block is a regular contributor to OUTSMART magazine.*

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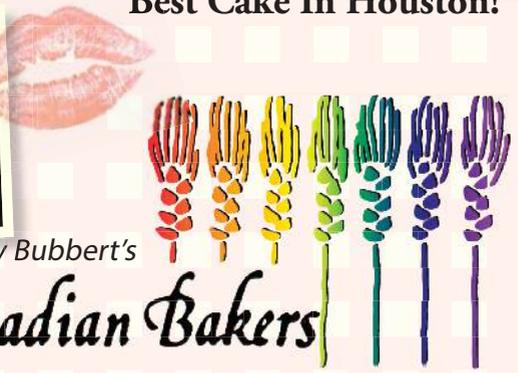
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**Picture This**  
Steve Cristy, left, and Ron Powell met in the food court of the Houston Galleria in 2012, and married at the Harris County Courthouse in 2017.

## True Love Waits

Age—and a brief separation—brought Steve Christy and Ron Powell together.

By Henry V. Thiel

**T**hey say distance makes the heart grow fonder. In the case of Ron Powell and Steve Christy, this was certainly the case.

“I knew he was the one when I was away on vacation in Europe for a few weeks, and all I could think about was how much I wanted to be home with him,” Powell says. “It was my first time out of the country, and all I wanted to do was be at home cuddling with Steve. I knew in my heart of hearts that I wanted to be with him forever.”

As soon as Powell got home, he presented Christy with a card saying how much he had missed him, and expressing his desire to talk about “forever.” Then he pulled out a ring he had purchased in Europe, and asked Christy to marry him.

“I immediately said yes,” Christy says. “I had actually expected him to ask me to move in with him. I was not expecting a proposal, but I was ready to commit to him.”

They moved in together shortly thereafter, and got married two years later—on

August 4, 2017.

Powell, a 49-year-old retail manager, met Christy, a 53-year-old hairstylist, in 2012 at the food court in the Galleria, where they both work.

One friendly chat led to them exchanging phone numbers, and after a few months of texting, they finally went on a first date.

“I decided to go on a second date with Ron because I felt we really connected,” Christy says. “We both seemed to feel at ease with each other as we talked about what everyone talks about on a first date—their hopes, wishes, and dreams. And we laughed. Ron got (and appreciated) my sense of humor. I knew that Ron was a very warm and genuine person, and that a long-term relationship with him was a distinct possibility.”

Christy says one of the advantages of being “older” is that it gives you a better perspective on what is important in a partner.

“When you are young, you check off boxes like ‘Does he have great biceps or beautiful

blond hair?’” Christy says. “When you are older, you tend to be more interested in compatibility. Do you like spending time with this person? Do you support the same kind of causes? I also knew that I wanted to get to know him better—and there was a lot of physical attraction, as well.”

Christy says he knew he was ready to make a long-term commitment after about six months of dating Powell.

“Ron is very different from the other guys I had been in relationships with,” Christy says. “He is always respectful, even when angry. He is also generous and kind, and inspires me to be a better human being.”

Powell notes that when he was growing up, marriage equality wasn’t even on the horizon.

“In fact, I never thought it would occur in my lifetime,” Powell says. “So to have the love and support from our family and friends has just been amazing. We both feel very fortunate to have found each other and to be surrounded by so much love.”

The couple married at the Harris County Courthouse because they wanted to focus on celebrating their love and union with friends and family, as opposed to getting them involved with the actual ceremony.

One of their good friends hosted a cocktail party and reception after the wedding, and Powell and Cristy hosted a brunch the next day at Maxx's Wine Dive.

They agreed that the best part of getting married was that Christy's family came from Kansas to be part of their special day. It was also the first time their families had met each other. Powell's cousin, Dawn Slone of Blue Catering, made their wedding cake.

"It was a chocolate ganache cake with pomegranate liqueur topped with a white chocolate buttercream icing—and oh my God, was it delicious," Christy says. "We were both overwhelmed by the love and support we received from everyone there."

"What we will remember most from our wedding was that we were able to enjoy being with all our guests—friends, coworkers, and family—and not feeling stressed or stretched," Powell says.

The newlyweds live in Montrose with their two rescued fur-babies, Levi and Jasper. They plan to honeymoon later in 2018.

*Henry V. Thiel is a regular contributor to OUTSMART magazine.*

## LOVE IS IN THE AIR

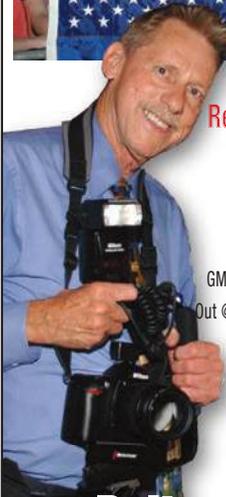


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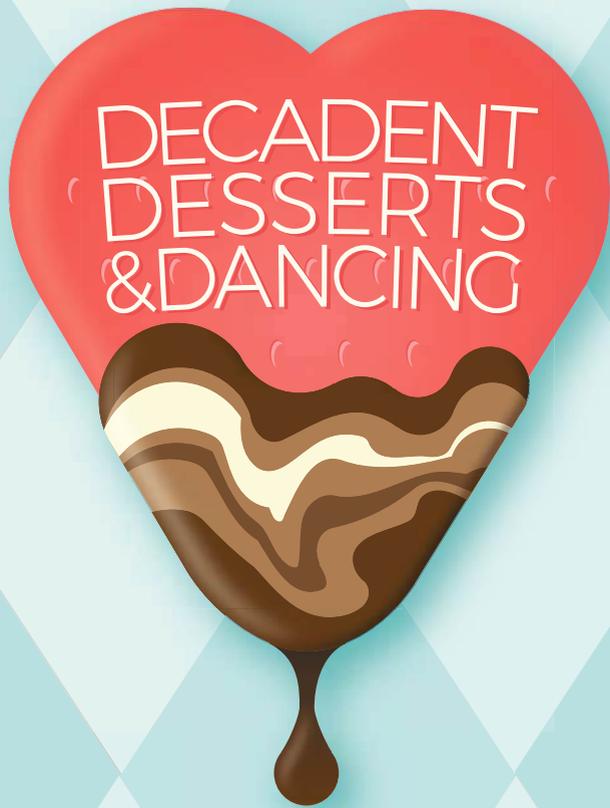


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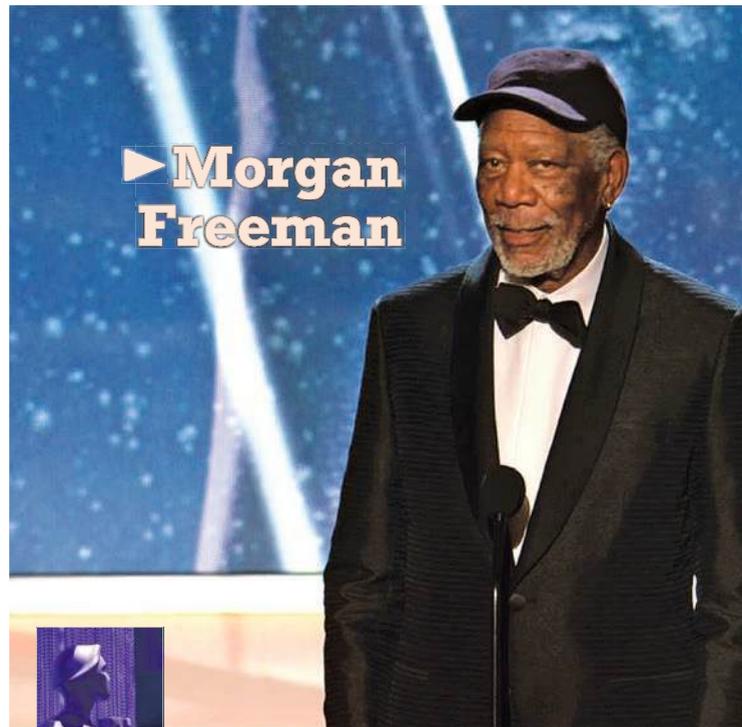


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► **Morgan Freeman**



(SAG Awards, 1/21/18)

*At the end of his speech:*

**I'm going to tell you what's wrong with this statue: it works from the back— from the front it's gender-specific.**

(People.com, 1/22/18, Maria Pasquini & Mariah Haas)

*Freeman was the recipient of the Screen Actors Guild Life Achievement Award at the 2018 ceremony.*

Shortly after walking onstage to begin his speech, Freeman stopped and said, "Hey... I'm talking to you. Yeah, hey," to a then-unidentified person in the audience.

"Okay, well you just stand out to me, that's all," he added, before resuming his speech.

And while he didn't elaborate on who he was talking about at the time, backstage he let reporters in on a little secret—it was Lily Tomlin!

"Yeah. That was Lily Tomlin. She's a wonder in herself, and I've always loved her. I see her, I say hello."

Tomlin was also the recipient of the SAG Life Achievement Award at last year's ceremony.



Lily Tomlin at the recent SAG Awards.





© **Is Morgan Freeman a fan of Lily Tomlin?**  
Would he say hello to her?

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◀ **Lena Waithe** (first black woman to win an Emmy for comedy writing)

(Curve, 1.17.18, Victoria A. Brownworth)

*Re: NPR's Fresh Air's Terry Gross and Waithe discussed clothes. Waithe had given a long description of her attire for the Emmys, and how important it was to her to feel good in what she was wearing.*

For me, I like clothes in general, but there was even pressure there! Everybody was like, "Oh, you're such a swaggy dresser. What are you gonna wear?" I knew I wanted to wear a tux, and I knew I wanted some flare to it. That's all I told my amazing stylist, Tiffany Hasbourne. And the designer is ALBA Legacy, an Asian designer named Jhoanna. I said, "I want to do a tux. I don't want to do a traditional tux. I want to do something that's a little fly, a little swaggy, because that's my personality."

When they showed it to me, I loved it and they tailored it perfectly to my body. I felt like the queen of the night in that thing.

*The end of her Emmy speech:*

I love you all, and last but certainly not least my LGBTQIA family. I see each and every one of you. The things that make us different, those are our superpowers—every day when you walk out the door and put on your imaginary cape and go out there and conquer the world, because the world would not be as beautiful as it is if we weren't in it.

© **First of All**

Lena Waithe (seen here with her girlfriend, Alano Mayo, at the Emmys): was she the queen of the night in her tux?

FREEMAN - TNT; SAG STATUE - CHRISTOPHER POLK/GETTY IMAGES; FOR TNT; KENWORTHY - INSTAGRAM; WAITHE - TRAE PATTON/CBS; TOMLIN - CHARLEY GALLAGHER/TTY IMAGES FOR TURNER



# 'Chavela'

All about Almodóvar's friend.

Anyone who has ever heard the late Spanish-language singer Chavela Vargas, who died at age 93 in 2012, knows there's more going on than meets the eye . . . or the ear, for that matter. With their respectful and revealing doc *Chavela*, codirectors Catherine Gund and Daysha Kyi give the true story of the ranchera diva a long-overdue telling.

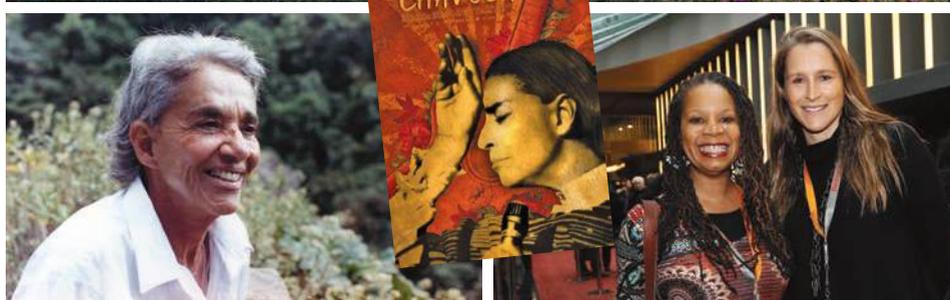
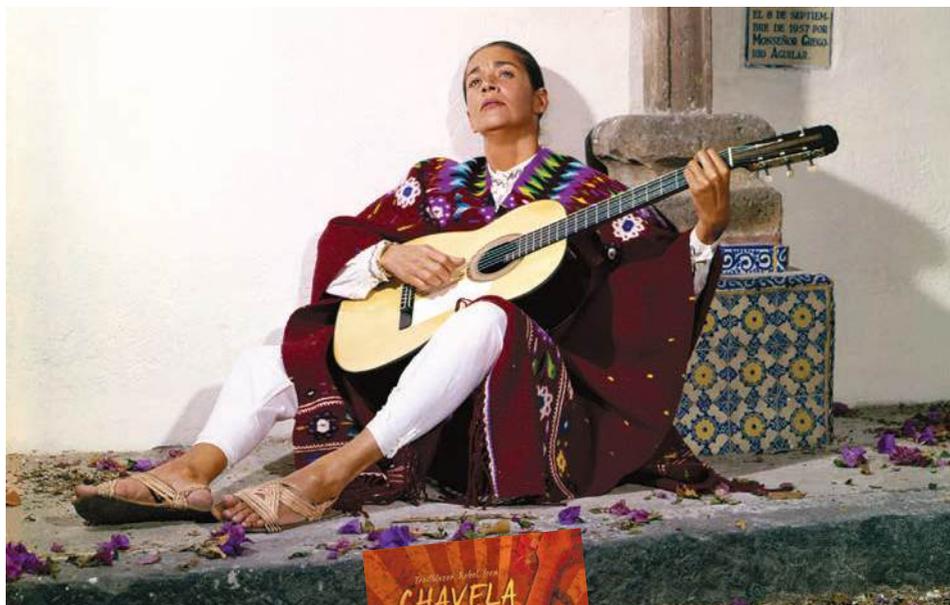
The film seamlessly combines extensive Vargas interview footage from 1991 with vintage performance footage, as well as reverent interviews with gay filmmaking legend Pedro Almodóvar; Vargas' former manager Mariana Gyalui; singers Eugenia Leon, Miguel Bosé, and Tania Libertad; cabaret owners Jesusa Rodriguez and Liliana Felipe; composer Marcela Rodriguez; fashion designer Elena Benarroch; photographer Tlany Ortega; former Mexican senator Patria Jiménez; Jose Alfredo Jiménez Jr., son of composer Jose Alfredo; two of Vargas' ex-lovers, lesbian author Betty Carol Sellen and human-rights lawyer Alicia Perez Duarte; and others who knew Vargas.

Born Isabel Vargas Lizano in Costa Rica, "at the end of the world" in 1919, Vargas describes herself as a sad and lonely girl who didn't play with dolls and "grew up alone." Mistreated by her religious and prejudiced parents who thought she was a strange "boyish girl," the rebellious and full-of-rage Chavela lived with an aunt and uncle after her parents divorced—all the while obsessing about leaving home.

When she finally did leave in the 1930s, she arrived in Mexico City and discovered music and art waiting for her there. After striking up a friendship with ranchera music composer/performer José Alfredo Jiménez, Vargas earned a reputation as the best interpreter of his songs.

Chavela also succeeded in creating a persona for herself in a macho world where lesbians were marginalized. She skirted the hypocrisy of the patriarchal Mexican society (they all knew she was gay, but never discussed it) while opening doors for others, unaware that she would be constructing a legend.

Among the lovers Chavela claimed were



Counter-clockwise from top: young Chavela in one of her trademark ponchos, directors Daresha Kyi (l) and Catherine Gund, and Vargas later in life.

Frida Kahlo (during the 1940s) and Ava Gardner (during the 1950s, when lots of Hollywood royalty spent time in Acapulco), as well as the wives of government officials. However, by 1973 her alcoholism was taking its toll on her career. She ended up broke, alone, and black-listed in the 1980s.

Meeting the aforementioned Alicia Duarte (whom she called Nina) in 1988 was the beginning of her sobriety. That, and her belief in mysticism and shamans. Her 1991 performance comeback in Mexico City, singing sober for the first time, led to even greater opportunities. Pedro Almodóvar brought Chavela to Spain in 1992. As Almodóvar puts it, he found one of

his "best collaborators" in Vargas' voice, which became part of his film scripts. Happy in Spain, feeling "loved and protected," Vargas officially came out. The revelation had no impact on her career, and she sang to packed houses at the Olympia music hall in Paris and in Mexico City at the Palacio de Bellas Artes in 1995, as well as throughout the early part of the 21st century.

DVD bonus features include commentary by codirectors Gund and Kyi, filmmakers interview, a live concert performance, and more. Music Box Films ([musicboxfilms.com](http://musicboxfilms.com)).

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

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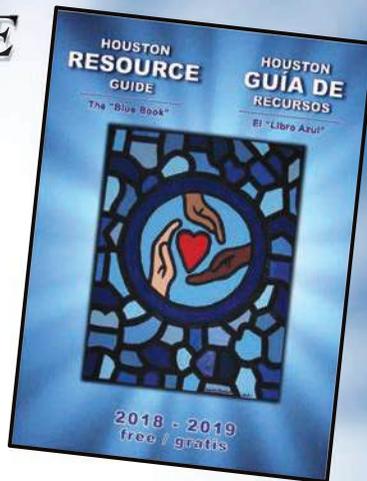
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# Big Blasts from the Past

Minnie Riperton, the Ramones, The Who, Billy Idol, The Moody Blues, and more.

Depending on your generational perspective, the late soul goddess **Minnie Riperton** is either the mother of actress/singer/*SNL* alum Maya Rudolph or the singer with the five-octave vocal range best known for the timeless 1975 hit single “Lovin’ You,” co-written by Riperton

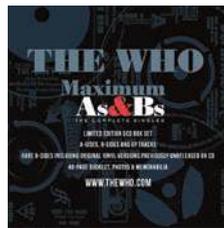


and her husband, Richard Rudolph. You can hear Riperton, who died of cancer in 1979 at 31, paying a “lovin’” homage to her daughter Maya at the end of “Lovin’ You.” The double-disc deluxe edition expanded reissue of **Perfect Angel** (Capitol/UME), Riperton’s second album (and the one on which “Lovin’ You” can be found), is a long overdue celebration of an artist we lost too soon. Riperton and Rudolph co-wrote seven of the songs on the original album, including the standouts “Reasons,” “The Edge of a Dream,” “It’s So Nice (To See Old Friends),” and “Our Lives.” The presence of Stevie Wonder playing electric piano and harmonica, as well as contributing the title track and “Take a Little Trip,” only served to increase Riperton’s artistic and hip factors. The abundant bonus material includes 11 additional tracks that go a long way in further cementing the album’s legendary status.

No, you’re not hearing things. That’s the **Ramones’** cover of “Little Bit O’ Soul” playing in the Fidelity Investments commercial. Yes, we’ve gotten to that point in our culture—but don’t let that diminish our appreciation of the American punk progenitors, who in 1977 released two (!) phenomenal albums. **Rocket to Russia** (Sire/Rhino), the second of the two, has been reissued in a 40th-anniversary deluxe limited edition, and contains Ramones classics such as “Sheena Is a Punk Rocker,” “Rockaway Beach,” “Teenage Lobotomy,” “Cretin Hop,” the queer “We’re a Happy Family,” and the band’s distinctive covers of “Do You Wanna Dance?” and “Surfin’ Bird.” The reissue consists of engineer/mixer Ed Stasium’s remastered original and

tracking mix on disc one, two dozen bonus cuts on disc two, a previously unreleased 1977 live recording from a concert in Glasgow, Scotland, and the original LP on 180-gram vinyl.

Would the Ramones have existed without **The Who**? After all, The Who’s teen/ counterculture anthem “My Generation” has been cited by some as one of the first punk-rock songs. “My Generation” is one of 86 tracks to be found on the five-disc The Who box set **Maximum As & Bs: The Complete Singles** (Polydor/UMC). Each of the singles—including “I Can’t Explain,” “Substitute,” “I Can See for Miles,” “Won’t Get Fooled Again,” “Join Together,” “Squeeze Box,” “Who Are You,” “You Better You Bet,” and “Eminence Front”—is immediately followed by the B-side, many of which are not heard very often. The box set also includes a booklet featuring photos, memorabilia, and track-by-track annotation.



In the late ‘60s and early ‘70s, The Who’s Roger Daltrey probably got a lot of attention from gay fans due to his stunning physique—smooth, pumped-up pecs and rippling abs. Years later, sneering bleached-blond **Billy Idol**, who started



out in the punk band Generation X, gained a reputation for putting his shirtless body on display. (And why not? He was in good shape, especially for a punk-rock/new-wave guy.) Idol’s first two albums—his eponymous 1982 debut and 1983’s **Rebel Yell** (both on Chrysalis/Capitol/UME)—have been reissued on high-quality vinyl, along with the two-LP hits compilation **Idolize Yourself: The Very Best of Billy Idol** (Capitol/UME). Listeners can expect to find songs such as “White Wedding,” “Hot in the City,” “Eyes without a Face,” “Flesh for Fantasy,” “Dancing with Myself,” “Mony Mony,” and “Cradle of Love,” among others, on *Idolize Yourself*.

The story of the U.K. psychedelic/progressive-rock band **The Moody Blues**, which continues to this day, has some fascinating chapters.

Early on, The Moody Blues had a hit single with the song “Go Now,” which doesn’t really sound like anything that came after it. In fact, it was the follow-up album, 1967’s **Days of Future Past** (Decca/UMC), newly reissued in a 50th-anniversary double-CD set, that set the

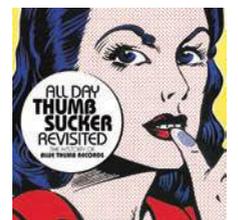


tone for The Moody Blues’ greatest successes. Of course, when it was first issued 50 years ago, it was something of a peculiarity because it was recorded with the London Festival Orchestra conducted by Peter Knight. The album did fairly well on the British charts, as did the single “Nights in White Satin,” but it took another five years for both the album and single to make the impact it did in 1972. The reissue includes the original 1967 stereo mix (available for the first time on CD), along with nine bonus tracks on the first disc. The second CD contains the 1972 stereo mix, four bonus tracks, and six mono single masters. Additionally, a DVD features a 5.1 Surround Sound Mix and a 96kHz/24-bit 1967 stereo mix, along with visual content.

If you didn’t get your fill of psychedelic sounds with The Moody Blues reissue, you owe it to yourself to check out **The Mysticism of Sound & Cosmic Language** (Smog Veil Records) by “Cleveland’s mythical prog rock improvisors” **Hy Maya**. Members of the short-lived band include Robert Bensick, Albert Dennis, Scott Krauss, and Allen Ravenstine. The double-CD set includes studio and live recordings dating back to 1972 and 1973.



The above-mentioned Smog Veil label has prided itself on its esoteric roster of artists for more than 25 years. Similarly, Blue Thumb Records, in its brief 10 years of existence, introduced listeners to its own impressive lineup



of artists, including Sylvester and the Hot Band (featuring the fabulous gay music icon Sylvester in his pre-disco phase), The Pointer Sisters, The Crusaders, Leon Russell, word-jazz innovator Ken Nordine, and many others. Originally released in 1995, the 2017 reissue of **All Day Thumbsucker Revisited: The History of Blue Thumb Records** (Verve/UME) is as enjoyable for its stunning array of talent (such as T. Rex, Captain Beefheart and his Magic Band, Ike and Tina Turner, and Love) as it is for being a music-history lesson.

Eighties music legends **Tears For Fears** is one of those bands that has almost as many hits



compilations as it does studio albums. To be fair, TFF's hits, including "Mad World," "Change," "Pale Shelter," "Shout," "Everybody Wants to Rule the World," "Head Over Heels,"

and "Sowing the Seeds of Love," just to mention a few, are sensational and deserve to be heard by ears new and old. **Rule The World** (Mercury/UMe) is a 16-track compilation that includes the aforementioned songs, as well as two brand-new songs.

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

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# 'Buzz'

A stimulating history of the sex toy.

**Tell: Love, Defiance, and the Military Trial at the Tipping Point for Gay Rights Major Margaret Witt with Tim Connor, foreword by Colonel Magarethe Cammermeyer**



For those who love her, Margie Witt was always known as a take-charge, caring person. A tomboy growing up, she befriended the friendless, got along with everyone, and was a super-responsible leader. It was,

therefore, a natural fit when, in 1987, Witt decided to join the Air Force, even though she was gay. • But of course, nobody was supposed to know that. As an elite member of the military, Witt fully understood that in 1987, just being gay meant a military discharge. Even Witt's girlfriend was mum, but there was trouble on that front: Tiffany desperately wanted a baby and was pressing, but Witt was uninterested in parenthood. • With a pregnancy-or-else deadline looming, Witt kept busy, was sent to the Middle East, and received commendations for saving a life there. But as her relationship crumbled, she needed a confidante. Witt turned to a female colleague who soon became more than just a friend with a sympathetic ear. • In the ensuing "very, very ugly" divorce, "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" was no longer possible. • There's much more to the story—sometimes too much. But stick around: things move faster in the aftermath of Witt's exposure and the fight for gay rights in the military. That's what makes *Tell* highly readable and deeply personal. • ForeEdge (upne.com).

—Terri Schlichenmeyer



**Buzz: A Stimulating History of the Sex Toy**  
by Hallie Lieberman  
2017  
Pegasus Books  
(pegasusbooks.com)  
359 pages  
\$26.95/\$35.95 Canada



ERIC SCHANZBERG

**D**ouble-A. It has many uses, that little word-dash-letter. It's good for future baseball players. Good for a pre-teen girl. Great, if you're a student trying to bring those grades up. And, as you'll see in *Buzz: A Stimulating History of the Sex Toy* by Hallie Lieberman, if you're an adult, Double-A is something you never want to run out of.

A dozen years ago, to make a little money, Hallie Lieberman found an unusual job: she was a home-party sex-toy salesperson in a state where the selling of sex toys was illegal. Ever afraid of being arrested, she stuck to a script that the company gave her. It was stilted and full of euphemisms, and the job was demeaning and embarrassing. She felt like she "wasn't actually teaching people anything."

From her PhD studies, Lieberman learned that "sex toys were ancient." Some 30 millennia ago, ancient Germans carved phallic objects, though some historians argue that stimulation might not

have been their intention. At any rate, the practice of using artificial devices for sexual pleasure spread across Europe and into Asia. Soon after the Middle Ages, mentions of sex toys began showing up in literature.

Beginning in Victorian times (and closer to home), rectal dilators and vibrators were made in the U.S. and approved by doctors to be sold as "medical devices." The dilators were made by "respected rubber companies," while the vibrators could be discreetly purchased in department stores for decades. Until it was outlawed, you could even have the devices mailed to your home. To circumvent the laws meant to keep sex toys out of the hands of everyday citizens, vibrators, dildos, and dilators had to be sold as "novelties."

In 1965, an engineer (who was also a ventriloquist!) started manufacturing sex toys.

In the early 1970s, a paraplegic welder began making them for women and advising the disabled on their use. Other vendors joined the revolution until, in 1972, sex toys gained respectability inside a small waterbed-store-turned-sex-shop run by two gay men (who welcomed hetero people).

Of course, there's so much more to this story, but here's one interesting thing about *Buzz*: while you might think the book would be titillating (and heavy on nudge-nudge-wink-wink passages), that's not the case. Author Hallie Lieberman doesn't do that to her readers. Instead, what you get is exactly what its subtitle promises: a history of sex toys throughout history, and their use by straight people, the disabled, the LGBT community, and feminists.

Through the narrative, you'll see how advocates tied sex toys to equality and self-confidence, and how the struggle to make the devices acceptable unfolded—and is still not over (including a surprise-not-surprise toward the end). That's serious stuff, and Lieberman offers it in a well-rounded way, though not without lightheartedness when appropriate.

*Buzz* is a book meant to inform rather than to shock, and that is enjoyably accomplished. The prurient, the curious, and the fans of pop-culture will love *Buzz*—no batteries required.

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



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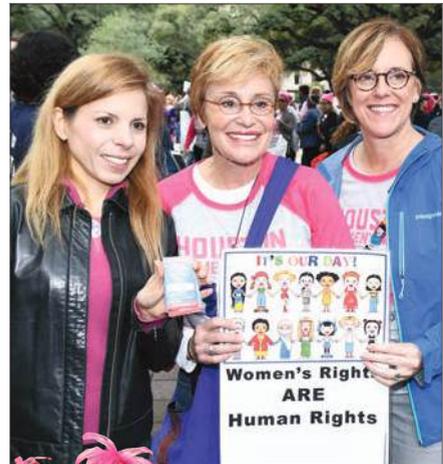
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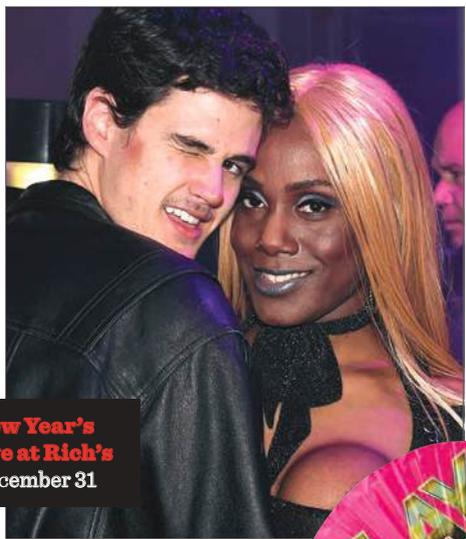
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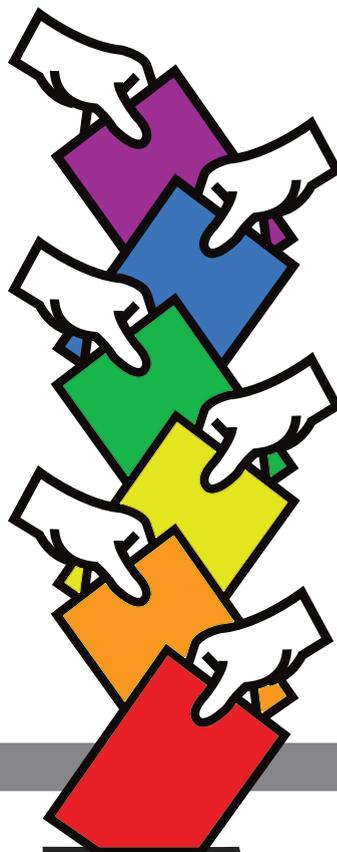
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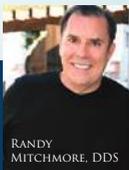
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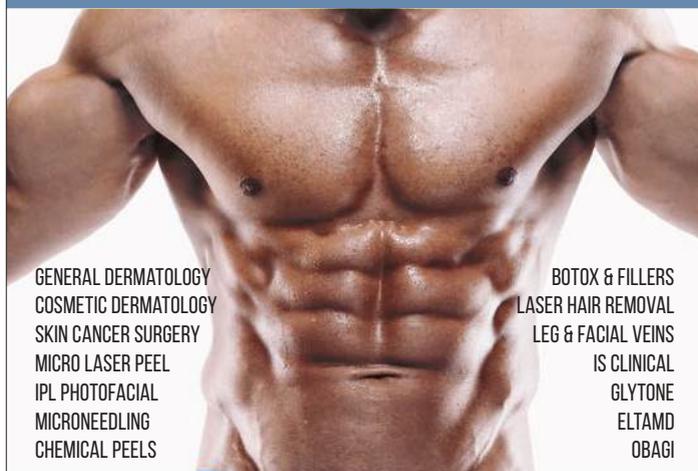


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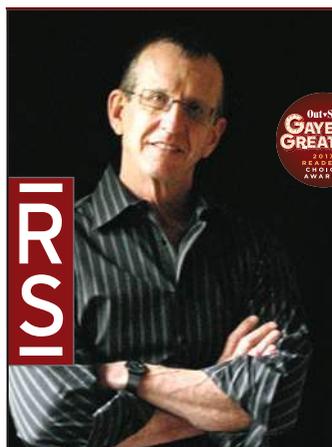
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### Ryan White Planning Council

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

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

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

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

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

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

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2616 Louisiana.....GloriasRestaurants.com  
Hamburger Mary's  
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davidalcorta.net.....832/439-0224  
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DaltonDehart.com.....713/622-2202  
Yvonne Feece-Tran Photography  
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A new LGBT motorcycle riding group is being put together for those in the Houston area who like to get out and ride! I'd love to have group rides/social gatherings every month, possible fund raiser rides for the community, etc.. All motorcycle types welcome - From Harley's to Hayabusa's, crotch rockets and cruisers - all are welcome. All rider experiences welcome! Please contact jasonmwilson@sbcglobal.net or look for Houston Pride Riders on Facebook.

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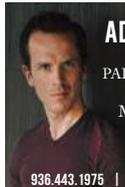
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## SIGNOUT

continued from page 96

By the middle of the month you are getting more organized, especially in your daily routines. Your boundaries are getting better!

**AQUARIUS** (January 20–February 18). Happy Birthday to the Aquarians! This is your personal



yearly cycle when you review what you accomplished last year and what goals you have for yourself this year. There are many good opportunities for you, both in your career and your creative interests. This is a good month to put yourself out there, especially with the New Moon eclipse on the 15th in your sign. Eclipses can open doors and give you the incentive to seek out

alternative paths for your life. Getting involved in business or community organizations can be very helpful to you, both personally and financially. You may even want to take on a leadership role! Money and finances require some of your focus near the end of the month.

**PISCES** (February 19–March 20). As the month begins, you are in a time of rest and retreat. You are being careful about what activities you commit to and who you talk to. You also feel a pull to become more active at work or in your community. It may be hard to balance both of those things, but you will have to give time to both. You are feeling the demands of work, and may need to take a lead role there. You are also reexamining your membership in a professional organization, and whether it really serves a purpose for you. On the personal side, you will really need to make sure you have time for yourself. This retreat energy will be especially strong at the end of the month, but you will be back on track in March.

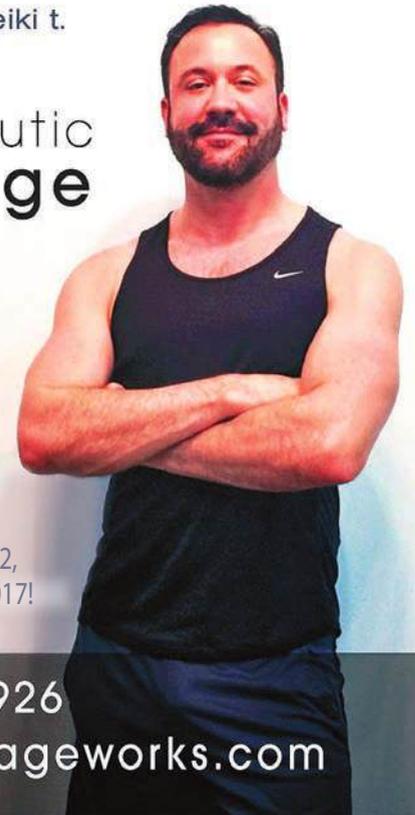
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## BAR & CLUB GUIDE

### HOUSTON

#### BAYOU CITY BAR

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#### BLUR

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

#### CLUB 2020

Located downtown, this urban club features Clubbers Friday with male and female dancers. Its 6,400 square feet also offers theater-sized viewing screens and VIP rooms. 2020 Leeland • 713.227.9667 club2020houston.com.

#### CLUB CRYSTAL

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

#### CROCKER BAR

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

#### F BAR

This boutique nightclub offers elegance without arrogance and features a stage, dance floor, VIP area, glass-encased quiet bar, and attractive patio. Tues. and Sun. drag. 202 Tuam St. • fbarhouston.com 713.522.3227.

#### GEORGE

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

### GUAVA LAMP

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

### HAMBURGER MARY'S

Tuesday & Wednesday 4p-10p, Thursday & Friday 4p-2a, Saturday & Sunday 11a-2a

### EAGLE

Part of the Eagle worldwide family, it's the definitive home to the man's man - leather, bear, jock or muscle, you'll find them here! DJs every night, multiple patios and a leather/accessories shop inside the bar. Noon-2am every day, 611 Hyde Park, 713.523.BIRD

### JR'S BAR & GRILL

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

### MICHAEL'S OUTPOST

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

### NEON BOOTS

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

### PEARL BAR

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

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**What are you best known for?**  
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### **RICH'S HOUSTON**

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### **THE RIPCORD**

This multi-roomed leather bar boasts a busy patio, especially on the weekends. The Black Hawk Leather shop located inside the club. 715 Fairview Ave 713.521.2792.

### **RUDYARD'S**

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

### **SOUTH BEACH**

This mega-dance club is a frequent winner of OutSmart's Gayest and Greatest awards. No cover before 11pm. 810 Pacific St. • 713.529.SOBE • sobehouston.com.

### **TC'S SHOWBAR**

With the longest daily happy hours in Montrose (8am-10pm), this neighborhood watering hole is very popular. Drag shows Wednesday-Sunday. Karaoke Monday & Wednesday. 817 Fairview • 713.526.2625 • tcshowbar.com.

### **TONY'S CORNER POCKET**

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

### **VIVIANA'S**

Happening weekend-only gay dance club with Latin DJs, singers, talent shows & Sunday strippers. 4624 Dacoma • 713.681.4104.

### **BEAUMONT**

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### **BRYAN/COLLEGE STATION**

#### **HALO VIDEO BAR**

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### **GALVESTON**

#### **23RD ST. STATION**

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

#### **ROBERT'S LAFITTE**

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

### **SPRING**

#### **RANCH HILL SALOON**

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#### **THE ROOM BAR AND LOUNGE**

This bar and video lounge has a laid-back atmosphere including daily drink specials, karaoke, free pool, drag shows, and live DJs several nights a week. 4915 FM 2920 • 281.907.6866 • roombarspring.com.



# The Solar Eclipse Is February 15

The eclipse will effect our emotions and our sense of security as Americans.

**F**or those planning ahead, our next Mercury retrograde is from March 18 through April 20. Get your projects started before March 15. The big event for this month is the solar eclipse on February 15. This eclipse will effect our emotions and our sense of security as Americans—feelings that will be strong through the end of the month. Those most affected by the eclipse are the fixed signs of Taurus, Leo, Scorpio, and Aquarius. • The Chinese New Year on February 16 ushers in the Year of the Dog!

**ARIES** (March 21–April 19). February is an especially busy social month for you as friends, community groups, and business organizations are highlighted in your sign. You are also examining your career path and considering taking on a new position or doing something on your own. You are eager to develop some new skills and look at projects that are really interesting. Business organizations can be especially supportive this month, and can put you in contact with the right people. You will be ready for a break near the end of the month.

**TAURUS** (April 20–May 20). You are looking for new directions, new projects, and the passion that comes from doing something you enjoy. Your career area is very active, and this is an excellent month to promote yourself or your services. Relationships continue to improve, and those who are involved are enjoying their partnership more than ever. If you are single, this is a great time to meet new people. Business partnerships are also favored this month. Toward the end of February, you will want to connect more with your friends and social activities. Be careful that you don't overload your schedule this month!

**GEMINI** (May 21–June 21). As the month begins, you are open to new ideas and differing points of view. This is a good month for education, travel, working with international businesses, and writing. You will need to give some attention to renewing your relationship bonds. If you are single, you are feeling more confident about yourself, which can give relationships some new potential! If you are not happy in your relationships, you will have the chance to do something about that. Career becomes the focus in the latter half of the month. Be careful that you don't overload your schedule, particularly around the 23rd, 24th, 25th, and 26th.

**CANCER** (June 22–July 22). You are working

on getting your act together this month. You are initially focused on your finances and getting out from under your debts. You also want a more intimate connection with your partner, and to have more open dialogue. Deeper problems can be solved with more open communication. This is a great month to focus on improving your work and health routines. You are much more expressive at work, and you may need to filter some of your comments. In the latter half of the month, you experience better conditions for travel, communications, and improving your social-media presence. Don't overthink everything. Find a good plan and stick with it!

**LEO** (July 23–August 22). Relationships are your big focus this month! If you are involved, this is a super time to renew those vows. If you are single and available, you are more magnetic this month and people will be drawn to you. Relationship problems are more easily addressed as well. This can also bring better business contacts to all Leos. Getting yourself in better shape is also part of the larger plan that is being initiated this month and will continue throughout the year. By midmonth, you are connecting with people on a deeper level. Finances are more important as we become more conscious about what motivates us. You will need more intimate time with your partner in the latter part of the month.

**VIRGO** (August 23–September 22). This is a busy month for you. At home, you are focusing on family and making your nest a more comfortable place. Family members can irritate you more easily this month. Don't hold your anger in. You are getting back to the normal routines that you lost during the holidays. You are paying more attention to exercise and what you eat. This is also a great month to get your office or work space in better shape. Near the end of the month, you are shifting your focus to your relationships and making necessary improvements there. In the last week of the month you will need some time for yourself, so be sure and put that on your schedule.

**LIBRA** (September 23–October 23). You are much more creative this month. It's a super month to explore art and metaphysics classes, and to make new friends in the process. At home, you are looking at some major changes. You could be moving, doing some remodeling, and taking on more of a leadership role in your

family. You are valuing your time more, and will be more selective about who you allow into your life. In the second half of the month, you are paying more attention to your health and work routines. Near the end of the month, you may want to get out of town for a retreat! Old friends can be especially important to you this month.

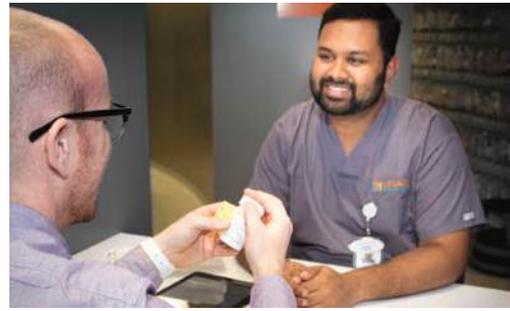
**SCORPIO** (October 24–November 21). With Jupiter (planet of growth and expansion) in your sign until next November, you are in a particularly good period. Jupiter has you feeling more open and optimistic about your future. Jupiter helps with social contacts, business support, and professional promotions. This month you are working on being more grounded. Although there is a lot of opportunity, you must make some choices about which direction you're headed. Family is also very important this month, so that may take time away from some of your other activities. Near the end of the month, you enter a very creative period. This can be good for writing, teaching, taking art classes, and even feeling closer to your children or your own inner child.

**SAGITTARIUS** (November 22–December 21). Mars (planet of action, power, initiation, and anger) is in your sign until mid-March. With Mars, you have more courage and energy to get out and have an adventure. You will pay more attention to your health, and be more direct with people in your environment. Your communication and organization skills are enhanced this month. You will be more comfortable putting your ideas and views out there for others to see. At midmonth, you are spending more time at home and/or with your family, but you also need some time to retreat. You may feel pulled in two different directions—the need to be active, and the need to get some time to yourself. Plan that time for yourself at the end of the month.

**CAPRICORN** (December 22–January 19). With Saturn, your ruling planet, in your sign for the next two years, you are in a big period of review about your life direction, purpose, and personal boundaries. Some things you will keep, and others you will get rid of. This month you are interested in your financial picture and getting rid of debts that make you feel very trapped. You are also examining how much your services are worth. Friends and business associations can be very good for promoting you or your services.

*continued on page 93*

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On December 14, Lambda NextGen hosted its 2017 holiday party at the Aria Stone Gallery in the Decorative Center of Houston. Pictured are **Shawn Kuehn, Kristian Jonsson, Rosy Mota, James Spear, Lindsey Sheinthal, Guillermo Flores, and Alan Prewitt.**



On December 16, the Diana Foundation hosted its holiday party at Houston House. Pictured are past presidents **Michael Kemper, Tanner Williams, and Frank Staggs;** current president **Dan Maxwell;** **Earl Krieger; Bill Poplin;** and **John Heinzerling.**



On January 6, the Diana Foundation hosted a happy hour at Guava Lamp. Pictured are **Thom Guthrie, Miles Frey, Travis DeShotel, Michael Liebbert, and Michael Alexander.**



On January 6, the Krewe of Olympus hosted its Twelfth Night Party at Central Houston Cadillac. Pictured are **Dwane Todd, Josh Salinas, Sarah Sweet, Hudson Rains,** Queen Olympus XLVII **Fred White,** and King Olympus XLVII **Andy Eversole.**



On January 10, the Greater Houston LGBT Chamber of Commerce hosted Brewing Up Business at Metro. Pictured are **Roy Alvarez Jr., Tom Jasien, Christina Connor, Luis Garcia, Randall Ellis, Tammi Wallace, and Gary Wood.**



On January 10, the Harris County Democratic Party hosted its January Brown Bag Lunch with Luis M. Lopez. Pictured are **Francisco Castillo, Odus Evbagaru, Lillie Schechter, Luis Lopez, Jael Casiano, and Mohammad Jamal.**



On January 12, John Ross Palmer hosted his 44th Birthday Barbecue. Pictured are Palmer and guests.



On January 14, Bunnies on the Bayou hosted Snow Bunnies at Rich's. Picture are **Kurt Grether, Akil Jones, Huzefa Tayabali, and Jarett Rubin.**



On January 20, the Krewe of Olympus hosted Ball XLVIII, "Cocktail Culture," at NRG Center. Pictured are King Olympus XLVII **Andy Eversole,** King Olympus XLVIII **Bruce Reeves,** Captain Olympus XLVIII **Clint Harwell,** Queen Olympus XLVIII **Nick Kowalewski,** and Queen Olympus XLVII **Fred White.**



On January 21, OutReach United hosted a launch party and Mardi Gras brunch at the home of Gary Wood and Bryant Johnson. Pictured are members of the board and representatives from the 2018 beneficiaries.



On January 21, Buffalo Soldiers Museum hosted a Wedding Extravaganza Expo. Pictured are **Isaías Hernandez,** caterer **David Alcorta,** and **Froi Flores.**



On January 22, AIDS Foundation Houston hosted Rock the Walk at El Tiempo. Pictured are **Jessica Rossman, Travis Torrence, Kelly Young, Melody Patelis, and Chris Lewis.**



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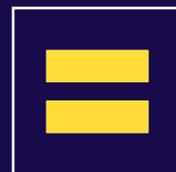
For tickets and information, visit

[hrchouston.org](http://hrchouston.org)

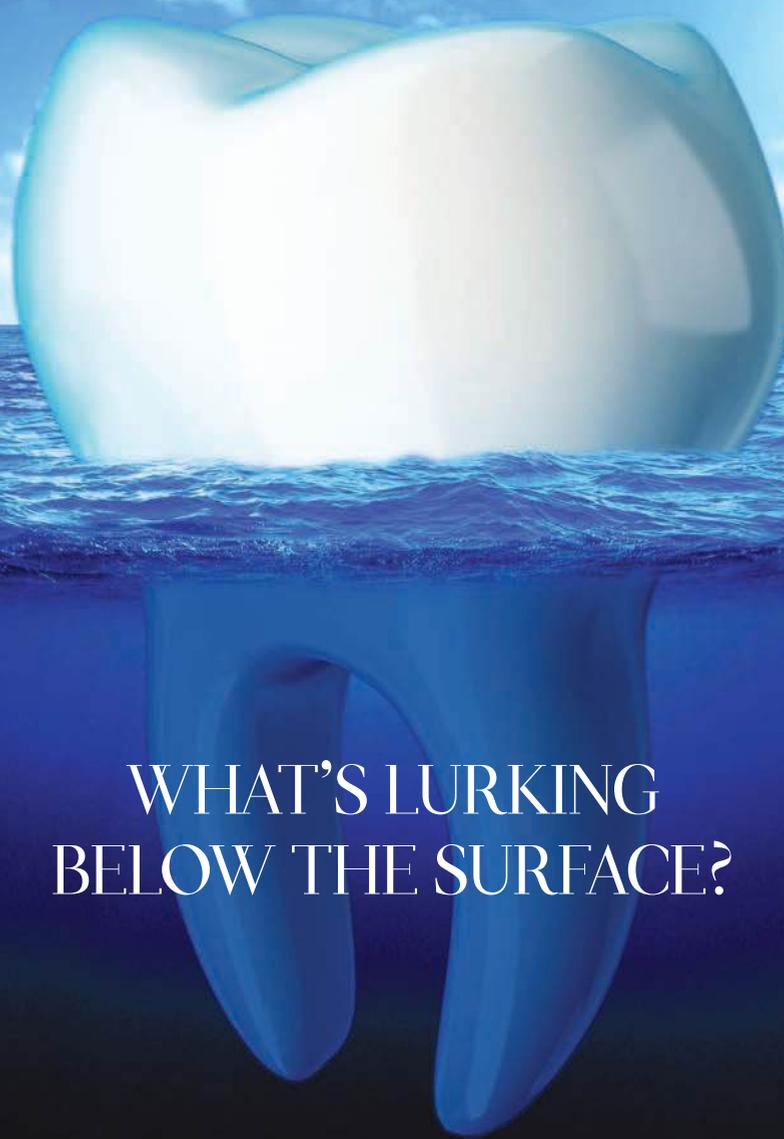
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