

FEB. '20 HOUSTON'S LGBTQ MAGAZINE

OutSmart

**Black
History
Month**

**AMBASSADOR
of AWARENESS**

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UP WITH THE CDC
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Love Bugs

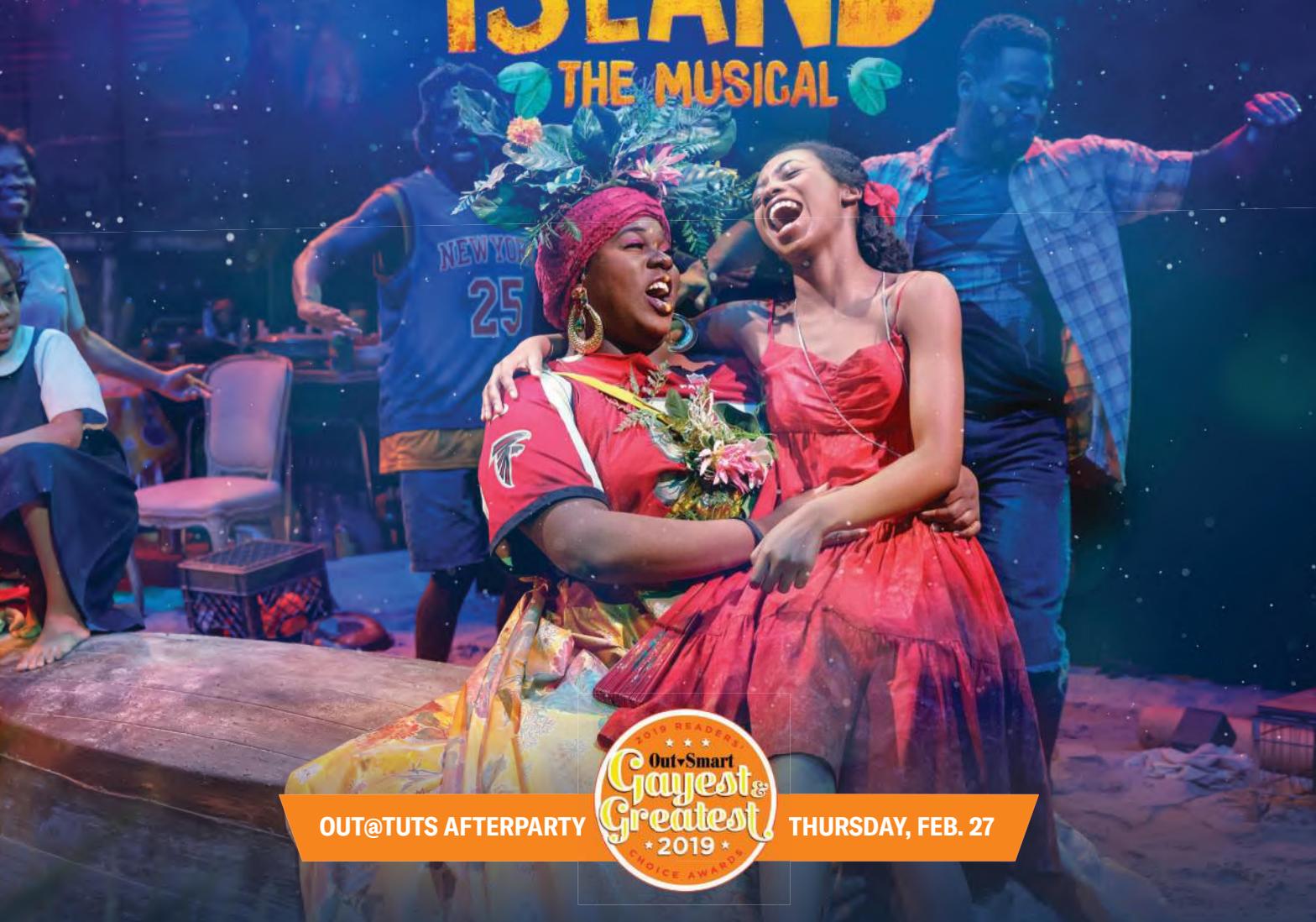
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SHARE THEIR
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Tristan Erickson and Ruben Salazar turn insects into art. Pg.72

Photography by ASHKAN ROAYAE



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

Subscriptions: \$30/12 Issues, \$58/24 Issues

E-mail: letters@outsmartmagazine.com

Website: OutSmartMagazine.com

OUTSMART is published monthly. Estimated readership in Houston and surrounding areas is 60,000. OutSmart Media Company is not responsible for claims and practices of advertisers. The opinions and views expressed herein do not necessarily reflect those of the staff or management of OUTSMART. Inclusion in OUTSMART does not imply sexual orientation. ©2020 by OutSmart Media Company. All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or part without permission of the publisher is strictly prohibited. Unsolicited material is accepted. No manuscript returned without SASE.



Last month, the National LGBTQ Task Force presented its annual Creating Change Conference in Dallas, bringing together thousands of LGBTQ leaders, activists, and advocates. In this February issue of *OUTSMART*, writer Andrew Edmonson reports the key takeaways from the annual confab.

During the conference, *OUTSMART* columnist and pioneering Houston trans activist Monica Roberts brought home the Susan J. Hyde Award for Longevity. We applaud Roberts, who in a Valentine's Day edition of her *Unapologetically Trans* column, opens up about the challenges she faces while dating as a trans public figure.

For those of you who aren't big on V-Day, columnist and psychiatrist Daryl Shorter, MD, tells us to ditch the heart-shaped candy and turn February 14 into a day that reminds us to tell our loved ones how much we appreciate them.

Elsewhere, writer Ryan Leach catches up with Dr. Gordon Crofoot, whose Montrose-area research center is conducting one of eight worldwide HIV vaccine trials. "The South [bears] a disproportionate burden of new and overall HIV infections for a variety of reasons," Crofoot notes. Several Houston activists have responses to this, including two Black LGBTQ leaders featured in this Black History Month issue.

Leach also chats with Derrick Brown, AIDS Foundation Houston's new chief development officer, about community engagement and connecting with donors, while writer Kim Hogstrom interviews Impulse Group Houston's new president, Ian Haddock, who recently teamed up with the CDC to tackle stigma against HIV.

Speaking of LGBTQ Houstonians who are taking over, our cover stars Ruben Salazar and Tristan Erickson are a part of this month's roundup of local queer power couples. Writer

Sam Byrd talks to Salazar and Erickson about *Bug in the Box*, the duo's booming business that preserves, stages, and decorates insects in artistic displays.

Finally, don't miss writer Jenny Block's story on photographer B. Proud. Keep an eye out for this renowned documentary photographer when she visits Houston next month to photograph local trans couples.

See you in March!



Lourdes Zavaleta
MANAGING EDITOR



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Ann Johnson Runs for Texas House District 134

Out candidate challenges Republican incumbent Sarah Davis.

By MARENE GUSTIN

Attorney Ann Johnson, 45, who comes from a family of lawyers, has worked for Texas State Representatives Mike Martin and Craig Eiland, United States Congressman Jack Brooks in the House Judiciary Committee, as well as in the Legislative Affairs Office of the White House during the Clinton Administration and the Harris County District Attorney's Office. The native Houstonian is now running to represent constituents in west Houston's District 134, in an effort to flip the Texas statehouse blue.

And this isn't her first time.

"The district was represented by Democrat Ellen Cohen," she recalls. "But she lost a close race in 2010 when the Tea Party sweep brought in Republican Sarah Davis." Not impressed with Davis' track record for gutting education funding in 2011, Johnson looked around for a candidate to support in the 2012 election.

"There wasn't a Democrat running," she says. "So I just said, 'I'm all in,' and ran against her." Johnson had just come out at the time, but the district had a healthy population of LGBTQ residents, at least in the beginning. "We were doing really well," Johnson says, "until they redrew the district." The new map was 57 percent Republican, with all of the Montrose precincts deleted. Even so, Johnson was able to win 45 percent of the vote. After the election, she left politics to start up a Human Trafficking Section for the Harris County D.A.'s office in 2013.

After being in private practice for the past three years, the Houston native has decided to throw her hat into the ring again. She faces two Democratic opponents in the March 3 primary—Lanny Bose and Ruby Powers. Johnson has gotten to know her challengers during the early part of the campaign and says they are all focused on the same fact: that



Super Tuesday is Looming

On March 3, Ann Johnson faces two other Democratic opponents in the primary race for Texas House District 134.

Sarah Davis is not right for the district.

"As part of the Republican Party, Davis has helped gut state education funding, and she voted to not expand Medicaid in Texas under the Affordable Care Act, leaving \$114 million in our tax dollars off the table," Johnson says. "I think if you educate people and keep them healthy, they can take care of everything else."

Johnson also believes that the time has

passed for sensible gun-control regulation, noting that four of the top-ten mass shootings have occurred in Texas in the last decade. Davis has been endorsed by the National Rifle Association and received an "A" rating for her stance on gun rights.

Another thing that sets the two candidates apart is climate change. Johnson says that

NEWS CONTINUED ON PAGE 84

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- ▶ **Severe liver problems,** which in rare cases can lead to death. Tell your healthcare provider right away if you get these symptoms: skin or the white part of your eyes turns yellow, dark “tea-colored” urine, light-colored stools, loss of appetite for several days or longer, nausea, or stomach-area pain.
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GILEAD

A Transgender Liberation Agenda

Calls for visibility and justice dominate the 2020 Creating Change Conference in Dallas.

By ANDREW EDMONSON

Three thousand LGBTQ activists, advocates, and leaders descended on Dallas January 15–19 for the thirty-second Creating Change Conference. The annual LGBTQ event, one of the largest in the world, is sponsored by the National LGBTQ Task Force. Its theme this year was “Learning, Love and Liberation.”

The conference’s goal is “to build the LGBTQ movement’s political power from the ground up to secure our overarching goal of full freedom, justice, and equality for LGBTQ people and their families in the United States.”

The conference bristled with political energy, and it didn’t shrink from diving headlong into some of the most contentious political issues in this election year:

NEWS CONTINUED ON PAGE 86



DEVON FROVLANO

Investing in Our Leaders

Trans women of color were front and center of the Creating Change 2020 conference.

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By LOURDES ZVALETA

QUEER THINGS to DO

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Mobilize for a Cause
The 2020 March for Black Women Houston will include a rally to the polls for early voting.



COMMUNITY
FEBRUARY 22

March for Black Women Houston

For two years and counting, Houston's March for Black Women has celebrated the lives of Black women and their contributions to society. Created by Black and LGBTQ activists Candice Webber and Nisha Randle, the event is intended to uplift Black women of all sexu-

alities and gender identities. In 2019, the event commemorated several milestones, including the election of 17 Black judges to the Harris County courts. This year's rally will promote the Black women (and their allies) who are running for office, and the event will conclude with a march to the poll-

ing location on the Texas Southern University campus. If you're unable to vote with the group, Super Tuesday voting is March 3, and early voting runs February 21–28. For more information on sponsorships or tabling at the event, visit m4bwhou@gmail.com or tinyurl.com/vo3t3rp.

COMMUNITY
February 14 (thru the 25th)
Mardi Gras Galveston

From February 14 through February 25, visit Galveston Island for the nation's third-largest Mardi Gras celebration. There will be parades, parties, and performances. tinyurl.com/wdh4qzx



MUSIC
February 27
Abundantly Queer

Houston artists Space Kiddettes and Stoo host Abundantly Queer, a monthly LGBTQ performer showcase at Pearl Bar Houston. tinyurl.com/w26xutb

THEATER
FEBRUARY 27

Out@TUTS

Join OUTSMART at Theatre Under The Stars for Out@TUTS, featuring *Once on This Island*. The show starts at 7:30 p.m., then mix and mingle with the cast at an after-party hosted by drag star Regina Blake-DuBois.
tinyurl.com/tbemnay



POLITICS

February 1

**2020 PRIMARIES
 ENDORSEMENT MEETING**

The Houston GLBT Political Caucus holds its 2020 Primary Elections Endorsement Meeting at St. Stephen's Episcopal Church. In order to be eligible to vote, one must have become a member by January 1, 2020.
tinyurl.com/w3hc8gm

COMMUNITY

February 2

PRIDE MARKET

Every first Sunday of the month, Pearl Bar Houston hosts Pride Market, an event for LGBTQ vendors to showcase and sell their work. Attendees must be over 21, and the market features food, clothes, art, and more.
tinyurl.com/rdjm3vr

COMMUNITY

February 5

SPRING GAYLA KICKOFF

The Montrose Center kicks off its upcoming Spring Gayla: TV Land with a party at the Color Factory. Visit the interactive art exhibit and learn more about the Center's April 25 event, which benefits LGBTQ homeless youth in Houston.
tinyurl.com/u7cv2fd

COMEDY

February 5

MARY'S COMEDY HOUSE

Explore the intersectionality of living the LGBTQ African-American experience during The Mahogany Project's Living in Color event. The forum, which occurs bi-monthly at the Montrose Center, provides personal insight on topics such as social issues, mental health, and community engagement.
tinyurl.com/t6tbpoq

COMMUNITY

February 8

**AUSTRALIAN BUSHFIRE
 CHARITY SHOW**

Galveston LGBTQ activist Jamie Fuller-Waymire has organized a charity event at Robert's Lafitte that benefits the wildlife that has been endangered by the Australian bushfires. Visit the historic Island bar for entertainment, an auction, and more. Proceeds benefit Wires, an Australian nonprofit.
tinyurl.com/t5n89aq

February 14 is Valentine's Day

POLITICS

February 15

**MOVIMIENTO 2020
 PRESIDENTIAL FORUM**

Jolt Action, a Latinx civic-engagement organization led by openly gay Houstonian Antonio Arellano, hosts the Movimiento 2020 Presidential Forum at San Jacinto College. The youth-led forum will question the Democratic presidential candidates about issues such as healthcare, immigration, racial equity, gun control, and more.
tinyurl.com/rmbbk7k

COMMUNITY

February 15

**SPIRIT OF LEATHER
 AWARDS & DINNER**

The National Leather Association Houston will host its annual Spirit of Leather Awards at the Montrose Center to recognize and honor those who serve and make contributions to the Houston leather community.
tinyurl.com/vdj5qd3

COMMUNITY

February 22

DRAG DIVA BRUNCH

Go to House of Blues Houston for Drag Diva Brunch. This month's event is themed Wizards and Waffles, and parodies the popular children's book series *Harry Potter*.
tinyurl.com/uy2cm74

SOCIAL

February 22

**HOUSTON GAYMERS
 MEETUP**

The Houston Gaymers host their February Main Meetup at Guava Lamp at 9 p.m. Meet fellow LGBTQ gamers while playing games from every major console.
tinyurl.com/rob7znm

COMMUNITY

February 23

**DECADENT DESSERTS
 & DANCING**

Go to Neon Boots Dancehall & Saloon for Decadent Desserts and Dancing. LGBTQ Houston's most delicious event benefits AssistHers, a group that provides resources for vulnerable women in the community.
tinyurl.com/v87eksa



COMMUNITY

February 27 (thru March 1)

LUEY WEEKEND 47

From February 27 through March 1, the Houston Council of Clubs will hold its annual Let Us Entertain You (LUEY) Weekend. LUEY Weekend: 47 is an LGBTQ leather party that brings together organizations, businesses, and local bars. LUEY Day 1 will begin at Buddy's Houston.
tinyurl.com/w2zquok

MORE QUEER THINGS TO DO →

QUEER THINGS to DO

SAVE the DATES

COMMUNITY

March 1

AIDS Walk Houston



Take the next step in helping to end the HIV epidemic at Houston's 31st annual AIDS Walk. Hosted by AIDS Foundation Houston and beginning downtown at Sam Houston Park, funds raised from the 1.8-mile walk will go to local HIV/AIDS service organizations that provide programs to the almost 30,000 Houstonians impacted by the virus. Walk by yourself, or sign up as a team leader and bring your friends, family, and coworkers to walk with you. To register for the event, visit AIDSWalkHouston.org.

SOCIAL

March 13

LGBTQ Veterans Happy Hour

Every second Friday of the month, hang out with LGBTQ veterans and allies at a Happy Hour event at Buddy's Houston. The event kicks off with karaoke, hosted by Houston's DJ Cori.

tinyurl.com/v5rwy2c

COMMUNITY

March 14

Out for Health

Founded and organized by students across all Texas health science centers, Out for Health is an annual health conference that addresses the needs of LGBTQ people. This year's conference is held at the University of Texas Medical Branch in Galveston, and discusses uplifting marginalized communities and how medical professionals can learn to provide more inclusive healthcare.

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Cupid's Arrow Keeps Missing Me

The difficulties of dating when you're an internationally known trans advocate.

Happy Valentine's Day, for all you people who are fortunate enough to be hugged up with the person you love. And in this Houston TBLGQ+ community, I get to see on a regular basis more than a few happy couples.

Some of y'all have recently gotten engaged. Others have been together for only a few years. Some have been together for decades. And I'm envious of all of you peeps who are role modeling relationship goals in real-time.

While I'm told by the peeps who love and care about me that my fabulous, unapologetically trans self is talented in many areas, unfortunately, there's one thing I consistently suck at, and I get reminded of it every February 14—or whenever someone asks me who I'm dating.

The area that I'm not so successful at is being in a long-term relationship.

The joke I tell about my relationship dry spell is that I've been wandering the dating Sinai Desert for so long that the hooked-up couples who are headed to the relationship Promised Land just stop, look at me, shake their heads, and resume their journeys as I head in the opposite direction looking for my special perfect one.

It's not like I haven't had suitors vying for my romantic attention. The problem is that the people who approached me did so acting as if I, as an unapologetically trans feminine person, am so starved for romantic attention that I would just fall to the floor and be grateful they chose me.

Naw, boo boo kitties. Just like my cis feminine counterparts, Moni has expectations and standards, and you are going to have to put in some work to capture my attention and my heart.

Chocolate and flowers I love. I expect them on my doorstep on Valentine's Day, my birthday, or both. Peanut butter or snickerdoodle cookies from Tiff's Treats also work.

If you're going to date me, you do so knowing that I am an internationally known and



out trans advocate, and I get busy at times. That means that I get invited to fundraisers and other events that will at times require you to join me as my plus-one. I travel to various events and conferences around the country, which translates to me being on the go and in a hotel room somewhere. That travel ramps up significantly during a Texas Legislative Session.

I'm not giving up that activism to stay in the trans closet (as one potential trans suitor wanted me to do). My people and my community need me. I like doing the advocacy work, and it's a part of who I am.

Because I have been on local and national television news shows, there are moments when I am recognized while I am out and about, and my close friends can co-sign that happening.

Even though I am a notoriously picky eater, I like to go out to eat from time to time. I also like attending collegiate and professional sports events, going to museums, and going to movies and plays. I like doing participatory sports like tennis, bowling, shooting pool, and

playing miniature golf. All those activities will sometimes require you, as a person interested in dating moi, to take me out during daylight or early evening hours. If you are unwilling to handle that, step.

If you are ashamed to let your family or homies know that you like dating trans people like me, don't approach me until you can be fearless in unapologetically stating that you like trans women.

Those are my minimum requirements in terms of what I'm looking for in a long-term relationship partner.

Something else that is playing into why I've been single for so long is my transition. When I started transitioning in 1994, I put myself on a five-year dating hiatus in order to focus on getting comfortable in my own skin, becoming the best person I can be, and dealing with all the issues brought on by my second puberty. I didn't want to deal with trying to be in a relationship with all of that going on.

Then I started getting active in Texas and national trans activism, and that put love on

CONTINUED ON PAGE 58



“I want to thank Houston’s LGBTQ Community for all the support you’ve given me over the past twenty-seven years as State Representative.

It’s a privilege to represent you in Austin. I promise I’ll continue fighting for equality and fairness for LGBTQ Texans.”

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SECURE Your Retirement Savings

How to reduce your tax bill on inherited retirement funds.

On January 1, 2020, some significant new rules for retirement savings accounts went into effect. The Setting Every Community Up for Retirement Enhancement (SECURE) Act is the most sweeping legislative change to our retirement system in over a decade. With the goal of boosting retirement savings across the country, the SECURE Act provides some nice incentives for investors. But where Uncle Sam gives, he oftentimes takes away as well.

In fact, some of the components of the SECURE Act can be particularly detrimental to the LGBTQ community, especially those who have listed someone other than a spouse as a beneficiary on their Traditional IRA or other retirement plan.

Here's an overview of the SECURE Act, along with details on how you or your loved ones may be impacted and some ideas on what you can do now.

Keep Saving beyond Age 70

Given that the average U.S. savings rate is an abysmal 7.9 percent (as of late 2019), the SECURE Act is aimed at easing the nation's looming retirement crisis. With a whole host of obstacles like market volatility, low interest rates, inflation, and longevity, one of the top worries on the minds of both retirees and those who are approaching retirement is running out of money while it's still needed.

But the SECURE Act includes several provisions that could help, such as:

- Allowing investors to continue making contributions to Traditional IRAs and retirement plans indefinitely. Previously, those over the age of 70½ were required to stop contributing.
- Increasing the required minimum distribution (RMD) age on traditional retirement plans from 70½ to 72, which can allow funds in the account(s) to keep growing tax-deferred for a while longer. (As it currently stands, an individual who turned 70½ in 2019 will still have to take their RMD in 2019 and



2020, even though they may not turn 72 until 2021. Those who turn 70½ in the year 2020, however, will not be required to take their RMD until they reach age 72, which could be in 2021 or 2022.)

- Allowing longer-term part-time employees to participate in employer-sponsored retirement plans.
- Letting workers take withdrawals of up to \$5,000 penalty-free from retirement plans for the birth or adoption of a child.
- Allowing penalty-free withdrawals of up to \$10,000 from 529 college savings plans to help repay student loans.
- Allowing taxpayers with high medical bills to deduct unreimbursed medical expenses that exceed 7.5 percent of their adjusted gross income (in 2019 and 2020). Funds may also be accessed penalty-free from IRAs and qualified retirement plans to cover costs that exceed this threshold.

Simplified Savings Plans for Businesses

If you own (or you are employed by) a small company, the SECURE Act will make it easier

and less costly to set up and administer “safe harbor” retirement plans such as a 401(k).

Businesses can also offer lifetime income annuities within their retirement plans, which allows employees to plan for an ongoing, predictable income stream in retirement. Similarly, if an employer-sponsored retirement plan is discontinued, participants may directly transfer their annuity (as well as other lifetime-income investments) penalty-free to another retirement plan.

A Significant SECURE Drawback

While the SECURE Act definitely offers some enticing features, there is one area that can place a significant amount of your hard-earned retirement savings directly into Uncle Sam's pocket. That is due to the elimination of the “stretch” IRA.

Previously, when Traditional IRA funds were inherited by a non-spouse beneficiary, the recipient was allowed to take withdrawals over a long period of time, based on his or her life expectancy. This, in turn, helped to ease the tax burden—especially for younger beneficiaries whose withdrawals could be spread out for many years or even decades (thus the term “stretch IRA”).

Following the passage of the SECURE

CONTINUED ON PAGE 52



D.A. Kim Ogg, on the cover of Out Smart Magazine June, 2017.

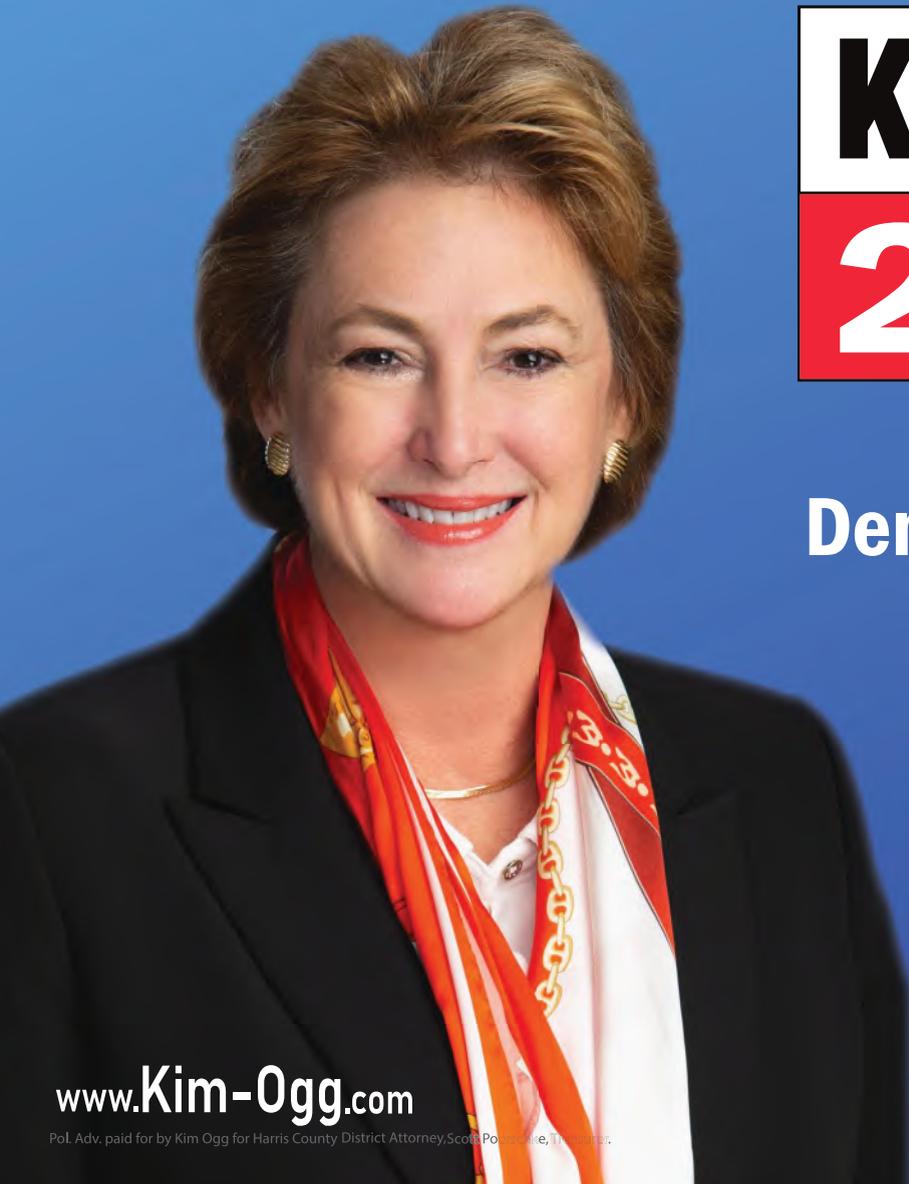
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Cyberspace Silliness

Governor Abbott sounds the alarm over Iran's online invasion.



Bless his heart, Texas Governor Greg Abbott has it floored in neutral. In all fairness, if Governor Greg is not tottering on the edge of paranoid hysteria with a splash of silly poured over it, then he's either asleep or passed out at the dinner table.

Right after the assassination of Iran's Vice Ayatollah, Abbott told the *Houston Chronicle* that Texas officials "have identified Iran as the origin of as many as 10,000 attempted attacks per minute" on the State of Texas computer system.

Oh, silver-plated rodeo rope with mother-of-pearl handles lassoing in the sunset! I think Abbott got confused and quoted the number of visits to pornographic websites by Texas evangelical preachers using State computers.

Texas must be the biggest anti-Persian power on earth (and two neighboring planets) to be subjected to 10,000 attempted hacks per minute. But Texas—fully armed, loaded, and ready to fight a damn war with Bubba and Melvin over at the shooting range

(leading the troops currently housed at trailer parks in Grimes County, and I have proof of that)—is holding off them damn Iranian computer hackers.

Okay, here's my proof about the trailer parks in Grimes County:



If you've never heard of Confederate Heroes Day, it's never heard of you, either. How totally inventive of Grimes County to put Confederate Heroes Day on Martin Luther King Day, where nobody would ever think to look. You can bet your best pair of pink boots that every trailer park in Grimes County will be decked out with Confederate battle flags and white-nationalism symbols on Confederate Heroes Day. (Oh, wait—that's how they decorate on every damn day of the year.)

Back to the idea of 10,000 Ira-

nian computer hacks per minute on the State of Texas computer system.

According to a statement released by the Texas Department of Information Resources (where Abbott claims he's getting his information about the 10,000 hacks per minute), they don't know a thing about that and they sure didn't tell the governor anything. The DIR says they observed an increase in *global* network activity. You know, an increase. From all over the damn place. On the globe. That's all they know. They didn't count, and they sure didn't leave the counting up to Abbott, because as we've seen before, when he counts past 10 he's gotta take off his shoes.

One hacking attempt did get the job done, though. Our big doofus agriculture commissioner, Sid Miller, got his website breached.



However, even Miller says it was probably the work of kids.

"It's not clear how the hackers got into the website. Officials don't think it was Iran, but they suspect it may have been youth participating in some type of cyber challenge," Miller said.

Good Lord, he's got that all figured out, and he's an idiot.

Yeah, and I don't think Iranians would name themselves #theloserteam. However, on the upside, Abbott could use that hashtag without having to pay a licensing fee.

One more thing, before I leave you to face the yearly bodacious sequin-glitter-and-candy competition also known as St. Valentine's Day: I wish you calorie-free candy and a cutie-pie who adores you. And if you're out on Valentine's and see someone alone, secretly pay for their coffee or their lunch because, dammit, everybody needs to smile.

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



MUSEUM DISTRICT

Institute Lane | \$3.7+mil
5/4.5+ - ±6,556 sf
restored masterpiece on a 19,000+ sf lot | formals | pool/spa
Marty Warren | 713.459.7479



RIVER OAKS AREA

Ella Lee Lane | \$2.9+mil
4/5.5 - ±5,295 sf
modern with sophisticated elegance on corner lot | pool
Wade Knight | 713.582.0264



BEACHTOWN

Shiraz Passage | \$1.1+mil
4/4.5 - ±3,353 sf
magnificent beachside home | 5 spectacular verandas | media room
Jim Rosenfeld | 713.854.1303



CYPRESS

Garwood Drive | \$680s
5/4.5 - ±4,485 sf
epic corner lot | generous upgrades | island kitchen | covered patio
Teresa Henderson | 281.217.0211



MONTROSE

W Saulnier Street | \$670s
3/3.5 - ±3,142 sf
gated area | pristine home | ideal location | elevator installed
Wade Knight | 713.582.0264



TANGLEWOOD AREA

Potomac Drive | \$440s
3-4/3 - ±3,446 sf
stellar location | 3 fireplaces | grand master suite | gated area
Jim Rosenfeld | 713.854.1303

Beyond Valentine's Day

A reminder to tell your loved ones that you appreciate them.

By DARYL SHORTER, MD



As we all know, not too many people get excited about Valentine's Day. Fond memories of "Will You Be My Valentine?" cards passed around childhood classrooms

have long since been replaced by cynical references to V-Day as a pseudo-holiday created by chocolatiers and greeting-card companies. For some, February 14 is a stark reminder of what it is they may not have yet most desire—a loving partner, a supportive and enriching intimate relationship, or perhaps even just a dinner date.

With some reconsideration, the barrage of candied hearts can serve as a different kind of mental and emotional prompt. Instead of Valentine's Day representing all that may be missing from our personal relationships, this holiday can serve as a reminder of the importance of telling the people who are present in our lives how much we love and appreciate them.

Do Heart Emojis Count?

In a recent conversation, I asked a group of people about the last time they heard or said the words "I love you." Perhaps not surprisingly, many in the group said they might go one to several days without hearing or saying those words. In spite of frequent communication with close friends or family via text or social media, expressions of affection were doled out more sparingly than one might think. In fact, some people said they sometimes go several days without receiving a hug or supportive touch from another person.

While most of us agree it is important to express and receive affection from those we love, it can still be pretty difficult cultivating relationships where that love is consistently and explicitly stated. Text messaging has radically shifted our style of communication, and while texting can make it easier to let people know we care, does a heart emoji

land in the same way as actual spoken words? Studies would suggest they do not. Despite our increased online connectivity with others, people are reporting higher rates of loneliness and feelings of isolation.

Why's It So Hard to Say I Love You?

Perhaps you grew up in a home environment where expressions of love among family members were not encouraged, because showing emotion of any kind was viewed as a sign of weakness. If your feelings are repeatedly invalidated by others who are close to you (such as parents or caretakers), then you learn pretty quickly that it isn't safe or acceptable to share much about anything, including ourselves.

Demonstrating affection is not always supported outside of the home, either. Even in relationships with friends and chosen family, while it may be a bit easier to express caring, taboos remain about those verbal expressions of love since beliefs about weakness are not limited to family relationships.

When growing up in a society where LGBTQ affection and sexual desire is seen as pathological or immoral, you are literally taught by the broader society that your love, as well as your way of loving and expressing love, is wrong. LGBTQ folks are encouraged by society to hide their love, to deny it, and to push it or pray it away. Suppressing natural desires for love, affection, and closeness in an effort to mask sexual orientation, or to desexualize one's self in order to literally preserve physical safety (as with trans and/or nonbinary people) is the reality for many—both prior to and after coming out.

Mentally and emotionally, the suppression of LGBTQ love and desire doesn't just end with curtailing outward expressions of affection in front of people who do not identify as LGBTQ.

It is extremely difficult to limit this type of repression to just one domain of life. The skill of suppression, which might literally be lifesaving for some, does not turn off quite so easily. Suppressing one's feelings can continue into our most intimate relationships, preventing us from being fully and authentically present, or causing us to stay quiet when we feel strongly towards others, including platonic love.

How Do I Communicate Love?

While it may be important to say "I love you" via social media, texting, or even in casual conversation, there is something deeper and more meaningful in fully expressing how much we care. We should not take for granted that people want to hear that they are loved.

Expressing love with others is like any other skill: it can be practiced and mastered over time. Part of this skill includes selecting those people who are open to receiving our messages of love. It would be overly optimistic to think or expect that all people to whom we express affection are ready to receive it in the spirit with which it is being given. Choose carefully.

Remember, we don't always know who is in need of a kind and loving word. So if you happen to be someone who receives lots of verbal expressions of love, pay it forward. The gift you give by saying "I love you" might be the only one your friend or family receives.

So, instead of asking, "Will you be my Valentine?" ask someone, "Did you know you are loved?"

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



Love Triangle

- 1.5 oz Dripping Springs Vodka
- 0.5 oz Creme de Violette
- 0.25 oz Maraschino Liqueur
- 0.25 oz Fresh Lime Juice
- Splash of soda water



Add all ingredients to a shaker tin with ice.
Shake well for 45-60 seconds and strain
into a chilled coupe glass.

Compliments of Industry Bar- San Marcos, TX



Important Facts About DOVATO

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

What is the Most Important Information I Should Know about DOVATO?

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

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

What is DOVATO?

DOVATO is a prescription medicine that is used without other antiretroviral medicines to treat HIV-1 infection in adults who have not received antiretroviral medicines in the past, **and** without known resistance to the medicines dolutegravir or lamivudine. HIV-1 is the virus that causes Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS). It is not known if DOVATO is safe and effective in children.

Who should not take DOVATO?

Do Not Take DOVATO if you:

- have ever had an allergic reaction to a medicine that contains dolutegravir or lamivudine.
- take dofetilide.

What should I tell my healthcare provider before using DOVATO?

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

- have or have had liver problems, including hepatitis B or C infection.
- have kidney problems.
- are pregnant or plan to become pregnant. One of the medicines in DOVATO (dolutegravir) may harm your unborn baby.
 - Your healthcare provider may prescribe a different medicine than DOVATO if you are planning to become pregnant or if pregnancy is confirmed in the first 12 weeks of pregnancy.
 - If you can become pregnant, your healthcare provider will perform a pregnancy test before you start treatment with DOVATO.
 - If you can become pregnant, you should consistently use effective birth control (contraception) during treatment with DOVATO.
 - Tell your healthcare provider right away if you are planning to become pregnant, you become pregnant, or think you may be pregnant during treatment with DOVATO.

Tell your healthcare provider about all of your medical conditions, including if you: (cont'd)

- are breastfeeding or plan to breastfeed. **Do not breastfeed if you take DOVATO.**
 - You should not breastfeed if you have HIV-1 because of the risk of passing HIV-1 to your baby.
 - One of the medicines in DOVATO (lamivudine) passes into your breastmilk.
 - Talk with your healthcare provider about the best way to feed your baby.

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

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

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

What are Possible Side Effects of DOVATO?

DOVATO can cause serious side effects, including:

- Those in the “What is the Most Important Information I Should Know about DOVATO?” section.
- **Allergic reactions.** Call your healthcare provider right away if you develop a rash with DOVATO. Stop taking DOVATO and get medical help right away if you develop a rash with any of the following signs or symptoms: fever; generally ill feeling; tiredness; muscle or joint aches; blisters or sores in mouth; blisters or peeling of the skin; redness or swelling of the eyes; swelling of the mouth, face, lips, or tongue; problems breathing.
- **Liver problems.** People with a history of hepatitis B or C virus may have an increased risk of developing new or worsening changes in certain liver tests during treatment with DOVATO. Liver problems, including liver failure, have also happened in people without a history of liver disease or other risk factors. Your healthcare provider may do blood tests to check your liver.
Tell your healthcare provider right away if you get any of the following signs or symptoms of liver problems: your skin or the white part of your eyes turns yellow (jaundice); dark or “tea-colored” urine; light-colored stools (bowel movements); nausea or vomiting; loss of appetite; and/or pain, aching, or tenderness on the right side of your stomach area.
- **Too much lactic acid in your blood (lactic acidosis).** Lactic acidosis is a serious medical emergency that can lead to death. **Tell your healthcare provider right away if you get any of the following symptoms that could be signs of lactic acidosis:** feel very weak or tired; unusual (not normal) muscle pain; trouble breathing; stomach pain with nausea and vomiting; feel cold, especially in your arms and legs; feel dizzy or lightheaded; and/or a fast or irregular heartbeat.
- **Lactic acidosis can also lead to severe liver problems,** which can lead to death. Your liver may become large (hepatomegaly) and you may develop fat in your liver (steatosis). **Tell your healthcare provider right away if you get any of the signs or symptoms of liver problems which are listed above under “Liver problems.” You may be more likely to get lactic acidosis or severe liver problems if you are female or very overweight (obese).**



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SO MUCH GOES INTO WHO I AM

HIV MEDICINE IS ONE PART OF IT.

Reasons to ask your doctor about DOVATO:



DOVATO can help you reach and then stay undetectable* with just 2 medicines in 1 pill. That means fewer medicines† in your body while taking DOVATO



You can take it any time of day with or without food (around the same time each day)—giving you flexibility

DOVATO is a once-a-day complete treatment for adults who are new to HIV-1 medicine.

Results may vary.

*Undetectable means reducing the HIV in your blood to very low levels (less than 50 copies per mL).

†As compared with 3-drug regimens.

 **Dovato**
dolutegravir 50 mg/
lamivudine 300 mg tablets

What are Possible Side Effects of DOVATO (cont'd)?

- **Changes in your immune system (Immune Reconstitution Syndrome)** can happen when you start taking HIV-1 medicines. Your immune system may get stronger and begin to fight infections that have been hidden in your body for a long time. Tell your healthcare provider right away if you start having new symptoms after you start taking DOVATO.
- **The most common side effects of DOVATO include:** headache; diarrhea; nausea; trouble sleeping; and tiredness.

These are not all the possible side effects of DOVATO. Call your doctor for medical advice about side effects. You are encouraged to report negative side effects of prescription drugs to the FDA. Visit www.fda.gov/medwatch, or call 1-800-FDA-1088.

Where Can I Find More Information?

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

October 2019 DVT:2PI-2PIL

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LEO⁺

Living with HIV



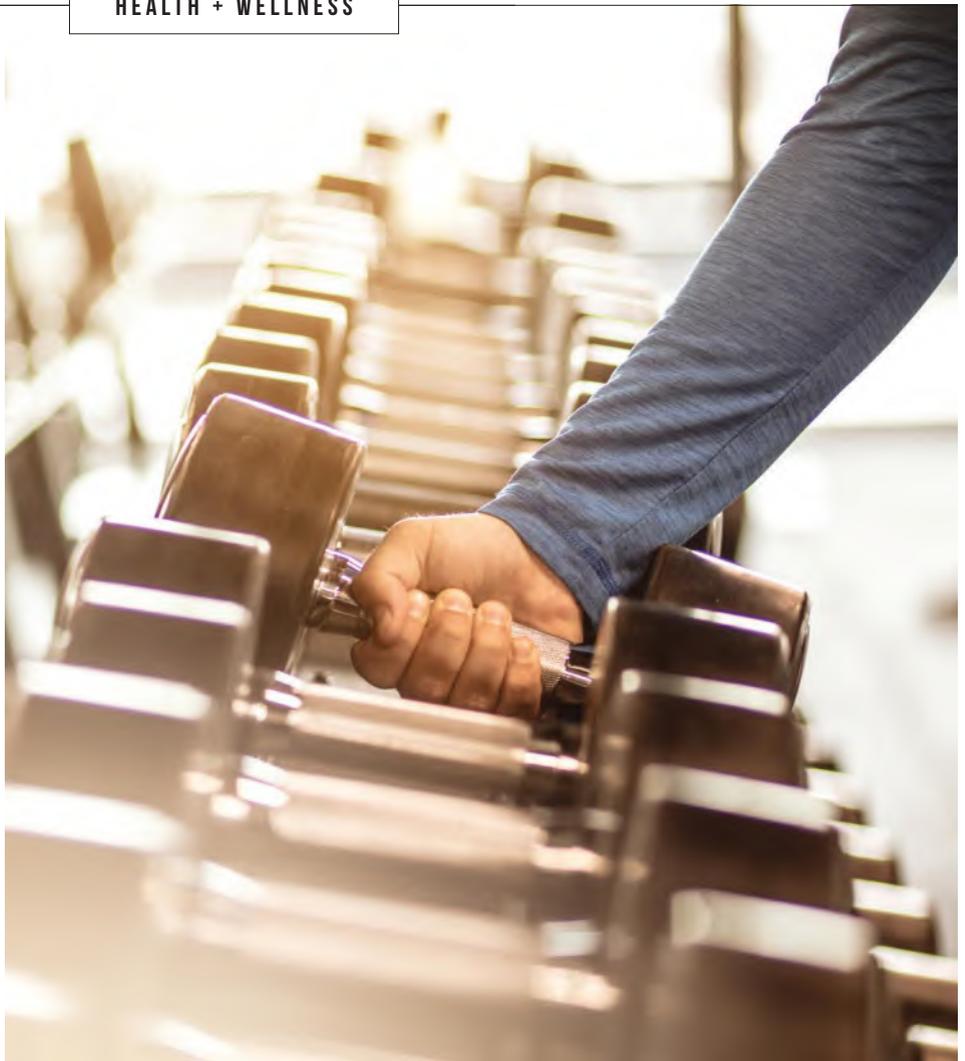
*Compensated by ViiV Healthcare

Could DOVATO be right for you? Ask your doctor today.

Reducing the Risks

Hit the weights for better heart health at any age.

By JOHN AARON



It's National Heart Health Month, and I've got some excellent news for the folks who hate doing cardio exercises but still want to look and feel their best. This news could also provide an added incentive to maintain that freshly minted gym membership you bought for 2020.

It seems that lifting weights not only builds muscles, but can also help fight off heart disease! Recent research indicates that weight training might be just as significant for heart health as cardio exercise is.

An observational study published in *Medicine & Science in Sports & Exercise* suggests that weight training—even as little as 60 minutes per week, split up into two or three sessions—can improve longevity and cut the risk of a severe heart attack or stroke by as much as 70 percent.

These statistics even applied to people who didn't regularly pursue any "aerobic/cardio" style of exercise. This study, which followed more than 12,500 people for almost 20 years, went on to suggest that spending additional time in the gym to work out longer or train more often did not appear to increase these cardiovascular health benefits.

In this case, the researchers believe resistance training helps reduce the risk of developing heart disease due to its ability to improve overall strength and body composition. The effect may result in less visceral body fat, more muscle, and a decreased risk of developing high cholesterol.

What do I find particularly exciting about this interesting study? Well, it not only promotes weight training as an essential part of establishing overall heart health as we age, but also suggests that weight training can improve your physique, maintain youthfulness, and keep your sex drive alive, too!

On a side note, however, it's essential to

understand that this particular study focuses solely on heart health. While applying the principles outlined should improve your cardiovascular standing, it doesn't promise you washboard abs or bulging biceps. For that, you would need a more disciplined program structured for aesthetics (a topic that I'll save for another article).

For now, you can rest assured that the risk of cardiovascular disease can be minimized if preventive measures like those noted within the study are applied. You can also improve your results exponentially by eating a healthy, well-balanced diet to feed your active lifestyle properly.

If you were to follow a formal diet, the Mediterranean Diet is the one most likely suited to heart health. That diet plan includes many of the following:

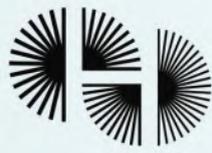
- A wide selection of raw fruits and vegetables.
- Lean proteins such as skinless chicken, skinless turkey, and broiled fish.
- Fish rich in omega and essential fatty acids like tuna, salmon, herring, mackerel,

and trout.

- Reduced intake of alcohol, red meats, fried foods, refined sugars, and processed grain products.
- Reduced consumption of sodium (including baking soda, preservatives, MSG, tenderizers, and table salt).

For some, adding supplements and herbal products to their diet may also be beneficial in the prevention of heart disease. Such natural remedies might include supplements like those listed below, which certain studies consider useful in managing heart health:

- Garlic. Some studies suggest that supplementing your diet with garlic will lower blood pressure by reducing the cholesterol levels in your body.
- Vitamin C. This vitamin is an essential antioxidant that may help in regulating blood pressure.
- Ginkgo biloba. Studies determine that Ginkgo biloba may serve to prevent the formation of damaging free radicals in our circulatory system. →



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INFO: MontroseCenter.org

Feb. 27: Out@TUTS Night

presents *Once On This Island*. After the curtain goes down, the party continues. Mingle with members of the cast and crew and sing a few show tunes.
INFO tuts.com/out

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March 13: Bringin' In the Green

LGBTQ Houston's beloved annual St. Patrick's Day Party! Network with old friends and make new ones at this happy hour event, which includes your favorite beverages, hot appetizers, and a great silent auction. Benefiting LGBTQ homeless youth.
INFO: MontroseCenter.org

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Champion of Change

Andrea Segovia continues her advocacy work as Gender Infinity's new executive director.

By MARTIN GIRON



To make the changes she wanted to see in the world, LGBTQ activist Andrea Segovia learned she had to go out and make those changes herself.

“A lot of it has to do with being a young Latinx queer person who grew up poor,” Segovia admits. “My mom and grandparents taught me that if you don’t go out and get something, someone else is going to. If you don’t take the risk, it won’t be yours.”

Born and raised in San Antonio, Segovia, 26, found a passion for working with nonprofit groups during high school. A position at Morgan’s Wonderland, the world’s first ultra-accessible theme park for guests of all ages and abilities, inspired her to continue working for organizations that created safe spaces for marginalized communities.

After a decade in the nonprofit sector, Segovia was recently named the executive director of Gender Infinity, a Houston-based organization that creates gender-affirming spaces for Texas transgender youth and their families, learners, advocates, providers, and educators.

Since its launch in 2010, Gender Infinity has presented annual conferences that uplift trans voices and provide an environment to learn about the issues. The group’s 2019 conference featured over 50 workshops with topics ranging from nonbinary medical transitions and intersex issues to spirituality and more. “Some of the sessions are closed and



only for trans people. Some are only for their parents, and others are only for providers,” Segovia explains. “However, most sessions are open to anybody.”

In addition to its yearly conferences, Gender Infinity hosts quarterly family gatherings and a biannual camp for trans youth and their families that provides them with fun activities and in-depth discussions. “[The camps] let kids just be kids,” Segovia says. “With other sleepovers and camps, [there are] concerns over being outed or misgendered, but at our camps that’s not an issue. You can be whoever you want to be.”

Now that Gender Infinity is in its 10th year of operation, Segovia says the group will continue to grow along with the youth who started with it. “[A lot of] the youth that started with us in 2010 are graduating high school or going

to college,” Segovia says. “That doesn’t mean that they’ll stop growing with the organization. It means that different conversations about getting older need to happen [to address health and community issues].”

This growth will also include bridging support networks between these families and the broader trans community. Segovia plans on developing a mentorship program that pairs trans youth with a trans professional in areas of specific interest. “We’re really hoping to [emphasize that you can be trans and still] be whatever you want,” she says.

Segovia, who is cisgender and bisexual, says that while she does not face the same obstacles that trans people do, she relates to the alienation that some trans folks face within the queer community. “As an out bi person, I know what it means to feel kind of out of place

[among other] LGBTQ people,” she says. “[My work] started to focus specifically on trans people because they’re the most marginalized in our community.”

Segovia hopes that through her executive-director position, she will be able to create more job opportunities for trans people, and that eventually a trans person will be hired to lead Gender Infinity. “As an ally, it gets difficult when you’re so close to a marginalized community. [You’re reminded] that you are not part of that community,” Segovia says. “I will never know the struggle that Black trans women face.”

Prior to being named the executive director of Gender Infinity, Segovia attended the University of Houston and began to organize student involvement on campus in support of the Houston Equal Rights Ordinance (HERO). Though the nondiscrimination ordinance was repealed in 2015, Segovia was determined to keep advocating for trans equality, this time with a bachelor’s degree in political science.

Segovia then started working for the civic engagement organization Battleground Texas during the 2016 presidential election. “We were actually able to change the turnout rate of Latinx Texans by five percent,” she notes.

Following the election, Segovia worked as Mayor Ron Nirenberg’s assistant campaign director for a brief stint in San Antonio. Dur-

“I LOOK AT THE YOUTH WHO ATTEND OUR CAMPS AND CONFERENCES, AND THEY’RE SO CONFIDENT IN WHO THEY ARE. I CAN ONLY HOPE THAT A LITTLE BIT OF THAT IS BECAUSE GENDER INFINITY EXISTS.”

—Andrea Segovia

ing this time, the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) offered Segovia a position as a Houston organizer during the 2017 Texas Legislative Session, an opportunity she says she could not pass up.

The workload she took on was not easy, Segovia recalls. “I worked 18-hour days every day from February 3 until late July. It was the

first time HRC had been in Houston after the HERO defeat, and there was a lot of rebuilding to do. It was nonstop work, [but that experience made it possible] to come into Gender Infinity.”

In October, Segovia became Gender Infinity’s executive director. In addition to her work there, she is also the policy and field coordinator for Transgender Education Network of Texas (TENT), a statewide organization dedicated to furthering gender-diverse equality in Texas.

TENT is directed by Segovia’s partner, trans activist Emmett Schelling. Segovia says that their mutual passion and respect for each other’s career helps when the workload gets tough.

The other driving force behind her work is trans youth, and the world of opportunities she’s working to create for them.

“I look at the youth who attend our camps and conferences, and they’re so confident in who they are,” Segovia says. “I can only hope that a little bit of that is because Gender Infinity exists. When I’m tired, I really think about the next generation. If I don’t do it—if we don’t do it—what are we setting up for them?”



To learn more about Gender Infinity, visit genderinfinity.org or follow them @gender_infinity on Instagram.



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Diving Deeper than a Checkbook

AFH's Derrick Brown shares his philosophy on connecting with donors.

By RYAN M. LEACH

From the early days of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, AIDS Foundation Houston (AFH) has been there connecting the community to the resources it needs. Now, Derrick Brown, the new chief development officer for the organization, will be connecting AFH to the resources it needs in return.

“Development is more than fundraising. It is about engagement with the community and the donors. It is about diving deeper than a checkbook,” says Brown of his philosophy on connecting with donors.

Brown grew up in Houston's Alief area, where he demonstrated an early knack for breaking through barriers at a time when others might have been afraid to. He married his husband, Dan Ritchel, in 2010.

The 47-year-old came out when he was 16—

an unusually young age back in the late '80s. He was a trailblazer as the first male cheerleader at Alief High School, where he developed an appreciation for volunteerism that led to an early connection with AFH.

“I was out at 16, and I started volunteering with organizations that served those in the community living with AIDS and HIV. I would help by spending time reading to them, helping with their grocery shopping, and things like that. I have always been tied to this mission, but not professionally until recently,” says Brown.

A Career On the Move

Brown's relationship and career have taken him all over the country. After graduating from UH with a degree in psychology and a minor in marketing, Brown moved to Dallas, where he

lived for 13 years. He earned his master's degree in human resources from the University of Phoenix, where he eventually became an HR director for Clear Channel. It was in that role that he met David Cradick, aka Kid Kraddick, one of the most popular radio hosts at the time. Cradick eventually developed a foundation called Kidd's Kids, whose mission was to give terminally ill children and their families the opportunity to travel to places like SeaWorld and Disney World.

"I helped grow [the foundation] from one city to a national organization while I was there," recalls Brown. "When Dan's job moved us to New York City in 2012, I started my own consulting firm and continued to do work for the foundation before being approached by the National LGBT Chamber of Commerce to open up their New York office."

Brown was successful in building the Chamber's New York branch into a 400-member organization. After three years, Brown and his husband moved to Philadelphia, where he began working with another client, Freedom for All Americans, a national organization focused on achieving non-discrimination protections for LGBTQ Americans in all

fifty states.

In the fall of 2017, Brown, his husband, and their dogs came back to Houston, where Ritchel has since retired. Brown did work for the American Red Cross of the Gulf Coast Region, and served as the interim development officer for the Tulsa, Oklahoma, branch. This is where he met AFH's new CEO, John Huckaby. When Huckaby took the helm at AFH, he asked Brown to join him—and the rest is history.

Reconnecting with the Community

"I have been in the LGBTQ space for most of my life and career, but usually as it relates to the business community. This work with AFH is the first time I get to work with the community side, and that really excites me," says Brown.

Although the fight to end HIV/AIDS has made some tremendous progress recently, Brown still sees a lot of opportunities.

"We are focused on launching programs that will help connect the community with the services they need. For instance, Mistr is a new program that we launched in December that allows people to get access to PrEP and

have it delivered to their home for free," says Brown.

AFH is also focused on eliminating the stigma of HIV through education about U=U (Undetectable Equals Untransmittable) and by connecting people living with HIV and AIDS to treatment. The hope is that a focus on prevention, adherence to treatment, and education will allow more people to live a healthier life and enjoy a healthier sex life.

For people who want to connect with AFH—either to volunteer, donate, or both—there is information online at aids-help.org. Donations that are designated for specific programming will be used accordingly, but Brown also encourages people to support AFH's general operations, which often cannot be funded through federal grants.

"There are so many programs that we would be able to provide that often cannot be paid for by other larger funding sources. Housing programs and different types of therapy are often in need of resources," Brown notes.

In the meantime, Brown will focus on developing AFH so the organization can focus on helping the Houston community in its fight against HIV/AIDS.



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From the Ground Up

Christopher Barry opens Space City's newest gay bar.

By ZACHARY MCKENZIE



Bars in Houston seem to come and go, but a new hot spot in Montrose is already proving it has major staying power. A familiar gayborhood location is now home to Buddy's, a one-of-a-kind bar that features karaoke, pool, DJs, and more, according to out owner Christopher Barry.

Just up the street from the classic Montrose bar haunts, Buddy's is a great first stop to meet friends and get your night started, according to Barry. "I did the whole demolition and redesign with my own hands. We completely redesigned the actual bar. We pushed it to the patio wall to serve inside and outside patrons at the same time, and make flow a lot more efficient."

Barry definitely knows a thing or two about the nightlife industry. "I bartended at Ripcord, and managed Guava Lamp," he notes. A devotion to the LGBTQ community motivated the entrepreneur to take on the challenge of creating a space for camaraderie, good times, and inclusion. "I saw all the bars closing in Houston, and I wondered if they were closing because of a cultural shift or because of the industry," he reflects. "[After working in a few of the bars,] I realized it was a combination of both. Then I realized I could use my experience to be a vehicle for positive change for our community, and help grow the nightlife scene."

Barry, a native of Beaumont, is easily recognizable with his blondish-red beard and handsome smile. It's no wonder he has been voted *OUTSMART* magazine's Favorite Male Bartender every year that he's worked behind a bar. Having previously worked in orthopedics and selling implants for spinal surgeries, Barry has generously shared his time and resources to support dozens of LGBTQ organizations in Houston. "I've worked with both community and professional [organizations]. I worked with the leather groups while I was at Ripcord, and sporting events while I was at Ripcord and Guava Lamp," he recalls, "I've worked with Lesbians of Color, Pride Houston, and more."

Those that know Barry well aren't surprised by his work ethic and his giving heart. At the age of 21, after returning home from a church mission trip in Mexico, the avid skateboarder learned that skateboarding on public property had been outlawed in Beaumont. He then teamed up with the Beaumont Police Activities League to design an all-steel skate park to provide a safe, legal, community-based haven for his community.

A source of pride for Barry is the quality of his new Montrose establishment—everything from the staff he employs to the ambience of the space. "Our average years of experience for our staff is about 10 years. The president of

the U.S. Bartenders Guild works here," Barry notes. The 20-foot-high ceilings allow for larger speakers and a fuller sound that patrons can chat over without needing to shout. "The energy at the bar gets higher as the night goes on. In other words, the lighting and the sound evolve as the night does."

It wouldn't be a gay bar if there weren't events to attract a crowd, and in a few months Buddy's guests can look forward to Latin Night on Thursdays. "Sunday night is hip-hop night, Sunday Funday will feature upbeat throwback music, and there is a lot of house music on Friday and Saturday nights!"

Events throughout the week will include karaoke on Wednesday nights with Wendy Taylor, who was a two-time Top 20 Finalist on *American Idol*.



**"I DID THE WHOLE
DEMOLITION AND REDESIGN
WITH MY OWN HANDS. WE
COMPLETELY REDESIGNED
THE ACTUAL BAR TO SERVE
INSIDE AND OUTSIDE
PATRONS AT THE SAME TIME,
AND MAKE FLOW A LOT
MORE EFFICIENT."**

—Christopher Barry

While the grand opening isn't until March, guests are welcome at the bar Monday through Thursday from 4 p.m. to 2 a.m., and Friday through Sunday from noon to 2 a.m. Barry hopes to welcome everyone who stops by to enjoy a drink and some good company.

When asked how he chose the name of his new bar, Barry explains with obvious pride: "It's called Buddy's because it's a place where 'everybuddy' is welcome!"



For more information about Buddy's, visit facebook.com/buddyshouston.

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Ambassador of Awareness

Ian Haddock teams up with the CDC to tackle HIV stigma.

By KIM HOGSTROM



“There was just *something* about Ian Haddock,” states Nathan Maxey, a Houston-area community organizer and nonprofit professional. “I saw it right away when we first met. Ian was a *standout*.”

Yet, nothing about Haddock’s early years or upbringing hinted at the fierce LGBTQ community health activist he has become as the local ambassador for the Centers for Disease Control’s national HIV-prevention program.

A Gay Kid Beats the Odds

Haddock was born in Texas City in 1987, and grew up in abject poverty. The youngest of three in a single-parent household, the intelligent, gracious child managed to flourish in school, in church, and in his community.

“I was the first of my siblings to graduate from high school, and was looked at as ‘breaking the generational curse’ for my family,” Haddock recalls. “It was when I came out that everything changed. Suddenly, I went from the hope of my family to another blemish in their lives.”

Haddock’s family gave him a choice: he could “choose not to be gay” and retain his home and family, or he could “choose to be gay” and live on the streets. The young man knew he had no choice. His family threw him out.

“From then on, I was a fully out queer,” Haddock says. “I was out through high school, and I was homeless. As a young, Black gay

man, I have experienced homophobia, racism, trauma, prostitution, and many of the other conditions that are pervasive in America. Something inside me, though, pushed me to turn those experiences into reflection. I think it was me being the hero to my 15-year-old self; it’s the piece—and peace—of God that lives in me that keeps me going.



“Still, it wasn’t until I was about 20 years old that I heard anything about HIV or the AIDS epidemic,” Haddock admits, reflecting on that shocking fact. “I was fully sexually active and knew nothing at all.”

At about this time, the young man crossed paths with Nathan Maxey, who was working with HIV-positive people in Houston. Haddock soon identified the compassionate Maxey as his “father of choice.”

“Ian was bright and full of potential, but he also seemed lost,” Maxey recalls. “I took him under my wing. When I shared my HIV diagnosis with Ian, it sparked an aspiration in him to help. That ambition continues to this day.”

“Meeting Nathan was a turning point for me,” Haddock emphasizes. “It was when he told me he was HIV-positive that I first learned about it. After that, the more knowledge I acquired, the more I knew I had to do something,” Haddock says.

Becoming an HIV Educator

“My involvement in public health and the LG-BTQ community happened by chance. As a sex worker, I routinely used community organizations to get checked for STIs and HIV. It’s only by the grace of God and some really good luck that I am not HIV-positive. I have taken every risk possible. I have done it all,” he says.

Haddock also knew from experience that there was a deep void in the public’s knowledge of HIV. To address it, Haddock launched The Normal Anomaly Initiative in 2016, a simple blog site dedicated to topics relative to the Black queer community. The website soon received over one million hits.

As the Normal Anomaly Initiative gained steam, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) took notice of Haddock, who is also dedicated to promoting sexual health among LGBTQ men as the president of Impulse Group Houston. When the CDC announced its new Let’s Stop HIV Together campaign (formerly known as Act Against AIDS), the organization asked Haddock to apply as an ambassador for the Houston area.

The national CDC campaign involves resources and partnerships aimed at easing HIV stigma and promoting testing, prevention, and treatment. The remarkable effort empowers communities, partners on the ground, and healthcare providers to reduce stigma and prevent HIV among the hardest-hit populations.

After several interviews, the CDC officially asked Haddock to become a 2020 Let’s Stop HIV Together ambassador—one of only 20 such ambassadors throughout the U.S. Ambassadors

are community leaders who support the campaign by disseminating HIV messaging, materials, and other CDC resources in the cities most heavily affected by HIV, according to the CDC’s website.

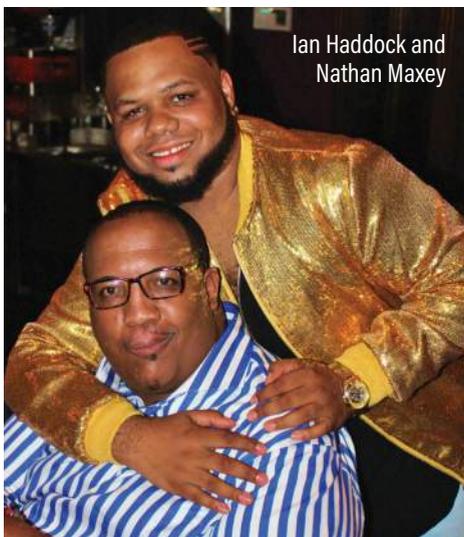
An Agent for Change

Haddock is charged with speaking to the local media outlets regarding HIV. He also engages in public speaking, community organizing, resource-sharing, and activism.

It’s an uphill slog. Despite the wonderful, life-saving advances in treatment, many people still do not understand the first thing about HIV. For every seven people who are HIV-positive, one does not even know they are infected.

“AS A YOUNG, BLACK GAY MAN, I HAVE EXPERIENCED HOMOPHOBIA, RACISM, TRAUMA, AND MANY OTHER CONDITIONS THAT ARE PERVASIVE IN AMERICA. SOMETHING INSIDE ME, THOUGH, PUSHED ME TO TURN THOSE EXPERIENCES INTO REFLECTION. I THINK IT WAS ME BEING THE HERO TO MY 15-YEAR-OLD SELF.”

—Ian Haddock



Ian Haddock and Nathan Maxey

HIV-related stigma plays a significant role in the grim statistics. Stigma refers to the destructive beliefs and attitudes toward people living with HIV, their families, HIV service providers, and members of groups that have been heavily impacted by HIV, such as gay and bisexual men, transgender people, the homeless, street youth, and the mentally ill. Stigma and discrimination are the biggest stumbling blocks to the CDC’s goal of wiping out HIV by 2030.

HIV-related discrimination affects the emotional well-being and mental health of people living with HIV. People often internalize shame, and fear that they will be judged negatively if their HIV status is revealed.

W. Jeffrey Campbell, the chief program officer at AIDS Foundation Houston, shares this view. “I’ve been in the field of HIV prevention for almost two decades,” Campbell states. “I’m excited to know that science has given us progressive prevention and treatment methods that are getting us closer to ending the HIV epidemic. One of the final barriers to ending this epidemic is stigma. CDC’s new Let’s Stop HIV Together campaign addresses the issue of stigma head-on. This gets us even closer to our goal.”

Haddock points out that communities of color are bearing the greatest burden of HIV. His assignment as a CDC ambassador is opening doors in that regard.

“The CDC says that in 2018, Black people accounted for 42 percent of new HIV diagnoses, and Latinx people accounted for 27 percent of new HIV diagnoses. One of the best ways to meet these populations is in their churches,” Haddock explains firmly.

Haddock approaches these faith communities with the same empathy, grace, and tenacity that makes him so good at what he does. “We talk with these groups specifically about the intersection of HIV with racial and social justice, and *not* about sexuality. We’ve found that it is an easier route to begin conversation without the sexual component.

“We then offer them [opportunities to get tested for] HIV, often during the services. It’s been a tedious process, but we are making some movement. We are removing the stumbling blocks, one at a time!” Haddock concludes.

 For more information about the CDC’s Let’s Stop HIV Together campaign, visit [cdc.gov/stophivtogether/index.html](https://www.cdc.gov/stophivtogether/index.html). For more information about The Normal Anomaly Initiative, visit thenormalanomaly.org.

Ending the Epidemic

Dr. Gordon Crofoot leads a new HIV vaccine trial from his research center in Montrose.

By RYAN M. LEACH

Houston's LGBTQ community is the subject of a bold step in the global response to help end HIV. The city will host one of eight worldwide teams that will seek to enroll 3,800 HIV-negative people between the ages of 18 and 60 to participate in the first Phase III HIV vaccine efficacy trial in more than a decade. The study will be conducted through a consortium of global partners called Mosaico, and the Houston team will be located at the Crofoot Research Center in Montrose.

The first Houston patient was vaccinated at the Crofoot Center earlier this year when the program was officially announced. Dr. Gordon Crofoot, whose practice has served the community for over 40 years, will be leading the research team. Crofoot's primary-care practice specializes in HIV/AIDS treatment, and focuses exclusively on serving the needs of Houston's LGBTQ community.

"Houston, and the South in general, unfortunately bear a disproportionate burden of new and overall HIV infections for a variety of reasons," says Crofoot. "It is important to look at key places where the HIV epidemic is still a concern in order to look for ways to stop

it. Additionally, Houston is the most diverse city in the U.S., and research needs to ideally reflect the makeup of the population. You need to study ways to prevent HIV in all persons, not just one group. Houston is a great place for clinical research because, hopefully, we can get participation from a very diverse group of volunteers."

Despite major breakthroughs in HIV prevention and treatment, an estimated 5,000 new HIV transmissions occur around the world every day. Men who have sex with men account for 66% of new HIV infections in the U.S. An estimated 25,831 people were living with HIV in Houston in 2017. That same year, the City documented 1,133 new HIV transmissions, in comparison to 1,292 in 2016.

Black and Hispanic/Latinx communities in Houston bear a disproportionate burden of HIV. Between 2013 and 2017, an estimated 48.2% of all new HIV transmissions occurred in Houston's African-American community, followed by 34.8% for Hispanic/Latinx transmissions and 12.9% for white transmissions. Among transgender communities, 12 female-to-male and 252 male-to-female people were reported to be living with HIV in 2017. →



In the last few years, the use of PrEP (pre-exposure prophylaxis) has increased as a form of HIV prevention throughout the world. This particular Mosaico study is testing a vaccine that would inoculate patients from infection—a much easier and more effective way of preventing transmission than the one-pill-a-day regimen of traditional PrEP.

“Advances in medicine have given us several new options for HIV prevention, but a vaccine would vastly accelerate our vision for ending the HIV epidemic worldwide,” said John Huckaby, CEO of AIDS Foundation Houston. “We are pleased to learn that Dr. Gordon Crofoot and his clinical team have been chosen as one of 57 research centers worldwide for the Phase III clinical trial of a potential HIV vaccine.”

Pharmaceutical companies will often team with public entities to provide funding for treatment and vaccine research studies like this one. These public-private partnerships can provide a mutual benefit: successful studies can yield ways to treat, prevent, and end public health crises like HIV while also creating profitable new drugs for the drug companies. The United States still lacks the political fortitude to solve the problems presented when successful drugs like PrEP are sold at price

“HOUSTON, AND THE SOUTH IN GENERAL, UNFORTUNATELY BEAR A DISPROPORTIONATE BURDEN OF NEW AND OVERALL HIV INFECTIONS. IT IS IMPORTANT TO LOOK AT KEY PLACES WHERE THE HIV EPIDEMIC IS STILL A CONCERN IN ORDER TO LOOK FOR WAYS TO STOP IT.”

—Dr. Gordon Crofoot

points that are unattainable for many. However, the importance of the work is nonetheless worthwhile.

Mosaico is supported by a partnership led by Janssen Vaccines and Prevention B.V., a part of the Janssen Pharmaceutical Companies of Johnson & Johnson; the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, which

is part of the National Institutes of Health; and the NIAID-funded HIV Vaccine Trials Network. Additional partners providing support include the U.S. Army Medical Research and Development Command.

If the vaccine is a success, it will need to be studied in larger populations that include cisgender women, and in parts of the world with more subtypes of HIV than are found in the United States, i.e. Sub-Saharan Africa. Vaccines that show marked promise in clinical trials can be given what is called fast-track status, since there is such an urgent need to get an HIV vaccine approved and out in the community.

“Anyone who may be at risk for HIV and does not feel that PrEP is a good option for them, or is unable to take PrEP for whatever reason, is a good candidate for this study if they are interested,” says Crofoot. “This current study is only open to men who have sex with men, and male-to-female transgender persons. If someone who fits that criteria is interested, they can contact the Crofoot Research Center at 713-526-0005 and we can go over more specific eligibility criteria.”



For more information about Crofoot Research Center, visit crofootmd.com/research-center.

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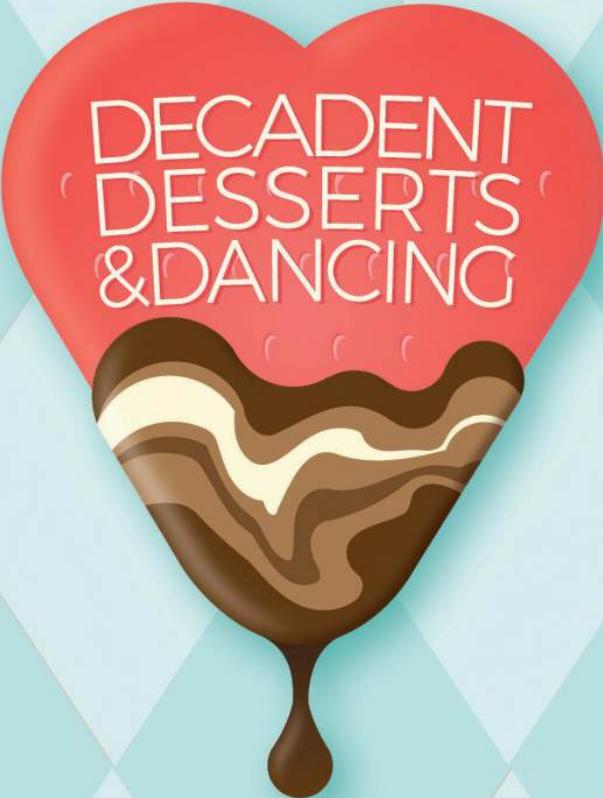
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Portraits of Love

B. Proud visits Houston to photograph transgender couples for her traveling art exhibition.

By JENNY BLOCK | Photos by B. PROUD

Photographer Barbara “B.” Proud says she has been an artist since she was a child. Drawing, painting, and music were all a part of her young life. But when she was in high school and introduced to photography in earnest, “The geek part of me fell in love with the combination of science, technology, and creativity.” Now she’s using her love and genius to educate and spread love in an ingenious way.

Proud is currently working on some groundbreaking documentary projects that focus on the LGBTQ communities. In early March, she’s coming to Houston so that she can include Houstonians in making the change she longs to see. One of these projects is *First Comes Love*, a traveling exhibition of photographs, stories, and videos of couples in long-term relationships. Her companion coffee-table book *First Comes Love: Portraits*

of *Enduring LGBTQ Relationships*, with a foreword by marriage-equality icon Edie Windsor, was self-published after Proud was unable to procure a mainstream publisher.

She is now hard at work on her sequel exhibition, *Transcending Love*, which is focused on transgender and gender-nonconforming couples across the country “in an attempt to open hearts and minds to a community deserving of understanding, respect, and basic human rights,” Proud explains. “I am currently working towards representing the greatest amount of ethnic, geographic, socio-economic, and age diversity in this project, in order to show a country that is increasingly divided that transgender and gender-nonconforming couples are everyone’s neighbor.”

Transcending Love is already a traveling exhibit of photographic portraits and stories on view through February 16 at the Stonewall National Museum and Archive in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. “I do hope that I will be able to

make a book of this work someday, but I’m not yet certain how that will come to fruition.”

Proud explains that the *Transcending Love* exhibit is much broader in scope, and therefore already more expensive than *First Comes Love*. “I’m trying to cover much more geographical area in order to make the project really strong. I will need much more financial support (and/or a willing publisher) to make the book a reality. That said, I am very committed to doing all that I can to make that happen.”

This work could not be any more important to Proud, who sees the transgender community as a population in great need of love, support, and acceptance. “Trans people continue to fight for their existence on a daily basis. States are constructing laws stripping the trans community of basic human rights and dignity. That’s just absurd to me. This project is a way for me to make a difference. I may only change one heart and mind at a time, but if that’s what it takes, then so be it.”

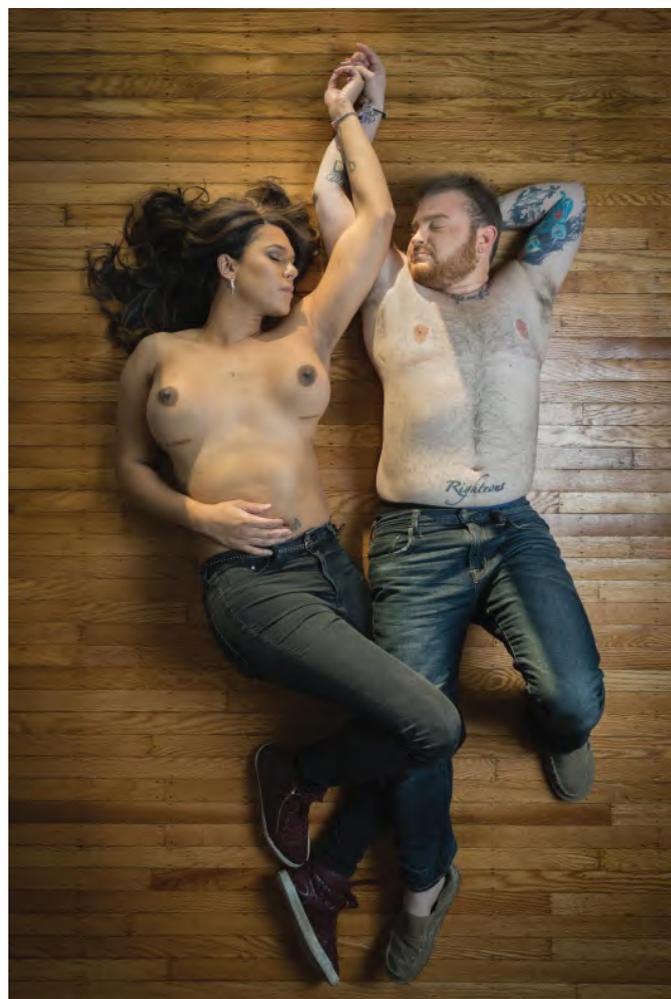
Although her success has been great, Proud admits that getting to where she is now has been a long path. She grew up in New Castle, Delaware, a quaint colonial town on the banks of the Delaware River just south of Philadelphia. As for her schooling, she says, “I’d rather not talk about where I went to school. It’s insignificant to my career. The skills that I use now are skills that I taught myself.”

In fact, Proud says, “I stumbled a while after college, went to graduate school for a few months in Tucson, Arizona, and finally ‘settled down’ by moving to Europe to work as a photographer for the U.S. Department of Defense as a civilian.” She lived in Germany for seven years before deciding it was time to return to the States and begin a freelance career. “I wanted to be closer to my family as my parents grew older.”

She’s had her own photography business for over thirty years. “I’ve worked for corporations, magazines, and organizations. I’ve photographed tons of celebrities, including President Obama and Lady Gaga on the same day.”

Proud is also more than happy to talk about her adjunct-professor duties in the photography program at The University of the Arts in Philadelphia. She’s been there for twenty years now. “I love giving back and helping the younger generation

T and Bella embrace in a hug.



Gabrielle (left) holds hands with her partner Jaden, an artist and graphic designer.

become better photographers and artists. My students inspire me. I teach studio lighting, fashion, editorial portraiture, and a business class.” She says the university has been extremely supportive of her work. “My book launch for *First Comes Love* was held in the main gallery on campus, at the request of the university administration,” Proud says.

Up until 2008, Proud’s personal work was quite different from her current projects. “I was into photographing botanicals in a very Georgia O’Keeffe style.”

But then something was ignited in her.

“In 2008, my partner and I hit our 20th anniversary and became the longest-surviving couple in our families. We were in the most stable relationship, but [our straight relatives] on their second, third, and fourth marriages had all the rights. It wasn’t fair,” she says.

When Proposition 8 passed in California in the 2009 election, Proud says she hit a wall and decided that she had to do something in the only way she knew how—through photography. “So, I set out to show the side of the LGBTQ community that was never shown. The media shows all of the parades and protests—the flamboyance and the waving of rainbow flags, but I wanted to show the more humanistic side, and how we were all living for decades as ‘married,’ just without all of those rights.”



Las Vegas couple Owen (left) and Blue await the birth of their child.

For Proud, the way to acceptance was going to be through understanding. “Changing the laws does not change people’s minds. Being able to include some notable figures—including the late, great Edie Windsor—made that project a unique piece of history. It’s not about *how* we changed the marriage-equality laws, [as other books explain], but rather *why* and for whom they were changed. I’m very proud of that project.”

Proud had no trouble finding couples to photograph, since she has been documenting the LGBTQ community for many years. “Having done photography for LGBTQ organizations for many years, I knew a lot of people. I’ve photographed the Human Rights Campaign’s national dinners for twenty years now.” Proud says that many people helped her make connections, or urged wonderful couples and subjects to reach out to her. “Once I started to get press, it was easier to find subjects. Social media was a huge resource, as well.” She spent a lot of time trying to find a truly diverse roster of subjects.

Proud feels that the transgender community was underrepresented in her book, which

makes her all the more determined to “get it right” in her current project. *First Comes Love* serves as her calling card now, she says. “It shows that my intentions are clear and honest, and that I am dedicated to making a difference. When potential subjects see the success of *First Comes Love*, they know they can trust me.”

This has allowed Proud to include notable figures such as Zackary Drucker, Jenny Boylan, Sarah McBride, and Amanda Simpson in her work.

“I wasn’t sure how I would be accepted by the trans community as an ally working to make a change,” Proud admits, “but so far I have been very successful. I am meeting and photographing the most wonderful people. I have photographed 60 couples so far, in 24 states, and I have a list of over 150 couples willing to participate. I am truly in love with all of my subjects. People who have seen the world in [all of its gender diversity] have a much broader understanding of humanity. I love it.”

Since a national conference of photography educators will be held in Houston in early March, Proud will be in town to photograph

those Houston couples next month.

And yes, she is always looking for more subjects to add to her list, both in Houston and beyond. “I can’t promise that everyone on the list will be photographed, but the more opportunities I have, the better.”

Of particular interest to Proud are couples from Midwestern and Southern states, male/male couples, ethnically mixed couples, and older couples. Only one partner in the relationship needs to identify as trans or nonbinary. “Couples should be ‘established,’ as in together for a few years and on track to stay together for the long haul,” she notes.

For each photo shoot, Proud spends about four to five hours with the couple. “We typically don’t know each other, so there’s time spent with introductions and getting acquainted.” She asks the couple to choose places in or near their home that are special to them. “The portraits that I make include something of their environment, because I feel that this takes the viewer one step deeper into getting to know the couple.”

Ultimately, Proud says she is looking to craft an expressive portrait that shows the emotion of the couples and their confidence in who they are. “I’m not looking to make their next holiday card picture. The more artistic and daring, the better—without going too far and alienating the audience.”

Following the photo shoot, Proud does a video interview asking about their relationship, and what makes it special. From the transcript of that interview, she writes an 800- to 1,000-word story that gets displayed next to each portrait in the exhibit. “These stories also bring viewers to a deeper level of understanding and, hopefully, acceptance. I also have footage that I will be able to use to make a short film.”

This work is a true labor of love for Proud—labor for which she very much needs financial support. “This is what I do in my ‘spare’ time with my own money. There is no staff, not even an assistant, and no magazine or corporation supplying the funding,” Proud explains. While she continues to apply for grants, she also welcomes tax-deductible contributions at any time.

B. Proud’s work is beautiful. Her message is inspiring. And the power of her projects is being felt across the country. She has every reason to “be proud,” and she’s giving some very lucky Houstonians the chance to make Houston proud, as well. Love is our key to acceptance, and Proud is doing everything in her power to make sure everyone feels its life-affirming embrace.



For more information about B. Proud or the *Transcending Love* project, visit firstcomeslove.org.

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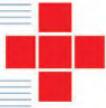
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Proper hydration, in addition to the foods and supplements outlined above, is also essential. Try to maintain a minimum of six to eight 8-ounce cups of water each day. Hydration is especially important on the days you choose to exercise.

Lastly, if you're the type that suffers from high levels of anxiety or daily stress, practicing relaxation techniques could enhance your heart-healthy results, too. These techniques might include yoga, meditation, self-affirmation/visualization, or Tai Chi.

Taking care of your heart means being mindful of what it takes to keep it healthy. But regardless of how old (or young) you are, the importance of beginning a suitably consistent exercise program can't be stressed enough, especially as we age.

Exercise, in combination with a healthy diet and perhaps the use of herbal and mineral supplements, may prove to significantly reduce your chances of developing fatal heart disease. Here, again, your exercise program doesn't have to be strenuous or complicated. You can start with gentle walking or swimming, and then advance to different types of fitness and resistance exercise. However, regardless of your routine, you must be sure to check with your healthcare provider *before* you begin *any* fitness program, in order to ensure that there are no immediate contraindications that might endanger you.

Although cardiovascular research reveals much regarding the effective prevention of heart disease as we age, the fundamental truth is this: you have more control than you might think you do. Know that *you* are the Numero Uno in charge of your health, your physical strength, and your heart. So be smart about the choices you make. Exercise regularly, eat well, and seek the advice of a health and fitness professional.



John Aaron is a father, writer, perpetual student, licensed bodyworker, certified health coach, personal trainer, and over-50 bad-boy wannabe. Find him at www.JohnAaronOnline.com



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Act, though, non-spouse beneficiaries who are more than ten years younger than the deceased account holder must liquidate the entire account within ten years of the account owner's death (unless the non-spouse beneficiary is disabled, chronically ill, or a minor child). This can result in a significant tax burden for those who stand to inherit high-value Traditional IRAs.

It is important to note that for anyone who passed away in the year 2019, their beneficiary may still "stretch" his or her beneficiary IRA. However, if someone passes away in 2020 or thereafter, their beneficiaries (other than a surviving spouse who is not more than 10 years younger than the original account holder) must withdraw the entire amount of the account within the 10-year time period. This shorter withdrawal window will of course increase taxes owed, due to the need for larger accelerated distributions.

Given this new rule, estate planning will change for many people. With that in mind, many in the LGBTQ community who are on the fence about whether or not to get married may want to take this into consideration.

Keeping Your Savings Out of Uncle Sam's Pocket

There are some things you can do now to help

protect your beneficiaries from a heavier tax burden on any IRA accounts they inherit from you. One solution is to reconsider who you have listed as your beneficiaries. (This may not be the best option if someone is counting on those funds for their ongoing living expenses if you should predecease them.)

Another alternative could be to transfer some, or even all, of your Traditional IRA funds into a Roth IRA, which may be inherited tax-free. Even if your income exceeds the maximum limit for being Roth IRA-eligible, there are still strategies available (such as a "back door" Roth IRA) for taking advantage of this type of account. Although this type of transfer may result in a taxable event now, the tax-free accessing of funds from a Roth IRA could allow for a much higher net benefit in the future.

The new SECURE Act regulations can make both Roth IRAs and life insurance more attractive. That's because both of these financial vehicles can allow for tax-free access to funds, regardless of what the income-tax rates are.

In some cases, then, it could even make sense to use funds from a Traditional IRA (earmarked for contributions or RMDs) to fund a life insurance policy that, in turn, will eventually pay out tax-free and/or "living" benefits.

Before you take any action, though, it is

recommended that you consult with a qualified Certified Financial Planner (CFP) who is well-versed in asset protection as well as tax-efficient planning. In addition, a financial professional who specializes in working with LGBTQ individuals and couples can help to better ensure that your plan meets your specific needs and objectives.

The Roth IRA offers tax deferral on any earnings in the account. Withdrawals from the account may be tax-free, as long as they are considered qualified. Limitations and restrictions may apply. Withdrawals prior to age 59½ or prior to the account being opened for five years, whichever is later, may result in a 10 percent IRS penalty tax. Future tax laws can change at any time and may impact the benefits of Roth IRAs. Their tax treatment may change.

This information is not intended to be a substitute for specific individualized tax advice. We suggest that you discuss your specific tax issues with a qualified tax advisor.

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

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On December 19, Theatre Under The Stars held Out@TUTS night for *Elf-The Musical* sponsored by OUTSMART. Pictured are Elizabeth England, Marcus Hooks, Regina Blake-Dubois with some of the cast members.



On December 18, Jumper Maybach Uptown presented a Twinkle Toast. Pictured are Mark Alvarez, Pat Ong, Jackie Ma, Quinn Dismukes, Daniel Zamora, Jumper Maybach, Rodney Pena, Sultana Kazim, Regina Adraoui, and Cengiz Gultek.



On December 15, the Houston Tennis Club held its annual awards banquet at Gloria's Latin Cuisine. Pictured are Enrique Gonzalez, Quentin Chavis, Scott Barish, Nicholas Prevost, Andrés Cedeño, Philip Nelson, and David Romero.



On December 8, Jim Sikorski held his annual Share Your Blessings Holiday Bash at La Griglia. Pictured are Brandon Blanton, Mike Freeman, Russell Hicks, Rich Lewis, Katy Caldwell, Brandi Ledet, Tim Martinez, Jim Sikorski, and Ed Finger.

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Forensic Artist

Nonbinary Houstonian Ángel Lartigue heads to Australia to research and create.

By BILL ARNING



By the time you read the following description of all the disciplines that Houston-born-and-raised nonbinary artist Ángel Lartigue has explored, they will have decamped for several months to the unlikely destination of Perth, on the Western coast of Australia. Lartigue has been invited to participate in the prestigious art and biological-science research center SymbioticA, an artistic laboratory dedicated to research, learning, critique, and hands-on engagement with the life sciences.

As Lartigue's nontraditional practice has grown, they are comfortably referred to as both an artist and a scientific researcher in forensics. As a mystic and rationalist, performer and object maker, entertainer and shaman, butch and femme, Lartigue cuts a compelling figure in culture, science, and nightlife. Encountering them is sure to make an impression, for better or worse. Even if you are encountering the deathly, musky smells of decomposition in a dark nightclub, I urge you to push past your queasy feelings and engage deeply. It's worth the effort.

My first encounter with Lartigue was in 2017 as I walked into the Box 13 artist space and saw Lartigue chained to an altar with rosary beads. Since I had arrived at the very start of the performance-art event, I would be Lartigue's first experimental subject for *Sub Scientist Booth*.

According to the artist's description, "[the booth's] conceptual basis consists of a scientist restrained (with a rosary leash, fence chain, clay shackles, etc.) while they extract participants' DNA substance using only household items such as salt and water to mouth-swish cheek cells. The process takes less than five minutes to execute, all while the participant observes. The participant takes home a raw sample of extracted DNA substance from the scientist in exchange for their own DNA. On occasion, blood is also given as an exchange."

During my *Sub Scientist Booth* encounter, I was instructed to sit on the floor next to the artist, swirl a fluid around my mouth, and spit it back out. Lartigue then produced a twisted strand of my genetic material along



Ángel Lartigue in fieldwork studies, 2018



Forensic burial map of cadaver (detail), pencil on graph paper, 2019

with a specimen of Lartigue's. Lartigue's outfit, with its S and M overtones, brought up some darker queer erotics. (In your sir/slave relationship, how Dom can you really be if you aren't controlling your Sub at a cellular level, twisting their DNA to your sadistic whims?) The BDSM dynamics under the surface of scientific research has been analyzed by feminist theoreticians of science like Evelyn Fox Keller and Donna Haraway. I was reminded of the opening passage of Haraway's *The Companion Species Manifesto* in which she imagines her DNA commingling with her dog's after a particularly wet canine kiss. But Lartigue's performance brought that theoretical idea memorably home.

As part of the first generation of LGBTQ folks who no longer need to think of all body fluids of lovers as potentially toxic, and invisible microbes as mortal enemies, Lartigue nonetheless tends to focus on end-of-life events. Lartigue describes being nonbinary as the rolling dice of their art, never knowing how that will direct their investigations. It creates a unique perspective: bodies and biology as raw material for art, politics, and self-invention.

In Lartigue's nightclub persona (or personae), they collaborated with the larger-

than-life personalities Farrah Fang and Mystic Stylez, who mysteriously go by another name as an art gallerist and curator duo. Their events happen too late at night for me, and remain under the radar of the larger art worlds, so they are not reviewed in the *Chronicle* or on Glasstire.

These queer nights had colorful names like “Trust Me Daddy,” and featured performers like the internationally celebrated House of Kenzo and the composer Rabbit. They have become the stuff of legend in the polymorphously perverse, radically inclusive, and diverse queer underground space that Houston is known for allowing to flourish.

As a first-generation American whose par-

ents arrived from Mexico in the '80s, Lartigue has always slipped between cultures, political regimes, and religions. Being more interested in linguistics, Lartigue never pursued an art degree. Their focus turned to the way the human body is only comprehensible when located on and cleaving to the rich soil of the earth itself, just as Whitman-esque poetics turns into the muck of the soil before transforming yet again into leaves of grass.

Dead bodies lying exposed on the ground are commonplace in certain border areas of Texas. The *New York Times* reported that over 300 dead are found every year on the ranches along the border with Mexico, with Brooks County being infamous for the toll its harsh

terrain takes on underprepared migrants hoping to find a better future. Students at UT-Austin try to exhume bodies buried in mass graves, but most are never identified and families are left to wonder.

In 2015 and 2016, Lartigue did a series of performance-based photographs called *Muerte*, in which the artist's body is seen twice in the same frame—first naked and dead, then alive and dressed. Although many photos depict urban settings, some show remote natural situations that bring to the fore the idea of a body turning back into soil and landscape.

Lartigue became curious about what happens when a dead body is left outside in the harsh Texas weather. This new area of artistic research was fueled both by his artistic interests in the earth and also his family history that includes a brother of his grandfather who disappeared and was never found. “A lot of people think I am detached after seeing so many bodies, but I am not at all. I have a very personal connection to the refugees, as well as a political identification.”

Lartigue enrolled in a forensics program to learn how to get maximum information while recovering human remains, ideally to give closure to children and families back in Central America who wonder if the “I arrived and have a job” call will ever come.

The massive, ongoing humanitarian tragedy has captured Lartigue's imagination, and the photos he made while learning to study corpses are memorable indeed. As the refugee crisis will only intensify as climate change and economic inequalities worsen, Lartigue's work is particularly vital.

Back in Australia, Perth should feel like home to Texas-raised Lartigue, as the city is known for a cowboy culture that coexists with Balinese dance rituals and other Southeast Asian cultures. Perth is also a great distance from the hip international center of Sydney, just as Houston is far removed from the trend-setting U.S. coastal meccas.

SymbioticA has hosted the most celebrated biology-based artists working today, including Stellarc and Orlan. Yet, the question of what it means to work in Australia in 2020 looms large. Today's Australian bushfires are a symbol of the worsening, self-inflicted hell we have created by ignoring the climate-scientists' warnings. Hopefully, having Lartigue work with these artists and scientists their will create a dialogue of value—maybe not enough to save the planet, but enough to help us see the meaning and beauty of our bodies' inevitable return to the earth.



Operation Psychopomp
(featuring Farrah Fang and Matador Xoloitzcuintle), 2018



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Unapologetically Trans | CONTINUED FROM PAGE 20

hold again for a while. A planned five-year relationship hiatus became 10 years, then 20, and now it's been almost 30 years since my last relationship.

There's also my failure to read the signs to know when someone is interested in me beyond just friendship, or not moving fast enough to let someone know I was interested.

And yes, the challenges of dating while trans have been a factor. I worried about the intimate-partner violence that trans feminine people experience at five times the rate of their cis feminine sisters.

Would I be open to dating a transmasculine person? Always been open to that, but it just seems that the ones I was interested in were either married or already hooked up in a relationship.

So once again, here I am on Valentine's Day buying my own chocolates and pulling out my DVD copies of rom-com movies to watch because Cupid's arrow keeps missing me.

Here's hoping that on Valentine's Day 2021, that will no longer be the case.

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

SignOut | CONTINUED FROM PAGE 109

unhappy, you must make some changes or your partnership may not last. With Mercury retrograde coming up in mid-February, you will want to take a step back and make sure you are on the right path. Be especially careful with the documents you sign in this Mercury retrograde period, February 11 through March 13. Your energy levels are much stronger and your patience is much shorter when Mars, planet of action, visits your sign from February 16 through March 31. Exercise is always good to mitigate Mars' need for physical expression.

PISCES (Feb. 19-Mar. 20)

This is going to be a significant Mercury retrograde for you, with the retrograde occurring in Pisces. Mercury is our communicator, and when she is retrograde, she is ready to reexamine past communications that have not been clear. This will also have a significant impact on your relationships. If you are having problems with your partner, this retrograde will help you focus on the real problems and not avoid having a discussion. This is always the time of year when you need more "alone" time, and 2020 will be no different. You are not very patient at work unless you are getting your own way! Life does get a bit more stable in the last half of the month. Watch your spending, as your impulse to shop is very strong in the first half of the month. Focus on what makes you happy, and later on you can help others who need your assistance.

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On October 29, the Bayou City Women's Chorus and the Gay Men's Chorus held their Pride and Joy concert at Resurrection MCC. Pictured are Manuel Garcia, Jake Sandridge, and Mike McCarver.



On November 19, the Houston Bears held a check distribution event. Pictured are Houston Bears and beneficiaries Marcus Hook with the Montrose Center and Courtney Sellers with Montrose Grace Place.

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On December 15, The Houston Tennis Club presented a check to Montrose Grace Place. Pictured are Kenneth Jones, Chris Shepard, Jeremy Fain, Chuck Meredith, Courtney Sellers, and Marcus Handy.



The Sallie Alcorn run-off election night watch and victory party on Dec. 14. Pictured are George Alcorn, Susie Alcorn, Sallie Alcorn, and George Alcorn.



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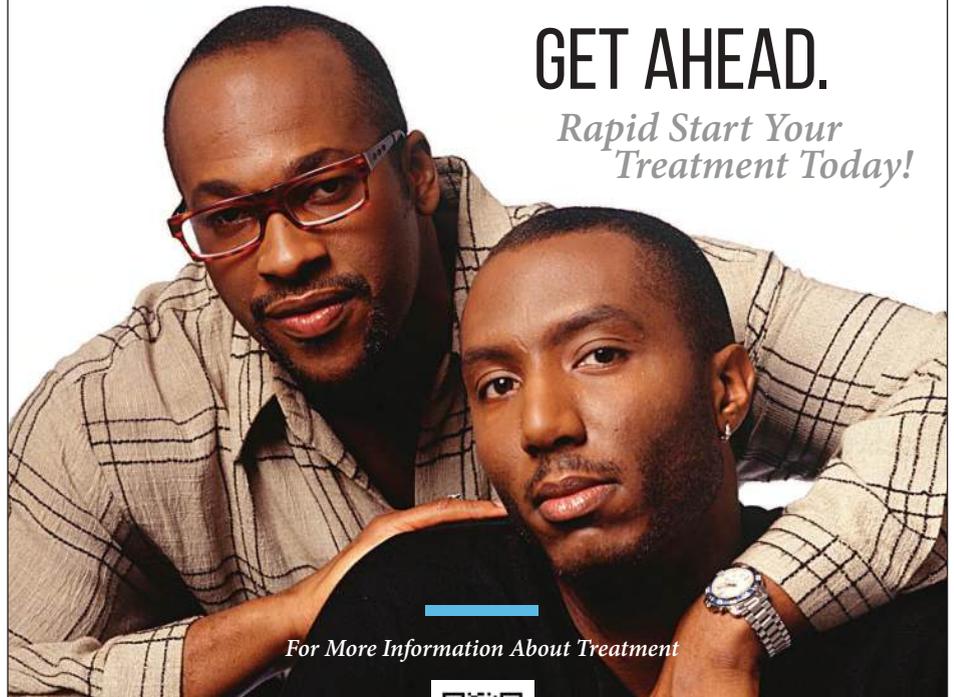
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Lauren Anderson (l) and
Harper Watters at the 2019
Houston Ballet Ball.

A Guide to Greatness

Houston Ballet's Lauren Anderson inspired soloist Harper Watters' success.

By OLIVIA FLORES ALVAREZ

Harper Watters, the Houston Ballet's dynamic young soloist, remembers the moment he first saw Lauren Anderson. "I was a teenager at the Houston Ballet Academy for a summer intensive training session. I was standing in the hallway with some friends, and I saw this woman coming toward me. It was like the sea was parting for her. She was just magnificent; she had such a presence. I asked my friends who she was, and they told me she was Lauren Anderson, the Houston Ballet's first Black principal dancer."

Soon after that, Watters was offered a place in the Houston Ballet II, the company's pre-professional training arm. Watters was 16 years old, already openly gay, and still in high school.

"Lauren walked up to me a little while after that and said, 'You got into Houston Ballet II? You're going to take it, aren't you? You have to take it.' I told her I wanted to, but my parents were a little nervous about me moving to Texas.

"She talked to them. She told me I had to accept the offer and come to Houston. My parents thought maybe I should wait a year, but Lauren told them, 'No. It has to be *this* year. His time is *now*. The opportunity is here *right now*. Next year, there might not be a slot for him. There might not be another offer.' And she was right. Anything can happen in a year. So they let me come. It changed my life."

Anderson remembers that conversation well. She had seen Watters in a dance class and was impressed with how regal he was, and how well he moved. She was very enthusiastic about such a talented young man joining the company.

"I told his parents that he'd be nurtured and

understood—both as a dancer and as a person of color—because they had been through it with me," Anderson recalls.

"And I told him, 'Once you're here, you're mine. I will take care of you.' And he's done wonderfully here."

That was 2009. Watters performed with Houston Ballet II until 2011, when he won the Contemporary Dance Prize (and sixth place overall) at the Prix de Lausanne dance competition. He joined the Houston Ballet that same year as an apprentice and moved up the ranks. In 2017, he was promoted to soloist.

Watters explains that Anderson has been more than a mentor to him.

"She's actually my fairy godmother," he says, laughing. "She's always been there for me. Early on, she would come up to me and tell me that I had to work harder—to really dedi-

cate myself to my training. 'We need a black Prince!' she'd tell me."

Anderson was referring to the coveted Prince role in *The Nutcracker*, a milestone for male dancers.

"I did tell him that," she says. "I wanted him to know that he was prince material, that he could get there if he worked hard. And he did." Watters most recently performed as the Prince in the Houston Ballet's 2019 production of *The Nutcracker*.

Watters adds, "I knew I wasn't going to get the Prince role just because I was African-American. I had to be a strong dancer. My talent was going to get me the role, not the color of my skin."

Anderson agrees. "Houston Ballet doesn't harp on the color thing at all. It never has. You do find that [color is an issue] when you go to other places, or when other choreographers come to set a work on the company here. But it was never a factor here. Since the beginning, Houston Ballet just wanted the best dancer for the role. Period.

"I was Alice in *Alice in Wonderland* in 1979 at the Houston [Ballet] Academy. Alice is the whitest of the white characters, so obviously [skin color] isn't the focus of the Houston Ballet. Cinderella and Sleeping Beauty—Disney made them white, but Houston Ballet didn't because I danced both roles."

Other American ballet companies have lagged far behind Houston Ballet when it comes to having African-American dancers in major roles. Misty Copeland became the first African-American principal dancer for American Ballet Theatre in 2015; Lauren Anderson was made principal for Houston Ballet in 1990, a full quarter-century before.

Charlotte Nebres became the first African-American Marie in New York City Ballet's *The Nutcracker* this past December. Cleopatra →

"SHE'S ALWAYS BEEN THERE FOR ME. EARLY ON, SHE WOULD COME UP TO ME AND TELL ME THAT I HAD TO WORK HARDER—TO REALLY DEDICATE MYSELF TO MY TRAINING. 'WE NEED A BLACK PRINCE!' SHE'D TELL ME."

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Williams had danced that role starting in 2001 for Houston Ballet.

“Houston Ballet hired its first Black dancer, Adrian Vincent James, in 1976. And they didn’t do it because he was Black; they did it because he was a great dancer,” says Anderson.

Still, Anderson notes that diversity is important, especially for young audiences. “Kids need to see us onstage,” says Anderson.

Both Watters and Anderson were children when they first saw African-American ballet dancers onstage. And for both of these star dancers, it was a defining moment. The Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater had visited the University of New Hampshire, where Watters’ father was a professor, and the family attended the performance.

“As a little kid I was always moving, always busy,” Watters explains. “But my parents said that when I was watching Alvin Ailey Dance Theater onstage, I was absolutely still, like a statue. I was just mesmerized.”

The same was true for Anderson, who was nine years old when she first saw the Dance Theatre of Harlem. At that performance, she realized she had never seen an African-American ballet dancer. Anderson was already training at the Houston Ballet Academy at that point, but it was still a shock.

“It had never occurred to me that I hadn’t seen a Black ballet dancer—until I saw a Black ballet dancer,” she says.

Watters, now 28, says that after almost ten years in the company, he continues to seek out Anderson for nurturing and career guidance. “I drop by her office every few days. Sometimes just for a hug, even. She doesn’t know it, but she has meant so much to me. Being a dancer is difficult. You’re always competing for roles. You’re worried about injuries. Trying to do your best at every performance. It’s hard. But having Lauren in my corner is amazing. I know I can do it, because she thinks I can. She tells me I can.

“She knows how hard it is, because she’s done it. And if, knowing how hard it is, she thinks I can do it, then it must be true.”

Watters has a huge social-media following, and he knows that he’s very visible. As a gay man, as an African-American, and as a ballet dancer, he’s a role model to young people.

“Lauren was a role model for me, not just because she was African-American but because she was fierce, she was confident. I hope that I can be an example for young people.

“Whatever it is about me that they identify with—because I’m gay, because I’m a dancer, because I’m African-American, whatever—I hope they can look at me and say, ‘I can be successful like he’s been successful.’ And the truth is, they can.

“Lauren was an example for me on so many levels. I just love her.”

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The candidate has been married to noted local artist Sonya Cuellar since 2015. They married as soon as the Supreme Court marriage-equality ruling passed.

"We've been together for almost ten years," Johnson says. "We had our rings, and as soon as we heard the news we texted each other, so I guess I can say we proposed by text. I wish I had a more romantic story, but that was it! But she's the yin to my yang. I am a stronger person because of her."

The couple resides in the Rice Military area of District 134 with their three rescue dogs, and they enjoy travel and spending time with Cuellar's extended family in Rosenberg, where they let

their dogs run and play with their nieces and nephews. There isn't much time for date nights during a campaign, but Johnson does say that they have a rule about leaving their phones at home when they go out to dinner so they can focus on each other.

Turning the Texas statehouse blue in 2020 is important to Democrats for a host of reasons, from LGBTQ rights to a woman's right to choose to climate change and affordable healthcare.

"This race is vitally important," Johnson says. "Because of [the upcoming redistricting process], the people you vote for this year will be drawing the maps in 2021. I know firsthand what happened to our district in 2012, and it is of major importance that we take the partisan politics out of redistricting."

Johnson has been endorsed by former Houston Mayor Annise Parker, former District 134 Representative Ellen Cohen, and the Victory Fund. Her official website is annjohnson.com.

Turning the Texas statehouse blue in 2020 is important to Democrats for a host of reasons, from LGBTQ rights to a woman's right to choose to climate change and affordable healthcare.

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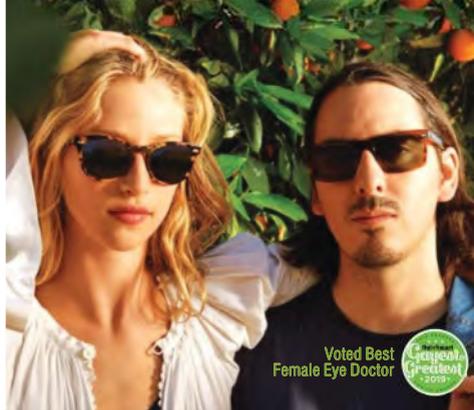
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QUEEN POWER COUPLES

LGBTQ Houstonians and their partners are taking over. From running some of Space City's hottest businesses to ensuring that our community is properly cared for, these twosomes are serious #RelationshipGoals.

This February issue of OutSmart spotlights six of these inspirational couples.

First, we feature our cover stars and the creators of Bug in a Box, **Ruben Salazar and Tristan Erickson**, who have built an entire business around making insects beautiful. Then, we introduce you to **Shenice Brown and Shan Randle**, two millennials who help people plan for their future at Empower Financial. Next, work up an appetite for **Michael Dorsey and Chih Lin** (also known by their business moniker, the Dumpling Dudez), whose business venture teaches the techniques

behind those eloquently wrapped, Eastern-inspired delights. LGBTQ Houston philanthropists **Carol and Sallie Wyatt-Woodell** then tell us about their love for charity work—and for each other. And don't miss our visit with **Jeff Harmon and Anthony Villarreal**, the busy doublet behind the new ReBar Houston nightclub. Lastly, fall head-over-heels for **Angelina Pinina and Carter Riden**, two performers who entertain the crowds and leave a trail of glitter wherever they go.



Making Bugs Beautiful

Ruben Salazar and Tristan Erickson
turn insects into art.

By SAM BYRD

Photo by ASHKAN ROAYAAE



Whereas most people see a bug and want to squash it or swat it away, 28-year-old Ruben Salazar and 22-year-old Tristan Erickson, owners of Bug In The Box, see beauty. What makes most people cringe with unease is something they feel quite comfortable with. In fact, they've built an entire business around their stylish, handmade shadow boxes that showcase a selection of insects and arachnids from around the world.

The two natives of Humble started their business at home as a labor of love a few years after they first met via Facebook. That connection has now metamorphosed into a six-year relationship—right along with their mutual love for the six- and eight-legged world of insects.

"It came as a hobby. We would go and catch our own specimens [in the large local nature parks] and display them. We have walls full of them. [After making quite a few] plain shadow boxes, we wanted to mix it up and make something more decorative for my mother for Christmas," Erickson says. "Then we posted Instagram photos and got more than 600 likes, so we realized this was something we could market."

And market, they did. For three years now, Bug In The Box has been growing. Their home venture has evolved into a 100-square-foot rental space in the Heights, another home studio, and a show space at The Silos at Sawyer Yards. The business has shadow-box contracts with the Houston Museum of Natural Science, MD Anderson Cancer Center, and various stores in the region.

Bug In The Box preserves, stages, and decorates the insects in artistic displays that fea-

ture butterflies, moths, dragonflies, beetles, wasps, bees, praying mantises, and scorpions. The insects are farmed mostly from Costa Rica, South America, Asia, and Africa—all ethically and humanely preserved after they have died naturally in farms or sanctuaries.

The couple explains that Mother Nature determines the insects' various life spans. The male praying mantis, for example, lives only until he mates. While that brief life cycle may seem cruel, their beauty can live on thanks to Bug In The Box.

But it's not as easy as the artistic shadow-box displays make it seem. The process of preserving and transporting the bugs for display is quite a meticulous endeavor in itself. "When the bugs die, they go through a freeze-drying process, so when we get them they're brittle and dry," Erickson explains. "We go through a rehydration process for about two to three months, so moisture can absorb back into the bug's skin. Then we can lay it out, pin it, let it dry, pose it, mount it, and frame it."

The couple's growing bug business seems like it should have always been a natural calling. Salazar's mother was an entomologist (a scientist who studies the classification and physiology of insects), while Erickson's father taught his young son the ways of nature.

"We've caught snapping turtles, red sliders, and even a water moccasin. I ended up releasing it, though," Erickson admits, explaining that his parents wouldn't let the snake reside in the house. "But I had bald pythons, poison dart frogs, and even a free-roaming iguana. He had his own room, and a puppy pad where he'd use the restroom. He'd sleep on the curtains. It was pretty cool!"

Although both men grew up with "bugs on the brain" and it all seems normal to them, they

still get the occasional raised eyebrow when people first learn about their business. But after seeing the shadow boxes, people begin to appreciate this unique decorative art and its symbolic meaning.

"Customers sometimes say that our butterflies remind them of a loved one who passed away. For example, MD Anderson carries the art in its gift shops, and if [one of their cancer patients] passes, it can be a gift for the family. Butterflies signify new life," Salazar notes.

Customers sometimes want to have their own pet arachnids preserved—usually scorpions and tarantulas. Salazar and Erickson will happily handle those requests, including picking out specific boxes, backdrops, and any special messages to attach to the box.

Some creepy-crawlers, however, are off the list for Bug In The Box.

"We've had requests for mammals. People want bats. We don't want to work with guts or blood. I wouldn't even know how to start with that. Insects aren't easy, but at least there's no blood," Salazar said. "Tristan doesn't like them, either."

And even though the couple specializes in dead insects, that doesn't stop them from enjoying living creatures as well. "We have owned a lot of lizards and geckos, and I had the cutest pygmy chameleons," Erickson says. "We've had dart frogs, leaf insects, walking sticks, and tarantulas."



Check out Bug In The Box's creepy-crawliest art on Tuesdays and Fridays from 1:00 to 5:00 p.m., or by appointment at The Silos at Sawyer Yards, 1502 Sawyer Street. Visit buginthebox.net or email rubensbernal@hotmail.com. Prices range from under \$150 to a few thousand dollars.

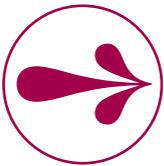


Tristan Erickson (l)
and Ruben Salazar

Saving for the Future

Shenice Brown and Shan Randle are the creators of Empower Financial.

By MARENE GUSTIN



“It’s never too late to start saving,” says Shenice Brown, a 27-year-old professional who with her partner, Shan Randle, 33, helps people plan for their financial future at Empower Financial.

“People shouldn’t live paycheck-to-paycheck,” she adds. “You should put 50 percent of your earnings into savings. That doesn’t mean you have to give up everything, but be realistic.”

The couple met in February of 2018 at a networking event with the Greater Houston LGBT Chamber of Commerce. Shenice was already a member, and Shan was attending her first event. They exchanged business cards and kept in touch over the next few months. Not only did love bloom, but so did the idea for a financial-planning business, which they opened later that year.

Shan, who had been a public-school teacher for eight years, shifted her focus from teaching reading and writing to teaching financial planning in 2017. “I wish I knew what I know now about finances when I was 18,” she says.

Both women came from difficult childhoods, and their goal now is to help other families plan for the future and for unexpected events. Shenice explains that if she could go back in time, she would tell her family two things: get plenty of life insurance, and save and invest your money.

“Too many times, we see someone who loses a loved one and, on top of the grief, they go bankrupt or have to start a GoFundMe account to pay for end-of-life expenses,” Shenice says.

“Along with helping individuals and businesses with life insurance and retirement planning needs,” Shan says, “we knew that our passion is improving our society’s financial literacy. We’re not taught much about money

and its role in the real world.”

In *their* real world, the couple shares a rental home in Spring, but they’re looking to buy a home soon. Both also have real-estate licenses. Shenice has a nine-year-old daughter who lives with her father in Connecticut, so traveling to see her is a priority. But otherwise, they live on a pretty tight budget. “We each get \$90 a week to spend on nonessentials,” Shenice says. “So date night is something inexpensive.” They also use a lot of coupons and look for specials.

But the end game is that they plan to have the option to retire in just five years.

“Retirement doesn’t have to mean you quit work,” says Shenice. “But it might mean you

can afford to take off for a month and travel. We had a couple who flipped houses and wanted to retire in three years, but they had no savings. Everything went back into the properties. But we helped them restructure their business plan, and I think they can do it.”

The couple doesn’t really have much time for going out, between their business and their charity work. They do free financial-literacy classes and workshops for high-school students, churches, and nonprofits, and they volunteer with the Greater Houston LGBT Chamber of Commerce, the local Human Rights Campaign gala, and The Woodlands Pride festival.

When they do have a little down time, Shenice likes to take long baths and listen to business podcasts. They plan to start their own podcast soon, featuring LGBTQ business professionals.

“I’m pretty boring,” says Shan. “But when I have time, I love picking up my basketball—and doing yoga and meditation.”

Shenice admits it can be challenging for a couple to both work and live together, but they seem happy—in spite of some minor cultural challenges.

“Can I tell this story?” Shan asks Shenice. “Okay, Shenice is from Jamaica. The first time I saw her eat shrimp, she just bit into the whole thing. I couldn’t believe she was eating the shell and all!”

“That’s the way we eat it!” Shan says with mock indignation. “Just google ‘Jamaican hot pepper shrimp’—we eat the shell *and* the whole head. All of it. It’s good!”

“ALONG WITH HELPING INDIVIDUALS AND BUSINESSES WITH LIFE INSURANCE AND RETIREMENT PLANNING NEEDS, WE KNEW THAT OUR PASSION IS IMPROVING OUR SOCIETY’S FINANCIAL LITERACY. WE’RE NOT TAUGHT MUCH ABOUT MONEY AND ITS ROLE IN THE REAL WORLD.”

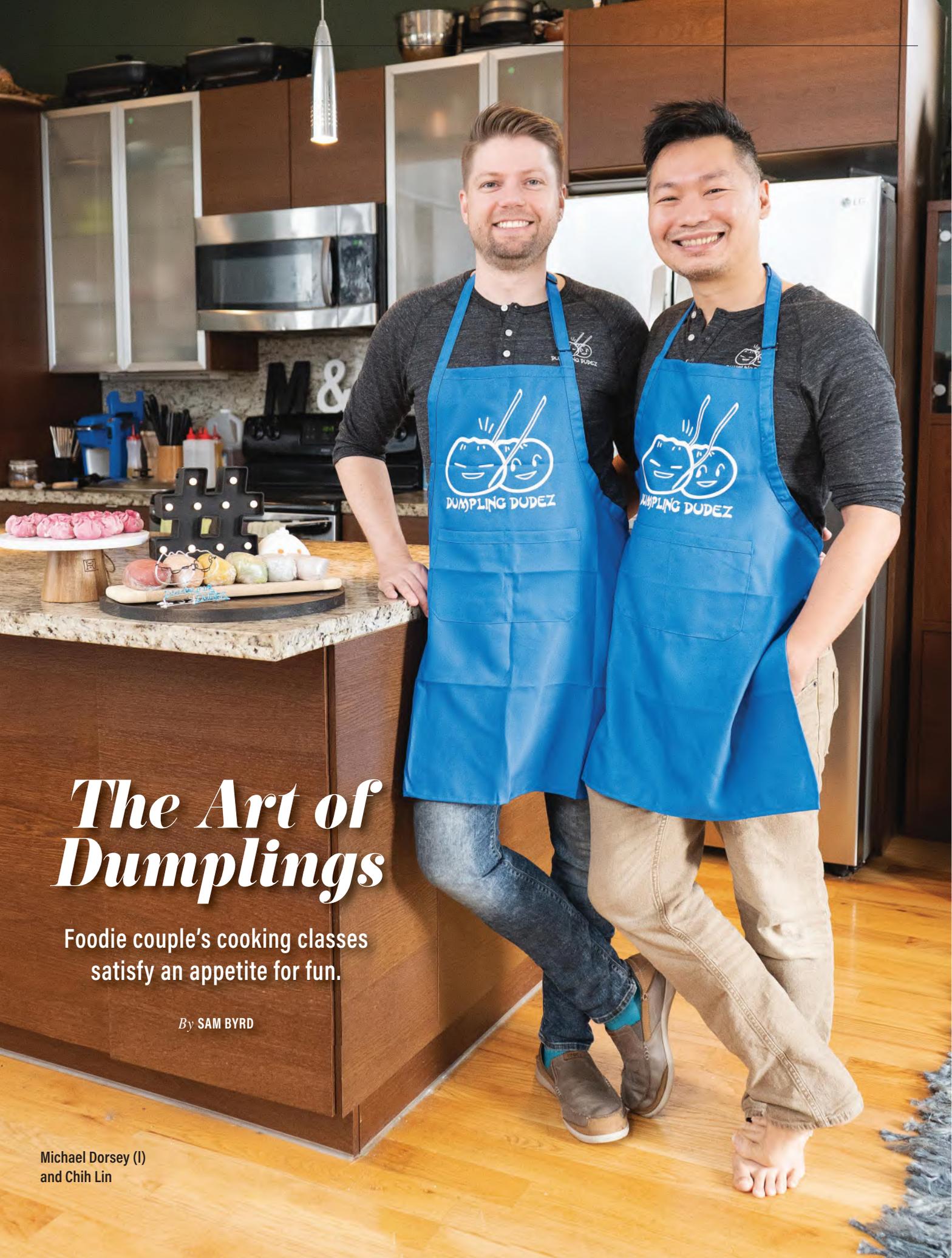
—Shan Randle



Empower Financial (empowerfinanciallife.com) is a National Gay and Lesbian Chamber of Commerce (NGLCC) certified LGBT Business enterprise.



Shenice Brown (l)
and Shan Randle



The Art of Dumplings

Foodie couple's cooking classes satisfy an appetite for fun.

By SAM BYRD

Michael Dorsey (l)
and Chih Lin



“Hey good looking, what you got cooking?” Ask that question in Michael Dorsey and Chih Lin’s kitchen, and the answer will most likely be dumplings. The married duo,

also known by their business moniker Dumpling Dudez, recently created a business venture to teach the techniques behind the eloquently wrapped, Eastern-inspired delights.

It’s generated quite the excitement in Houston’s foodie scene. The couple’s burgeoning enterprise is quite tasty and complex, but its origins were sparked by something simpler—their budding romance.

“We actually met online,” Dorsey explains. “A friend of his saw my online profile and told him he needed to message me. I lived in Austin, and he lived in College Station at the time. We talked online and messaged each other for a good four to six months. This is before social media, just to put it in context. It was a leap of faith. He came into town and we grabbed coffee.”

The rest took off from there. The relationship grew, and eventually the time came to start taking more serious steps toward creating a stronger bond, including getting to know each other’s friends.

“When we first met, we didn’t know if our friends would like each other, so we threw a dumpling event to get everyone together, and

people loved it. Now we do it once or twice a year,” Lin says. “We both are foodies, and we both wanted something creative. We tried to figure out what life experience we liked in the past, and we decided it was dumplings. We wanted to make it an experience for other people.”

At the time, both enjoyed careers in engineering, but they felt compelled to depart from their original career paths to take on something more meaningful that they could call their own.

“I worked in oil and gas for 15 years, and Mike worked in that for five years. We loved what we did, but at the end of the day we realized we were building a dream for someone else. We felt like something was missing, and wanted to do something more fulfilling. It was scary, but eventually we dove in,” Lin says.

Dorsey had previous experience as a construction contractor and subcontractor, so he was more at ease with the idea of going rogue. Lin eventually got on board with the idea of leaving his job, and finally informed his boss on April 1, of all dates. And voilà, Dumpling Dudez was born.

The name was something that seemed natural to the pair. Dorsey says, “It was just something funny we were joking about. People already knew us as foodies and from cooking dumplings at the parties we’ve thrown. People nicknamed us ‘Dumpling Guys,’ and we turned

it into ‘Dumpling Dudez.’”

The idea behind the business is no April Fool’s joke, though. It offers a beginner’s level how-to lesson on creating the dough, building a dumpling, and getting creative with the various folds and designs for these tasty morsels.

Classes cost \$69.99 per person, which includes an introductory glass of bubbles, an appetizer to kick off the night, and all of the required ingredients and tools. Plus, participants get to cook all the dumplings and eat them at the end of the class. Perks of the night include a BYOB format, as well as a chance to take in the stars and Houston’s skyline after the class is over, weather permitting. The class is offered on Fridays and Saturdays for three weekends out of the month, and each class can accommodate up to 12 guests.

Dorsey and Lin offer a selection of meats and fillings—including vegetarian options—for people to choose from during the class, and they follow up with sample recipes for participants to try at their leisure.

Roses, college mascots, cartoon characters, Yoshi eggs, Baby Yoda—you name it, and the Dumpling Dudez can find a way to shape it out of a dumpling. Although they teach the traditional dumpling folds, they usually pay attention to current events (whether it be pop culture or an upcoming holiday) to find something timely and memorable to create in their classes.

The Dudez are social-media savvy, too. They supply selfie sticks, a tripod for time-lapse videos, and lights for images and videos on Instagram, YouTube, and Facebook. They also give alerts throughout the class for the perfect Boomerang moments.

In fact, social media is one of the best ways they market their classes. Lin’s background in marketing for the energy industry serves Dumpling Dudez quite well. In the first few months, he grew the business’s Instagram account from 200 followers to more than 2,500 and counting, while posting everything from tried-and-failed experiments with dough colors to discovering new shapes and folds for the dumplings.

Dorsey says Dumpling Dudez can also take their kitchen-class experience on the road, if requested. Businesses sometimes hire them for team-building events, or as a fun way to decompress from the daily grind. They’ve previously worked off-site with groups of up to 30 people.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 84



All the Perks

Dumpling Dudez’s cooking classes include an introductory glass of bubbles, an appetizer to kick off the night, and all of the required ingredients and tools.

INSTAGRAM

Leading Ladies of LGBTQ Philanthropy

Sallie and Carol Wyatt-Woodell are passionate about supporting their community.

By SAM BYRD



If sharing common interests is what creates a strong relationship, then the glue that bonds Carol and Sallie Wyatt-Woodell is their mutual call to community involvement.

It was as close as it gets to love at first sight when the two met at a board meeting for Kindred Spirits seven years ago. Sallie sat on a committee that hired Carol to perform fundraising development tasks for the foundation, and that's when the sparks first flew.

"Sallie showed up uncharacteristically late to a meeting. Instantly our eyes met, and there was a click. I proceeded to flirt shamelessly through the entire meeting. We talked afterwards, and then both got in our cars to leave," Carol recalls. "Two blocks later, we stopped our cars in the middle of the street, and I asked Sallie out. Sallie said she only accepted the invitation because she thought my car would get stolen. We were kissing before the night was over, and we haven't been apart since."

Both agree that meeting professionally while serving the community helped solidify their interest in each other. "The way we met was a great way to filter through what was important," Sallie explains. "We didn't have to meet at a bar or a blind date; we got to see each other as active participants in the community." Carol adds, "How we spoke of and championed our opinions, and behaved as community leaders, made an impression on each other."

Volunteering had always been a central part of their lives before they met, and it continues well into their fifth year of married life.

"In relationships, it's common to see one person who is visible in the community [while the other person is] a silent partner. With us, we're both active and involved, both together and on our own," Carol says.

Sallie, 42, started volunteering in her early

30s, while Carol, 65, started in her early 40s. The list of organizations that they dedicate their spare time to is a who's-who of the city's most prestigious queer-focused nonprofits.

Carol is the creator and manager of Social Notes Houston, a website and email list that provides information about the goings-on of Houston's lesbian community. She has volunteered for Pride Houston, where she held the titles of Vice President and then President. She also worked as a table captain co-chair for the Human Rights Campaign's Houston Gala, and as a board member and event chair for OutReach United.

Sallie currently serves as president for Out for Education, and as the director of volunteers for OutReach United. She previously served as secretary for the Diana Foundation, which is the longest-running LGBTQ nonprofit in the United States. She also spent time working with the Victory Fund's Houston branch.

Through the years, Sallie and Carol have opened their home to host holiday parties that benefited various LGBTQ nonprofit organizations by raising thousands of dollars each year. Together, they served as table captain co-chairs for the Montrose Center Spring Gala in 2015 and 2016, and they are resuming that role for this year's event.

Their dedication to the community hasn't gone unnoticed. Both women were voted Female Grand Marshal of the Houston Pride parade—Carol in 2010, and Sallie in 2017.

In addition to their unwavering support of the LGBTQ community, they have an affinity for animal rescue and adoption. They share their northwest Houston home with three dogs and two cats, and are also in the final stages of planning their second annual From Rescue to Runway event to support Houston K-911 Rescue. It involves a puppy fashion show, a silent auction, and the chance to rub elbows with Houston's animal enthusiasts. The char-

ity event takes place from 2:00 to 4:00 p.m. on Saturday, February 8 at Neon Boots Dancehall & Saloon, 11410 Hempstead Road.

"We just saw it as a chance to do something that we're good at to help them. We've adopted two dogs from this rescue, and it was close to our hearts," Sallie says. Carol adds, "It was a chance to take the skills we've built in the gay community, create a new event, and produce it on the fly for a different audience. It's a labor of love."

Both women maintain full-time careers in addition to all of their volunteer work, so taking an occasional vacation can look quite tempting to the couple.

"We enjoy traveling to the Rocky Mountains. Colorado is our spiritual home," they say. "Because we both lead busy lives, any night we can spend at home in front of a fire with our animals and a glass of wine is an absolute treat."

Committing to make time for each other is also a way they keep their relationship nurtured, and keeping a shared calendar helps them find down time for each other. "What we have done since the beginning of our relationship is schedule [our individual activities] on each other's calendars. Then when we both have a free night, that is our date night. We have a date night every week," Sallie notes.

As active as these women are, they are also looking toward the future and creating a long-term plan to hand the torch to the next wave of Houston philanthropists.

"I'd like to mentor the next generation of volunteers. I'd like to see them step up. We need their ideas, energy, and passion. We're seeing that at the polls, and we need to see it at the small nonprofits as well," Sallie says. "We'd like to find the people who want to volunteer, and help them understand that this will be good both socially and for business. Volunteering will make a difference in their lives."



Sallie (l) and
Carol Wyatt-Woddell

Balancing Business and Pleasure

Jeff Harmon and Anthony Villarreal are the busy couple behind ReBar Houston.

By SAM BYRD



On any given night at ReBar Houston, the drinks are slinging, the drag queens are singing, and the pulse of the music is ringing through the air. Houston's latest hot spot is garnering attention as *the*

place to be, and it's all happening because of the work of owner Jeff Harmon.

Harmon has been the man behind the scenes for some of southeast Texas' best-known nightclubs. He has owned Halo in College Station since 2003, and for years he was the force behind the rebirth of Rich's in Midtown. Most recently, he opened ReBar at 202 Tuam Street.

"There were a few factors involved in moving from Rich's to ReBar. For a long time I've wanted to be in the gayborhood, but when does a building become available in the area? I had to wait until something happened, and the opportunity eventually came about," Harmon says. "I wanted to have a nightclub that could be open multiple days a week and have multiple types of things. We do drag here. We have a beautiful patio. On the weekends, people come to dance. There was a combination of reasons that it made sense to bring this to the gayborhood rather than remain in Midtown with a giant building."

The business has been a hot spot for months now, with live singing competitions, drag shows and contests, and appearances by some of the most sought-after DJs.

The person behind Harmon's success is his partner of nearly seven years, Anthony Villarreal, who helps Harmon with the club's day-to-day management. Although Harmon runs the

show, if he is pulled away from the club to tend to other matters, Villarreal steps in to make sure operations are flowing smoothly and at the level of Harmon's expectations. Whereas Harmon likes to stay behind the scenes when working, Villarreal is more of a social butterfly who jumps in the middle of the action and socializes with patrons. Harmon is the yin to Villarreal's yang.

Villarreal is successful in his own right as the owner of EZ Reach Cabinet Systems, a business he started fresh out of college. The company focuses on customized cabinet renovations, specializing in building interior pull-out shelves as well as rebuilding and refinishing the exteriors.

With such an entrepreneurial spirit between the two, it was only a matter of time before they teamed up to create another business. They are celebrating their second year as co-owners of Revelry, an annual three-day event on Easter weekend with five separate parties featuring guest DJs.

"For Revelry, we fly in talent from all over the world. There's a difference [in how DJs] from other countries mix their music, and I want to bring that variety," Villarreal says. "The energy is there, the intensity is there, the love is there. That's what Revelry represents—those three things. It's diversity, bringing everyone together to join in this dance party and have a great time. It's a passion of both of ours."

Both men enjoy the circuit scene, but they also have a softer side when they get a chance to step out of the club and relax. One thing they both love to do in their down time is travel.

Harmon says, "We love going to Pensacola and P-Town. P-Town is our favorite place, and

we go every year. Our travel schedule starts in the spring, and it's pretty hectic until October. We're both very close to our families, so we spend a lot of time with our families for the holidays."

Villarreal emphasizes their love of family as he describes his extended clan in The Woodlands. "I come from a family of five, and they all have kids. It's just a big family. Jeff loves to come to The Woodlands, and they love to see him. We do like to take time to visit them whenever we have that chance. They treat him like their brother or their son."

Since the pair lives together and works from home during daylight hours, they sometimes like to find a way to enjoy some time apart. Villarreal likes to work out at the gym, and Harmon often travels to see a close friend who lives in Louisiana.

"I travel to see her often," Harmon notes. "I can hang out with her, do absolutely nothing, and still have a great time. It gives Anthony time to do what he wants to do, and I get out of his hair. It gives us a healthy break."

Distance always makes the heart grow fonder, though, and reminds them of what they like about each other. Villarreal says, "I love how sweet he is. He's a sweetheart. He doesn't have a mean bone in his body."

Harmon is equally generous with his praise; "Anthony has a good heart. I like him because he's genuine, and he puts me first."



ReBar is open Thursdays through Mondays (hours vary) and is located at 202 Tuam Street. Revelry takes place April 10–12. For updates, visit facebook.com/revelryhouston/.



**"IT'S DIVERSITY,
BRINGING EVERYONE
TOGETHER TO JOIN IN
THIS DANCE PARTY
AND HAVE A GREAT
TIME. IT'S A PASSION
OF BOTH OF OURS."**

—Anthony Villarreal

Jeff Harmon (l) and
Anthony Villarreal

Carter Riden (l) and
Angela Pinina, dressed
as their alter egos
Richard Long
and Bella Forte.



Drag Duo

Performers Carter Riden and Angela Pinina
have a love that sparkles.

By CONNOR BEHRENS
Photo by JENN PANIAGUA



On the surface, Angela Pinina and Carter Riden are just like any other couple. But the two share a special bond whenever they entertain the Houston crowds and leave a

trail of glitter wherever they go.

Riden, known as drag king Richard Long, has been in the drag scene for several years and has entered numerous pageants and contests. The “Glitter King,” as he calls himself, got inspired to do drag after seeing performer Ian Syder-Blake on stage one evening.

“I watched him do ‘Same Love’ and I was enthralled,” Riden recalls. “He was living his best life on stage, and I really looked up to that.”

Syder-Blake offered Riden the chance to perform with him onstage as a backup dancer, and thus was Riden’s alter-ego born.

“After that, it was all just kind of trial and error through beards and adhesives,” Riden says. “I landed on glitter and became the shiniest thing in the room.”

Pinina, who acts, sings, and entertains as Bella Forte, is new to the drag scene and has quickly fallen in love with it. “I like seeing all the different aspects of drag kings and drag queens,” she says.

It was performing at a drag show that caused the two to bump into each other one night.

“We met doing a cabaret show that had a mix of drag performers and live singers,” Pinina remembers. “We had both known each other for about a year before we actually started dating. We were both in other relationships, and then those died out. After that, we kind of connected.”

It was just a matter of finding the time to connect with one another, which meant talking

on social media and bonding through online gaming.

“We spent a solid three weeks chatting and playing UNO on Facebook Messenger because both of us lived crazy, outlandish lives,” Riden says. “I was up too early, worked too long, and then had drag at night.”

Pinina was holding down three to four different jobs at a time, but she made an effort to keep in touch with Riden because she felt the pair had something special.

“Our free time was very scarce to even hang out in person, but we made it happen,” she says.

The couple’s connection proved stronger than any lack of free time. Two years later, the pair remains inseparable.

The way Pinina sees it, the couple’s success is due to several factors, but the main ingredient is their shared love of performing. “Being an actor in this town, I have dated actors and

my friends told me ‘No more actors,’” she says. “But when I met Carter, I thought, ‘Oh, he’s a performer. He’s not necessarily an actor the way I’m an actor, but he’s a performer.’ He understands the art of live performance and basically portraying a character. I enjoy that we can relate to each other that way. We support each other extremely well in our individual art.”

Riden always makes sure that he is attentive to their relationship, which he says is key for any couple.

“That’s really all there is to it,” he says. “Whenever Angela has a bad day or a stressful day, my first instinct is to go run a bath with a ton of bath salts in it. Light some candles, put on some pretty music, or have some dinner on the table. Just take some stress away.”

Pinina credits always being open and honest with Riden as the secret to their enduring romance.

“The communication between us is very open, and we are very transparent with each other,” she says. “We think we have something pretty special.”

As long as you and your partner support each other, anyone can have a fulfilling, long-term relationship, Pinina emphasizes. “Be honest about your feelings. Just be honest with yourself, and support each other. If you’re not supporting each other, then what are you even doing? Lift each other up. Your relationship shouldn’t tear you down. Your partner should honestly be the last one to do that to you.”

When asked if there’s a secret to their successful relationship, the pair suggests that it’s just their low-key nature that keeps things fresh.

“We pretty much take everything day by day,” Carter says.

“HE UNDERSTANDS THE ART OF LIVE PERFORMANCE AND BASICALLY PORTRAYING A CHARACTER. I ENJOY THAT WE CAN RELATE TO EACH OTHER THAT WAY. WE SUPPORT EACH OTHER EXTREMELY WELL IN OUR INDIVIDUAL ART.”

—Angela Pinina

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They also have ideas for growing the business. “We are looking to launch a bulk-ordering program. We’re also looking to team up with local businesses like gyms, coffeehouses, and breweries,” Dorsey says. “We’re figuring out different events out there that are both artsy and foodie in nature. At the end of the day, it’s all about the experience. Part of why we quit our jobs was to have new experiences in life. We’re trying to keep the same concept.”

Since the business currently operates out of their home, the couple spends the majority of their waking hours together—something they have gone out of their way to make sure doesn’t interrupt their decade-plus relationship.

“It was definitely one of the biggest fears when we first started the business together. We didn’t want our relationship to be impacted by the business. We worked really hard on communicating our emotions and feelings,” Lin says. “Staying accountable to the business and each other is tricky, but it’s very important to achieve success. The trick is to have clearly defined responsibilities that we each manage, and to specify the roles and responsibilities as we learn each other’s working style.”

“Being together 24/7 is definitely a challenge,” Dorsey affirms. “It is also one of the reasons we started this journey together. We never got to spend much time together when we were working full-time in our previous careers. Having said that, we have found it is very important to find the time to take for ourselves as individuals.”

To help unwind, Dorsey and Lin take part in their own independent activities like going to the gym, running, and playing video games.

In the meantime, though, they’re building their business—dumpling by dumpling—and showing Houstonians how food can inspire fellowship. Through it all, they’ve also remained true to their virtues.

“Having our own business gives us the freedom to try something we couldn’t have done [previously]. One of the things I believe in is being true to yourself. It’s sometimes hard to do that in the corporate environment. I thought that if I came out, I would get fired,” Lin admits. “You’ve got to be yourself and show your vulnerability when you launch a new product. If we fail, we fail. We are a ‘pop-and-pop’ business. We know that will turn some people off, but if we are going to do it, we are going to do it as real people.”



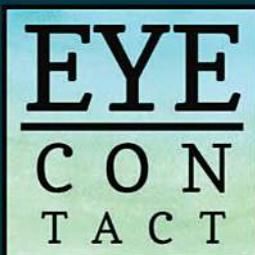
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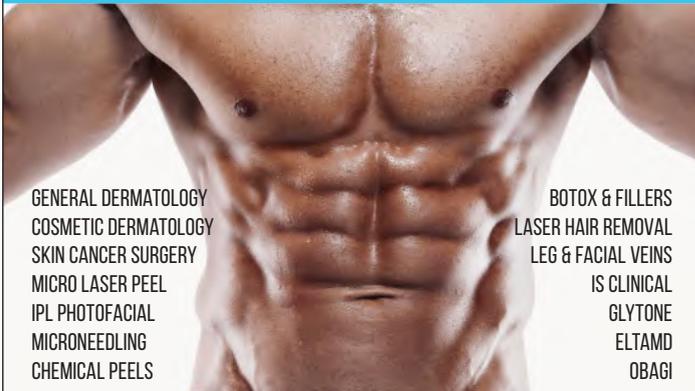
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CREATING CHANGE | CONTINUED FROM PAGE 14

the 2020 census, the upcoming presidential election, immigration policy and the treatment of LGBTQ refugees, and the onslaught of violence against transgender Americans.

An Epidemic of Violence in Texas and Beyond

This year, the Task Force made a conscious choice to place trans women of color front and center at the conference, in response to the alarming and ongoing wave of anti-trans violence. In 2019, at least 25 trans Americans were murdered (including four Texans), according to the Human Rights Campaign. In Houston, 22-year-old Tracy Single was killed on June 30, 2019, and on September 20, 29-year-old Itali Marlowe died after sustaining multiple gunshot wounds in southwest Houston.

The toll of deadly anti-trans violence has become so stark that the American Medical Association has officially declared it an epidemic. Since 2015, there have been at least fifteen murders of trans Texans, with half of those occurring in Dallas, according to reports from the *Dallas Morning News*. African-American trans women are disproportionately represented among the victims.

The centerpiece of Creating Change is its state-of-the-movement address in which longtime Task Force Executive Director Rea Carey lays out the LGBTQ movement's key priorities and challenges for the coming year, from the Task Force's perspective. For the gathering in Dallas, Carey ceded the stage to four Black female trans leaders to discuss the cultural changes that need to happen in order to ameliorate the lives of trans Americans.

Decriminalizing Sex Work

Taffy Johnson, of Seattle's United Territories of Pacific Islanders' Alliance, articulated a clear priority: removing the stigma surrounding sex workers, especially those who are trans women of color.

"Culture change means destigmatizing and decriminalizing sex work so that everyone receives the help and care and support that they need," she observed. "As an indigenous trans woman, culture change means unlearning the binary assumptions of gender identities. Culture change means that some identities exist beyond that, and are more encompassing of a person's totality than just a person's genitalia and appearance. Culture change occurs when a person who looks like me, or who is a trans woman of color, is in a leadership position [that we are oftentimes shut out of]."

Investing in Trans Leaders

Another panelist, Jade Lenore of AIDS United, stressed the importance of investing in leadership-development programs for trans

women, for being intentional in putting them in leadership positions, and for supporting them in those roles.

For Jeynce Mizrahi Poindexter of Equality Michigan, providing financial resources to organizations and programs supporting trans women is key. "Invest in Black trans women," she declared. "When you ask her to come to your spaces to speak, you honor her with a stipend. If we are asking the world to support equality and what we're going through, we must first set the standards, as a community, that we are going to go by."

Shifting the Narrative

The dynamic young activist Micky Bradford, a national organizer with the Transgender Law Center, was heartened by the sharing of stories about trans lives. "We have shows like *Pose* that are shifting the narrative of what it means to be a trans person of color," she observed. "What we need to do is put cameras in the hands of every single Black femme trans in this room and beyond [so they can] tell their stories."

She praised the efforts of organizations like Black Trans Media and House of Pentacles, a film-industry training program that launches Black trans youth into filmmaking. "They are literally training Black trans femmes to be filmmakers, to be storytellers, to shift the policies that govern our lives."

At the close of the State of the Movement presentation, a dozen trans activists from across the country, including Houston's Ana Andrea Molina, took center stage to proclaim a Transgender Agenda for Liberation. Key components of that agenda include:

- Equal access to healthcare, housing, bodily autonomy, and intergenerational connection.
- Respect for indigenous cultural practices and land sovereignty.
- The affirmation of trans children from the moment of birth, so that they are empowered to live as their authentic selves at home, at school, and in public life.
- The granting of full rights and protections for individuals in sex-work economies.

"It starts with trusting trans Black femmes, and ends with ending the prison-industrial complex," commented Micky Bradford of the Transgender Law Center. "At its core, it is about ending state violence. It is about ending the violence that makes our communities the most vulnerable to interpersonal violence, to discrimination, to being over-policed, criminalized, caged, and murdered.

"Trust Black trans femmes across movements," Bradford stated in conclusion. ▼

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All Grown Up

Trixie Mattel dishes on her new tour, cosmetics line, book, and more.

By MARTIN GIRON
Photo by ALBERT SANCHEZ



Since winning *RuPaul's Drag Race All Stars 3* two years ago, Trixie Mattel has been busy at work building her fantastic pink-plastic life. The Barbie-inspired drag queen has gone on to tour across the world, start her own cosmetics line, and even film a documentary bio entitled *Moving Parts*. Mattel has also explored other creative avenues by posting makeup videos to her personal YouTube channel and reacting to the Netflix original series like *Dolly Parton's Heartstrings*. (Mattel and Parton share a love for big blonde hair and folk music.) Mattel has done all of this with her friend, co-star, and co-writer Katya Zamolodchikova, a fellow season 7 contestant from *RuPaul's Drag Race* with whom she hosts the popular YouTube series *UNHhhh*. Prior to Mattel's March 8 performance in Houston at the Wortham Center, the Milwaukee native spoke with *OUTSMART* to discuss her upcoming projects.

Martin Giron: What have you been up to since you last went on tour?

Trixie Mattel: In 2019, I turned 30, had huge business growth, and entered the third year of a relationship.

Is that what “growing up” means to you?

I’m now at the age where, as a gay person, I’m looking at everyone else and asking myself, “Have I done nothing?” I don’t have a family or kids. A lot of us, especially gay people who don’t have kids, [feel like] we have no legacy. So it’s like, do our lives even matter? Are we just taking up space and buying clothes? Also, I’m at this turning point with drag. I’m a lifer now. I can’t just go down and do a shift at Coldstone. This is it. Crossdressing is it for me. Given that I’m getting older, and recently hit 12 years of doing drag, I’ve been having some dark self-reflections. That’s really what made the Grown Up tour happen. Let’s talk about being an adult, and how you never really are one. You’re just an old child.

What does the writing process for your comedy skits look like?

I usually write down jokes all year, based on whatever experiences I’ve had. At the end of the year, I sit down with all of the jokes on note cards and tack them on the wall with double-sided tape and I look at it like a serial killer tracking another serial killer. Then I ask myself: What’s the connection here? What was my overarching experience? And, what does that say about where I am in life?

Is this similar to how you wrote your book with Katya?

There was a big switch [to get into the writing process] for the book. A book sounds like, “Oh, I won’t have to get into drag! That’s great. I’ll be Gale Weathers writing *The Woodsboro Murders*, and wear a side pony and type on my computer.” But *Trixie and Katya’s Modern Guide to Womanhood* took a long time. We wrote it throughout the year and had to do lots of photo shoots for it. There were at least 10 days of photo shoots.

It’s basically a handbook to prepare yourself for being a young adult woman, written by two middle-aged men [who are drag queens]. We cover the basics like hair, makeup, being broken up with, and getting your period. Katya literally wrote a haiku about getting your period in this book. It’s a great book, and I’m very proud of my sections. I’ve known Katya for probably five years, and that bitch is crazy. I don’t even know if she read my sections, but I

read hers. If you think she’s weird now, you’re going to read this book and ask yourself if she’s okay. It has that energy.

Speaking of Katya, how is filming for Season 5 of UNHhhh coming along?

It’s good. I can’t believe we’re still doing it. I think we’re on episode 120 or something. We love it, and it’s led to so many other things. It never feels like work, either. We get to show up, pick out our looks for the day, put on our makeup and wigs, and talk about whatever we want. I’m *in* this shit, and I still watch it and cry laughing. Katya and I watch it and scream. Every week when an episode comes out, we text each other like “Oh my God, did you watch it yet?”

Tell me about your new album *Barbara*.

The album is built like an 8-track. The first four tracks are very upbeat, bright, and sunny. They’re supposed to be like a day at the beach with the AM radio playing in your dune buggy in 1969. The last four tracks are supposed to be like that beach at nighttime—those songs are more folksy. I moved to California a few years

“GIVEN THAT I’M GETTING OLDER, AND RECENTLY HIT 12 YEARS OF DOING DRAG, I’VE BEEN HAVING SOME DARK SELF-REFLECTIONS. THAT’S REALLY WHAT MADE THE GROWN UP TOUR HAPPEN. LET’S TALK ABOUT BEING AN ADULT, AND HOW YOU NEVER REALLY ARE ONE.”

—Trixie Mattel

ago, so I live in a perpetual summer. I also love the ‘60s in general, so I really got into this ‘60s summer fantasy.

It’s called *Barbara* because that’s Barbie’s real name. I wanted to go back to the beginning and [rediscover] why I became Trixie and what my original vision for her was. I [first] imagined Trixie as this Malibu Barbie who told really dark and sad jokes—she’s impossibly beautiful but deeply dysfunctional.

What’s next for Trixie Cosmetics?

There are new lip colors coming out in the spring. Katya and I are working on a beautiful blood-red matte color called Red Scare. Last year we released about 17 products, and this year we’re launching probably twice that.

Which product from the line do you recommend most?

The Summer of Love Blush Palette.

Tell me your favorite thing about performing in Texas.

Getting drunk and eating Whataburger. [Laughs] I love Texas—let me tell you about Texas. Texas is one of the only places I can go where I don’t look crazy. There are a bunch of homosexuals who had very oppressive Southern upbringings. They like big hair, big earrings, big everything, so they also like my style and dark sense of humor. Texas is like a melting pot—the homophobes and the gays both turn up to Dolly Parton at Applebees. A straight guy there once told me, “We love Jesus, but we *worship* Dolly Parton.”

Favorite Dolly Parton song?

“Wildflowers” or “Coat of Many Colors.”

What are some things fans can expect to see from the Grown Up tour that’s different from your two previous tours—Ages 3 and Up, and Moving Parts?

Whenever I finish a project, I die. And from the ashes of exhaustion, I wake up, shake off the spiritual hangover from touring for a year, and ask, “What’s next?” I’m so fickle, I don’t try to make a show that’s drastically different from before, but my life is always changing, so the material is always about something new. Ages 3 and Up was about being broken up with, Moving Parts was about when I was single, and Grown Up is about being in [a long-term] relationship and keeping the wheels on that motherf-ker. And because it’s a new show of mine, I also matured the production. There are five times more costumes, more wigs, bigger, crazier videos, and a live band.



Keep up with Trixie Mattel on social media @trixiemattel.

What: Trixie Mattel’s Grown Up tour

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One of a Kind

An interview with singer and songwriter Mary Gauthier.

By GREGG SHAPIRO

Photo by LAURA PARTAIN

The Grammy-nominated album *Rifles & Rosary Beads* (In the Black/Thirty Tigers) by lesbian singer/songwriter Mary Gauthier is a product of Gauthier's association with Darden Smith's nonprofit organization *Songwriting with Soldiers*, a PBS television special in which soldiers team up with professional songwriters for a night of music. For Gauthier's album, she collaborated with male and female soldiers for a majority of the tracks. Two of the songs, including the devastating "The War after the War" were written by military wives whose soldier husbands returned from the battlefield wounded. Gauthier, whom I've always described as a sort of queer Lucinda Williams, has a history of bringing listeners to tears (check out 2010's *The Foundling*), but *Rifles & Rosary Beads* takes that ability to a whole new level. Mary was kind enough to take time out of her tour and writing schedule to answer a few questions for OUTSMART.

Gregg Shapiro: Mary, I'd like to begin by congratulating you on your Grammy Award nomination for your brilliant 2018 album *Rifles & Rosary Beads*. What does such an honor mean to you?

Mary Gauthier: I don't know! It always is nice to be singled out for an honor like that. Mostly, it means that I have to keep going to work every day. There's no magic bullet that changes my job. I just have to keep going to work and doing what I do. Trying to find the next story that's important for me to tell.

What can you tell me about the genesis of the *Rifles & Rosary Beads* project?



Mary Gauthier

It's a collection of songs co-written with members of the military and their families. The songs are true stories that have been lived by people that I've sat down and written with. I listen to their stories and bear witness to what they're going through, and turn their life into a song.

Do you think your history of musical collaboration led you to this, in a way?

Yes, I do. I think my own personal story helped me be able to understand some of what they're going through. There's definitely a good match [between] me and people who have struggled. I'm able to sit in the story and listen without being afraid, and bear witness without judging.

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MARY GAUTHIER | CONTINUED FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

and message, how does it make you feel, as both an artist and a citizen, that we are once again on the precipice of wars with Iran and North Korea?

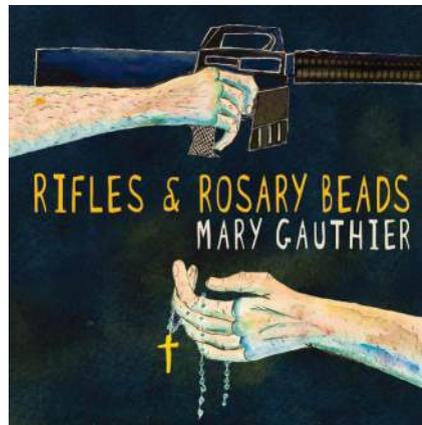
To stay out of the politics of it, I would say there is a tremendous burden on those who serve. We have a responsibility to be very careful before we send them into yet another endless conflict that we're not even sure why we're fighting. Less than one percent of our population serves, and those people are carrying the weight for all of us, whether we acknowledge it, understand it, or even realize it. Having listened to them and sat with them over the last seven years, and those who are still in active duty, we should think long and hard before getting embroiled in another nightmare scenario that has no endgame. We should never go in unless we have a plan on how to get out. That didn't happen in Iraq and Afghanistan. We're still there. I've seen the human cost on our women and our men, not to mention what's happened to people in Iraq and Afghanistan—the civilians and their children. It's a very somber decision to go to war, and I take it very seriously.

In addition to being a songwriter, you have also made a name for yourself as a teacher by leading popular songwriting workshops. What do you like best about the workshop experience?

I love talking about songwriting. I love talking about songwriting with songwriters that are committed to learning the art and the craft. I'm a huge believer in this work as a way of telling important stories that need to be told. I like working with writers who want to get in there and really work and learn and become better at what they do. As a teacher, it brings me great joy to be able to do that.

With all of the ongoing favorable attention showered on *Rifles & Rosary Beads*, have you had time to think about what you might do for your next album?

No, I'm in the middle of writing a book right now. That has my full attention. It's called *Saved by a Song*. Musically, I really don't know what's next. I do want to get this book moved along. I'm writing it for St. Martin's Press. In February, I'm just going to be in the writing chair getting this book as far along as I can get it. When I turn in that first draft, I'm sure I'll start thinking about where I need to be, musically.



Listen to Mary Gauthier's *Rifles & Rosary Beads* on all streaming platforms now, or purchase it online.

A little over 20 years ago, you released your second album, *Drag Queens in Limousines*. It was at a time when there weren't a lot of people singing about or paying tribute to drag queens, let alone making them part of the title of an album. Fast-forward to today, when *RuPaul's Drag Race* is one of the most popular shows on TV, especially with straight women. Do you still have drag queens in your life,

especially the kind you sang about taking you in when you needed help?

Life has changed. I'm 58 years old. I don't live at the bars like I used to. I'm a folk singer going from town to town. But I've always had a strong pull toward outsiders and folks who live outside of what's considered normal. Creative types. The rebels and misfits. People who push culture forward have always been of interest to me. When I was young, I spent a huge amount of time in the gay bars. I got sober when I was 27. I'll be 30 years sober this year. The reason I go to bars now is for music. I haven't been spending much time in the clubs or going to drag shows or doing that thing that I used to. But I lived it for a long time, and I've always loved genderqueers and people who have pushed the envelope. It's always been interesting to me. I've always rooted for those brave souls that get up there and do it their way and do it different. My heart is always with those people.

Bill Lee, the governor of Tennessee, is going to be signing an anti-LGBTQ adoption bill into law. As both a Nashville resident and an adoptee, please say something about that.

I hope that he doesn't! It's a very ill-informed and misunderstood decision that he's making. There's a lot of pressure on him from conservative churches who don't understand who we are, and don't know what incredible parents we would make. A gay person, or a gay married couple who wants to adopt, have put considerable thought into [becoming parents]. It's a very planned and well-thought-out decision, and they should be treated like any other couple in the adoption process. Vetted and chosen based on merit. But they should never, ever be excluded because they're gay. That's just prejudice, and it's wrong.

For more information about Mary Gauthier, visit marygauthier.com.

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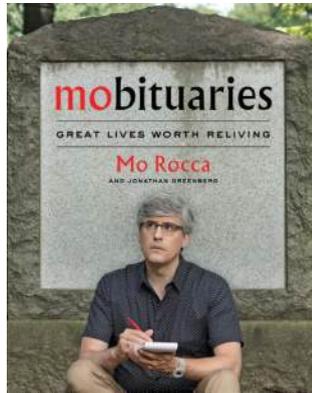
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By TERRI SCHLICHENMEYER

'Mobituaries'

Great lives worth reliving.



Mobituaries: Great Lives Worth Reliving
 • by Mo Rocca and Jonathan Greenberg
 • 2019
 • Simon & Schuster (simonandschuster.com)
 • 375 pages
 • \$29.99

Dust to dust. That's supposedly our fate when we exit, stage left. We were formed out of dust, and we'll once again just be a pile of it when we die.

But is that *all*? Couldn't we hope to live on as a line or two on a page somewhere? Or, as in the new book *Mobituaries: Great Lives Worth Reliving* by Mo Rocca and Jonathan Greenberg, will someone *remember*?

Nothing lasts forever. If you're old enough to be reading this, you're old enough to know its truth: everything and everybody ends eventually, and some leave without any fanfare. We might not even see them go because, as Rocca (who is openly gay) muses, "Not everyone has gotten the send-off they were due." That setting-things-right need for closure launched Mo Rocca's *Mobituaries* podcast as a way to show his appreciation "for someone [or some *thing*] who didn't get the love she or he deserved the first time around."

Take, for instance, the "long S," which looks something like a small F and can be found in the Declaration of Independence. It ceased to be used in late 1803, so it's gone—but not forgotten. Women don't wear hobble skirts anymore, and men don't wear codpieces. Doctors don't believe that phrenology helps to diagnose your obsession with cats, and encyclopedias won't help a young author-to-be who thinks he's gay. And you can no longer visit Prussia, because it hasn't existed since early 1947.

But *things* don't just disappear. People do, too.

Once upon a time, every man wanted to dress like a guy named Beau Brummel. We don't talk about Ada Lovelace these days, or her 19th-century computer programming work. Few people know who Moses Fleetwood Walker is, and even in today's political climate, Billy Carter's name is rarely mentioned. Repu-

tations can die ignominiously, TV shows get canceled, and careers fade away (or sometimes end tragically with a president's assassination). Complacency can die, as can grace.

But sometimes, just when we think life is filled with nothing but death, demise, and unpleasanties, it can return on the tops of champagne bubbles.

The first thing—perhaps even the *only* thing—you need to know about *Mobituaries* is that it's absolutely delightful. Promise yourself two minutes with this book, and you'll still be reading half an hour later. Dip in for a little nostalgia (when did station wagons depart, anyhow?). Step back in time to witness the acts of people who made big impacts, but are now largely forgotten. See how celebrities can eclipse other celebs, even in death.

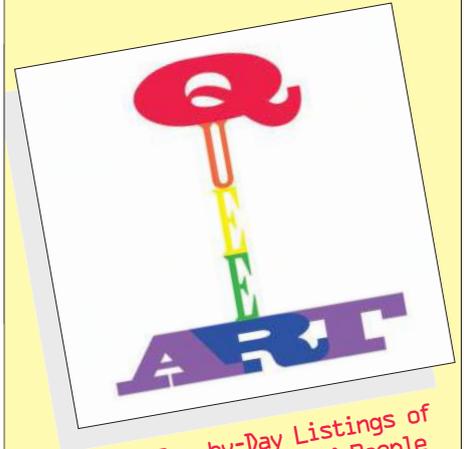
Like with a bag of potato chips, watch yourself reach into this book for another handful, because authors Rocca and Greenberg give readers just enough to whet appetites without filling them up. And as with any feast, literary or otherwise, you can nibble without thinking you must have a heaping helping of everything.

Rattle around, and you'll find that *Mobituaries* is gently humorous, kindly inclusive, and just plain fun to read. Keep it nearby and you can bet this book won't be collecting dust.

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.

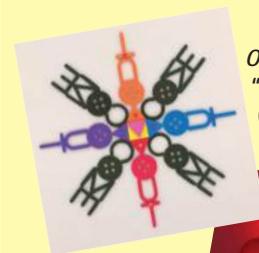
2020 Queer Art Wall Calendar

by Blase DiStefano



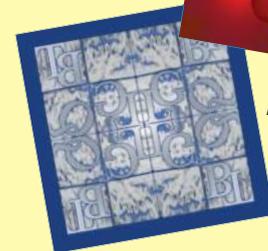
with Day-by-Day Listings of Birthdays of LGBTQ People

- January "8-Pointed Gay Snowflake"
- February "Queer Love"
- March "Lesbian Pinwheel"
- April "4 Lesbos & 4 Homos"
- May "Best Bi"
- June "Gender Fluid"
- July "All-American Grooms"
- August "A Transgender Swirl"
- September "A Kaleidoscope of Queers"
- October "Come Out, Come Out . . ."
- November "4 Faggots in Space"
- December "4 LGBTQs in 16 Blocks"



October
"Come Out,
Come Out . . ."

February
"Queer Love"



December
"4 LGBTQs
in 16 Blocks"

See all artwork at:
ABlaseDesign.com

OUT THERE

Photos by DALTON DEHART & EDGARDO AGUILAR

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January 19, 2020
Dozens of supporters took part in the **41st annual Snow Bunnies** cocktail party at Re-Bar Houston. Hosted by Bunnies on the Bayou, all proceeds from the event went to LGBTQ charities supported by the non-profit organization.



January 26, 2020

Nearly 200 attendees gathered at Buddy's for **Pride Houston's 2020 Theme Unveiling Party**. During the event the LGBTQ organization announced that this year's event, would be themed "Houston is Divercity," along with the names of its grand-marshal nominees.



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January 12, 2020

Hosted by Bruce Reves, this year's annual **Krewe of Olympus Twelfth Night**—one of the largest predominately gay krewes in the United States—celebrated the start of the Carnival season with food, cocktails, and a mini-float competition. The event, which took place at Central Houston Cadillac, honored Mardi Gras traditions and raised money for local charities.



January 12, 2020

Members of **Bering Church** and its pastor, Rev. Diane McGehee, took to the pews to protest the United Methodist Church's ongoing same-sex marriage ban by publicly blessing dozens of LGBTQ couples' unions. The church has sought justice for people of all sexual orientations and gender identities since the early '80s.



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WEDDING GUIDE

By RYAN LEACH | Photos by QUY TRAN

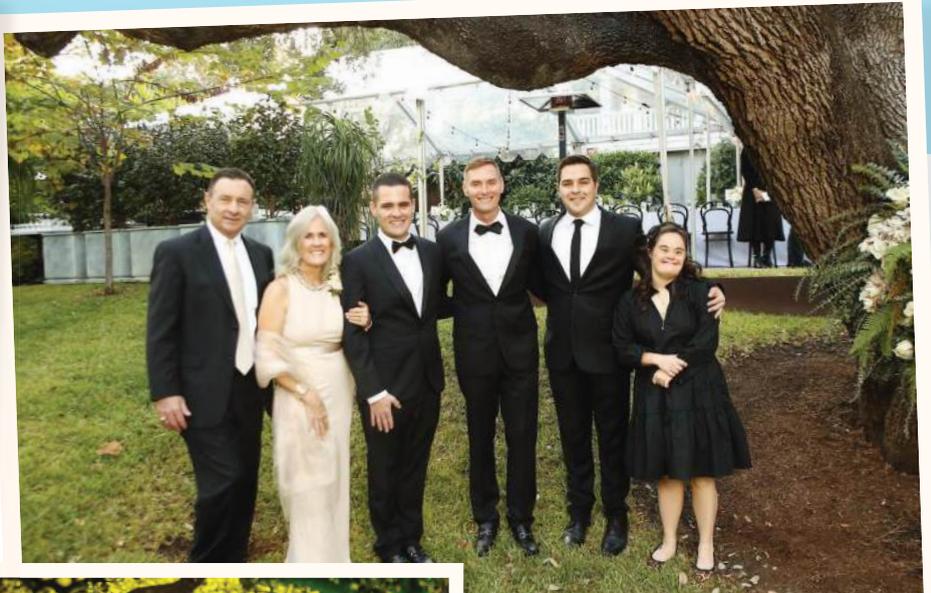
A Capital-City Romance

Ryan Korsgard and Marshall Eudy fell in love in Austin.

Ryan Korsgard is a familiar face to many Houstonians. For years, he was our go-to reporter on KPRC-TV Channel 2. We all relied on his top-notch reporting, but now he has a new fan and a new life in Austin with his husband, Marshall Eudy.

The two men married on November 9, 2019, at the Hotel Saint Cecilia in Austin. Ryan, 46, moved there to take on a new job as the general manager of Million Air Austin, an airport services firm. It is also the city where he had his first date with Marshall, 34, at Austin Java after the two connected “the old-fashioned way, through Tinder!” as Ryan describes it. →

Marshall Eudy (l)
and Ryan Korsgard



“I picked the place. It’s not fancy. I know Marshall was not impressed with my choice,” Ryan explains about the coffee house.

Marshall, an Austin native and vice president of legal and business affairs for Mood Media, has clearly moved past whatever bad first impressions he may have had. “When you talk with Ryan, you can quickly tell that he is a passionate person. It was intriguing to me to meet someone who was passionate about many personal interests and had so many experiences that were different from my own. And at the same time I felt like our personalities just clicked, as though I had known him for a very long time,” recalls Marshall.

The feeling was clearly mutual for Ryan, and the two knew they had found something special when they were able to lean on each other when Marshall had a long work assignment in Orlando.

“When I moved to Orlando, I found that I was under intense stress and pressure. I grew a lot during that time in many respects, but I found that increasingly Ryan was the person I relied on for emotional support. He was much more than someone with whom I enjoyed spending time,” says Marshall.

Ryan recalls that period, too. “I knew Marshall was special because I didn’t mind rushing to Hobby Airport on Friday nights to catch the 8:05 evening flight direct to Orlando. But what really told me that we were going to eventually get married was when Marshall explained to me that when he had challenges in Florida, I was the one he wanted to call. That told me a lot,” says Ryan.

When they did eventually marry, they chose Austin’s Hotel Saint Cecilia because it held a lot of special meaning for the couple. Marshall recalls that one of the most romantic things that Ryan did for him early on was to plan a special birthday dinner for him at the

hotel. Coincidentally, Marshall’s gift was a watch that matched the one Marshall eventually used to propose to Ryan.

Their wedding weekend in Austin also included some special friends and family members. Channel 2’s chief meteorologist (and Ryan’s former colleague) Frank Billingsley officiated at the ceremony, and one of the special moments from the evening before came when Gracie, Marshall’s sister, hosted a champagne toast and marshmallow roast.

“That was a special night because both of

our families were there and met for the first time. More importantly, they were there to celebrate our marriage. This was special,” says Ryan.

“I tried not to tear up when Gracie gave us a toast, but I failed miserably,” Marshall recalls.

Although Ryan has moved on from reporting for Channel 2, Houstonians will be glad to know that he is enjoying life in Austin. When the two men begin their honeymoon Caribbean cruise to St. Barths in March, they will also be sailing into their new lives as a married couple.

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QUEER QUOTES

Compiled by BLASE DISTEFANO

Vans Valentine

(out.com, 1/13/20, Mikelle Street)

The new “I Heart” Vans sneakers proclaim “I [heart] Boys” and “I [heart] Girls.”

It’s actually unclear whether the shoes were supposed to be specifically for the queer community. As *Nylon* noted, “nowhere in the product description, nor press blast, is there any mention of queer identities.” The publication also notes that the styles are a part of the brand’s Valentine’s Day offer-

ing. We love love!

In addition to these styles, the brand has also recently released two kids shoes, seemingly with LGBTQ+ themes. One

slip-on style features a rainbow heart on the toe, while a pair for toddlers is a wash of hearts done in a gradient of the rainbow. The *Georgia Voice* speculated this could be



Queer Shoes?

It looks like a couple of Vans sneakers go both ways.

the first time that a sneaker company releases LGBTQ+ inclusive shoes for a holiday that’s not explicitly LGBTQ+.

Mark Steyn

(*The Rush Limbaugh Show*, 1/13/20, Premiere Networks)

Cory Booker has suspended his presidential campaign. I believe there are now no people of color left in the Democrat primary except Andrew Yang. And he’s Asian—so as we know from recent court decisions, that doesn’t count. [T]he Democrat primary is like one of these cheapo horror movies where all the black and minority actors get killed off first, leaving onstage the same tired old white people. Mostly septuagenarian white men, although I believe Elizabeth Warren—oh yeah, she’s still in, she’s of course officially a person of color in that she was Harvard

Law School’s first woman of color. Suck it up, minorities!

This is what happens when you



Uh...

Are we sure Mark Steyn (pictured) is not gay?

mortgage your future to the Democrat Party!

The great repository of diversity now is

Elizabeth

Warren! What is she, 1/1,054th of color? Actually, do we know she’s a woman? I mean, who’s to say that’s not all a big scam, too? And it’s just going to be a bunch of septuagenarian white guys up there, along with Mayor Pete. Are we really sure he’s gay? I mean, he looks like some guy from the accountability department. [He’s got] a very non-gay look. I don’t know.

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MCKINNON - PAUL DRINKWATER/NBC; THE VIEW - ABC SCREEN SHOTS; VANS - VANS SCREEN SHOTS; STEYN - RUSHJIMBAUGH.COM SCREEN SHOT

Kate McKinnon

(ew.com [Entertainment Weekly], 1/5/20, Samantha Highfill)

During [the recent] Golden Globe Awards, Kate McKinnon took the stage to present Ellen DeGeneres with the second-ever Carol Burnett Award, which is given to someone who has made outstanding contributions to the television medium.

McKinnon delivered an emotional speech, paying tribute to the path that DeGeneres paved.

“In 1997, when Ellen’s sitcom was at the height of its popularity, I was in my mother’s basement lifting weights in front of the mirror and thinking, ‘Am I gay?’” McKinnon said, adding, “and I was, and I still am. But that’s a very scary thing to suddenly know about yourself, it’s sort of like doing 23andMe and discovering that you have alien DNA.

“And the only thing that made it less scary was seeing Ellen on TV. She risked her entire life and her

entire career in order to tell the truth, and she suffered greatly for it. Of course, attitudes change, but only because brave people like Ellen jump into the fire to make them change. And if I hadn’t seen her on TV, I would’ve thought, ‘I can never be on TV, they don’t let LGBTQ people on TV.’ And more than that, I would’ve gone on thinking that I was an alien and that I maybe didn’t even have a right to be here. So thank you, Ellen, for giving me a shot.”

After accepting the award, DeGeneres headed to the press room, where she was asked whom she looks up to. Her response? “Kate McKinnon. I look up to—not just people that are older than me but people that are starting out now and paving the way,” DeGeneres said. “I think Kate McKinnon is brilliant, and I think she’s strong, and I think she’s brave, so I look up to her.”

Yep, She's Gay

Kate McKinnon is seen here giving her speech to introduce Ellen DeGeneres, who was receiving the Carol Burnett Award at the 77th Golden Globe Awards.

Sylvia & Anna & Joy

(The View, 1/10/20, ABC)



Sylvia Allen



Anna Navarro



Joy Behar

Joy Behar: [Arizona Senator Sylvia Allen] wants to take the word “homosexuality” out of all the books [in Arizona schools].

Anna Navarro: Everybody that comes out against homosexuality has got stuff going on . . . I’m just saying.

Behar: [Maybe Senator Allen thinks they will say.] “Gee, the word homosexual is not in [this book], so I must not be gay.”

BAR & CLUB GUIDE

HOUSTON

BACCO WINE GARDEN

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BARCODE

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

BLUR

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

BUDDY'S

Buddy's is a modern gay bar with events as diverse as Houston, featuring cocktails, beer, karaoke, pool, DJs, and more! 2409-A Grant St.

CLUB CRYSTAL

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

CROCKER BAR

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

GEORGE

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

GUAVA LAMP

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

HAMBURGER MARY'S

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

EAGLE

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definitive home to the man's man. Leather, Bear or Jock, you'll find them here. Voted "Best Community Bar," "Best Men's Bar," "Best Place to Show Your Leather," "Best Happy Hour," and "Best Place to Buy Erotic Playthings" by our readers. Eagle has multiple levels and patios, along with DJs and male dancers—and it's the place to watch sports. Noon–2am every day, 611 Hyde Park Blvd., 713.523.BIRD houstoneagle.com

JR'S BAR & GRILL

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

LA GRANJA DISCO Y CANTINA

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

MICHAEL'S OUTPOST

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

NEON BOOTS DANCEHALL & SALOON

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

PEARL BAR

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

ReBar

A haute nightclub with a celebrated patio that features renowned DJs and entertainers. Opening early October.

THE RIPCROD

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

RUDYARD'S

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

TONY'S CORNER POCKET

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

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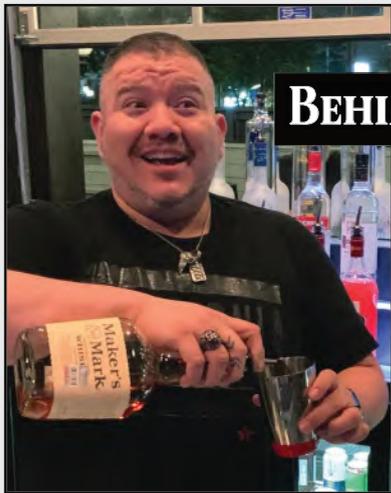
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 Favorite to drink: "White Tea Shot"—vodka, peach schnapps, and sweet and sour mix.

Where is your favorite place to drink when not on duty?

Voodoo Queen on the East

Side, or Warren's Inn.

What is a current bar drink trend you'd like to see end?

Groups that pay individually. Have one person pay and get the group to pay that person by Venmo!

What are you best known for?

My personality, for sure.

What is the best and worst holiday to work? Why?

Best holiday is Christmas—everyone is happy, but even if you are alone you can feel good at the bar!
 Worst holiday to work is New Year's Eve—it's amateur night and everyone is rushing for a shot at 11:45!

Biggest tip from one customer?

I got a \$500 tip from a customer on Christmas once.

Who are the hardest customers to please?

The regulars that were customers in a bar that has changed management. They have a certain expectation level that might be changing, and they don't care for that!

If you weren't a bartender... what career would you choose?

I was an oil & gas trader, and also in HR and development.

What is the best part about working at this bar?

It's cool working for a great owner and wanting to do an amazing job for the ownership. And, it is great to be back serving my community.

VIVIANA'S

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BRYAN/COLLEGE STATION

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The only LGBT dance club in Bryan/College station, this sleek spot is open Thurs.-Sat. smack in the middle of Aggieland. 121 North Main • 979.823.6174 • halobcs.com

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

RUMORS BEACH BAR

Drink specials every night and daily day-drinking specials starting at noon. Great drag shows Fri. - Sun. and karaoke Sun. - Thurs. at 8pm. Sunday Drag Bingo. 3102 Seawall Blvd. 409.497.4617 • rumorsbeachbar.com

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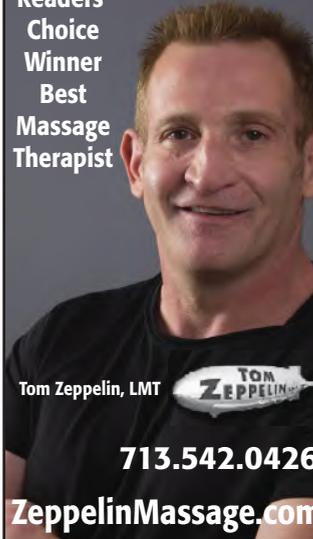


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tions in your life after February 16. Your patience levels will be dropping through the end of the month. Relationships can be a great escape from the muck throughout February. If you are single, the beginning of the month is a great time to meet someone new!

SCORPIO (Oct. 24-Nov. 21)

There is so much daily activity in your life that you are looking for some grounding time to step away from the demands of your busy schedule. You will want to spend more time making your home a more comfortable place to retreat to. You have set some new career and life goals for yourself. You want to turn your creative energy into something that produces income. By midmonth, you will want to review the projects you are working on, and at the same time you will get a strong burst of positive energy to help you push forward through the fog. Relationships are going through an upgrade in your life as you look for more free time to spend with your partners and break away from your old routines.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21)

February continues to be a busy month

as you keep your schedule full. The first half of the month is a good time for exercise and improving your health. You are not very patient during this period, but it's a great time to confront any issues that you have been ignoring or avoiding. You are better at getting your point of view across, and you exhibit more self-confidence. By midmonth, old family issues resurface with Mercury retrograde. This can also be a time to consider some home improvements. You are interested in making investments in stable financial markets by expanding your resources or customer base. You may also seek a raise or increase your fees to align with current market trends. By the end of the month, you are ready to take a break from the activities.

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19)

You continue to be busy, even though the current energy patterns are less tense than they have been over the last two months. You are making major life changes such as a new career, starting your own business, retiring, or setting new goals for your relationship. It's time for a major overhaul in how you generate relationships, and in the kind of support you give them. If you are single, this is a good time to be looking. If you are involved but

CONTINUED ON PAGE 58

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Give Yourself Extra Time

Mercury retrograde will make travel and traffic more difficult.

Our friend Mercury goes retrograde this month on the 11th, so get your new projects started before that time. Mercury will be direct on March 15. Mercury retrograde will make travel and traffic more difficult, so give yourself extra time to reach your appointments. The second half of the month is busier than the first half. February shouldn't be as intense as January, but tensions do resurface in March. This is a good month to connect with friends, business associates, and other emotional support systems. • The sun starts the month in Aquarius before entering Pisces on the 18th. Mercury will be traveling through Aquarius, and then through Pisces on February 3. Retrograde Mercury will travel back through those same signs and have the strongest impact on the Pisces folk and the Aquarian water-bearers. Venus travels through Pisces and enters Aries on the 7th for a visit during March. Mars travels through Sagittarius as February begins, but then enters Capricorn on the 16th.

ARIES (Mar. 21-Apr. 19)

Career demands and family obligations continue to keep you busy this month. You are feeling more confident and willing to invest in yourself and your projects. This can be the time to step up to a leadership position at work, or within your community. You are better in relationships and negotiations with Venus in your sign this month—and even with Mercury retrograde in the last half of the month. The last half of February is a better time to pull back and re-examine your current strategy. Make some time for your relationships, and renew those bonds.

TAURUS (Apr. 20-May 20)

The energy of reinvention is very strong, and pushing you to explore different career options, new relationship interests, and a possible relocation. In the first half of the month, you are exploring options that will give you greater opportunities and make your life more interesting. Friends and business networking groups can be very beneficial this month. You can reconnect with old friends and coworkers with Mercury retrograde in the last half of February. Relationships can be dicey this month, with the old paradigms starting to feel restrictive and pushing you away from existing partnerships. Explore ways to bring new life to your relationships—otherwise, you may be considering an exit strategy.

GEMINI (May 21-June 21)

Relationships are especially active as the month begins. You will need to invest some time in your partnership to renew the bonds and commitments you have. Otherwise, your partner may feel neglected and create some drama to get you to pay attention! This is a good month to confront any existing problems and find a reasonable solution. Your creative urge continues to dominate your career sector. If you are not doing something that you feel drawn to, you may have a hard time keeping your focus and your drive. You will need some time for reflection, especially with your ruler, Mercury, going retrograde in your career sector. Pace yourself, especially in the last half of the month.

CANCER (June 22-July 22)

You are continuing to review your long-term plans around career, retirement, and relationships. Relationships are more energetic and feistier, with Mars (planet of action, physical activity, and instinctual response) visiting this area of your horoscope by midmonth. Your partner's feelings are right on the surface, and they will take what you say very personally. This is a good time to renew your commitment—or to be prepared for an unhappy partner.



AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18)

Long-term, goal-oriented planning has become a part of what you are doing. For some, this is a time to really focus on getting your career on track. For others, this is a time to reprioritize your boundaries and focus on what you *want* to do rather than on what you *have* to do. This could also be a time to reinforce your skill set, or to consider retirement and other options. You are continuing to assess your domestic responsibilities at home. You want fewer demands on your time, especially with work or home obligations. Some of you may relocate, while others are making their existence easier. It will be easier to spend your money after midmonth with Mercury retrograde. If there is a need to buy something expensive, you will need to wait until Mercury is direct on March 15. You are still overly sensitive to the external environment, so you'll want to limit your exposure in public.

You will also be quicker to respond to life in general. You remain in the reorganizing and restructuring mode that you've been going through. The latter half of the month is a time of reflection about the deeper meaning and purpose of life.

LEO (July 23-Aug. 22)

Partnerships and personal relationships continue to be active. This is an excellent month to connect with the people who mean the most to you. It will help to remind you of why you do what you do. If you are single, the early part of the month is a good time to meet new people. You are still working on getting your life, your work routines, and your health habits in better working order. Coworkers may be harder to get along with as we approach midmonth. You are in a period of reinvention that is strongly impacting your career choices. You may want to leave what you are doing, start something on your own, or even retire. This energy will continue to build through the year.

VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22)

With your ruler, Mercury, going retrograde by midmonth, you need to get your projects started, contacts made, or that first foot in the door before February 11. After the 11th is a super time to recon-

nect with old friends and existing clients, and to finish up previous projects. The Mercury retrograde will be occurring in your relationship sector. Old problems may reemerge so you can get another shot at resolving those issues. You will want to have more conversations with your partner, even if everything is good. This is a great month for getting your life organized, cleaned up, and prioritized. Your creative energies get stronger by the middle of the month. You will want to act on a project that has been building in your head. You are keeping a close eye on your boundaries this month.

LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 23)

You are looking for a break from the demanding December and January period that kept your stress levels high. So much of that comes from family concerns, emotional and financial security demands, and from being the one who has to resolve the problems. This is a good month to spend time with your kids, or work on hobbies that satisfy your artistic urges. Mercury retrograde will be impacting your work environment. This may be a time of equipment or Internet problems, or just people having difficulty getting to work. You will exercise more control over all the situa-

CONTINUED ON PAGE 109

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SCENE OUT

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On December 18, The Montrose Center held a holiday party at Rivas. Pictured are Andrew Mercer, Ann J Robison, and Miguel Carrillo.



On December 31, EPAH held a New Year's Eve party at the home of Glenn Laible and Jim Bartley. Pictured are Mike Bodin, Jody Morris, Randall Hendrick, Michele Laprade.



On January 8, Harris County Democratic Lawyers Association held its January luncheon at Churrascos. Pictured are Steven Duble and Navid Rezanejad.



On January 11, The Krewe of Olympus 2020 held its Twelfth Night party at Central Cadillac. Pictured are Becky Brewer, John Broussard, and Danny Terrebonne.



On January 15, the Greater Houston LGBT Chamber of Commerce held its Brewing Up Business at Share Wellness and MediSpa. Pictured are Dr. John Share, Tammi Wallace, Angie Kurokata, Alexandra Velez, and Tiffany Tosh.



On January 19, Bunnies on the Bayou held Snow Bunnies 2020 at ReBar. Pictured are members of Bunnies on the Bayou with attendees.



On January 21, the Greater Houston LGBT Chamber of Commerce held a workshop with Refuge Marketing at Amegy Bank. Pictured are Lane Lewis, Robert Hahn, Tressa Sagullo, Clay Melder, and Kenrick Jacobs.



On January 21, a 2020 Census training workshop was held at the Montrose Center. Pictured are Atlantis Narcisse, Angela Guidry, Richard Gamez, and Marcus Phillips.



On January 21, EPAH held a dinner meeting at House of Blues. Pictured are Jim Jemelka, Cindy Cuellar, Paul Lovero, Michele Laprade, and Daniella Farias.



On January 23, the oH Project held a reception at the Health Museum. Pictured are Don Mason, Claudia Feldman (oH Project interviewer), Tom Allen, Tori Williams (co-founder) Dick Grimes (interviewee), and Beth Allen.



On January 12, Bering Church held a Blessing of Same-Gender Unions ceremony and reception. Pictured are the clergy with participants.



On January 26, Pride Houston held a logo and theme unveiling party and announced the grand-marshal nominees at Buddy's. Pictured are grand-marshal nominees with members of Pride Houston.

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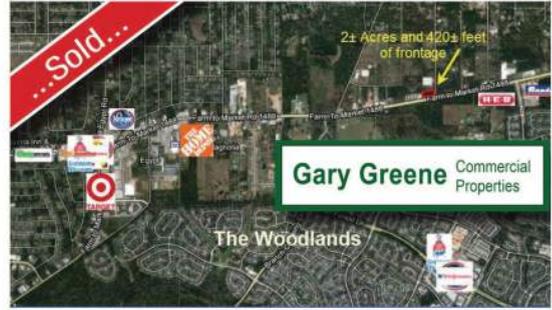


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A JEWEL TO BEHOLD

By SAM BYRD

Meet Athena S. Sapphire, a goddess tucked into a showgirl's body. The diva can dance, captivate, and serve a stunning mug, all with the class of a true Southern belle. She travels across southeast Texas to dazzle crowds each week, bringing her unique flair and effortless beauty to the fans. Read on to see what makes this queen a rare gem.

Pronouns?

He and him when not in face. She, her, queen, goddess, madam, or whatever else whilst in face.

Spirit animal?

Butterfly.

Hometown?

Memphis, Tennessee.

Drag birth date?

July 17, 2014 (almost six years!)

Any Valentine's Day plans?

If I am not performing somewhere, hopefully I will be having a candlelit dinner somewhere cozy and sweet with my partner, David.

Any thoughts to share for Black History Month?

I don't believe the page is large enough for all my thoughts. I *will* say that not only is it the shortest month of the year, but it's also a month where you can learn about so many amazing inventors, actors, and writers. You may even learn something about yourself. I just wish it wasn't only once a year that black people are praised in such a light.

Describe your drag persona.

Energetic, rambunctious, lively, and a goddess.

What illusions are you known for?

I have a list of chocolate beauties that come to mind. These include Whitney Houston, Tina Turner (aka Angela Bassett), Donna Summer,



Keep up with Athena on Instagram: @Athena_sapphiree

Megan Thee Stallion, and Normani. I also have a mean Barack Obama voice.

Team Britney or Team Christina?

Team Selena Quintanilla.

Favorite RuPaul's Drag Race contestant?

It's a toss-up, but I would have to say Shea Couleé.

Where can we catch Athena hanging out when she's not performing?

At a dog park, bowling, or having a cocktail and tipping some other queen.

Favorite charity to support?

The Montrose Center.

What would be your ultimate goal as Athena?

To continue to show people how amazing they are, and to become a national titleholder before I'm 30.

Any professional role model(s)?

Michelle Obama, Dolly Parton, and Beyoncé, because they are all respected and noteworthy figureheads in their own right.

What advice would you give to your younger self?

I'd say, "Everything *doesn't* happen for a reason, and that's ok. Just strive to always be better." I would also tell my younger self, "Your skin is your most powerful weapon."

If you could do one thing to change the world, what would it be?

To make it so that slavery was never thought of. I challenge everyone who reads this to start a conversation with their friends about this, and see how deep it gets. ▼

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