

# OutSmart

MARCH '22

HOUSTON'S LGBTQ MAGAZINE

## PET CARE PROFESSIONALS

Local Queer Animal Experts

Pg.56

## DEVINE FEMULINE

Todrick Hall Live in Houston

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EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

# TEXAS TASTE-MAKER

JO CHAN IS READY TO BECOME BRAVO'S NEXT TOP CHEF

Pg.42



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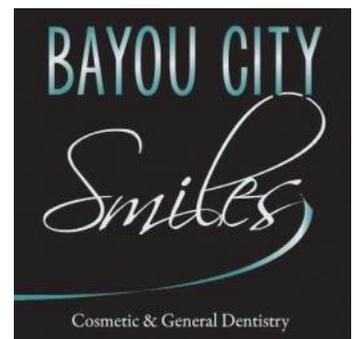
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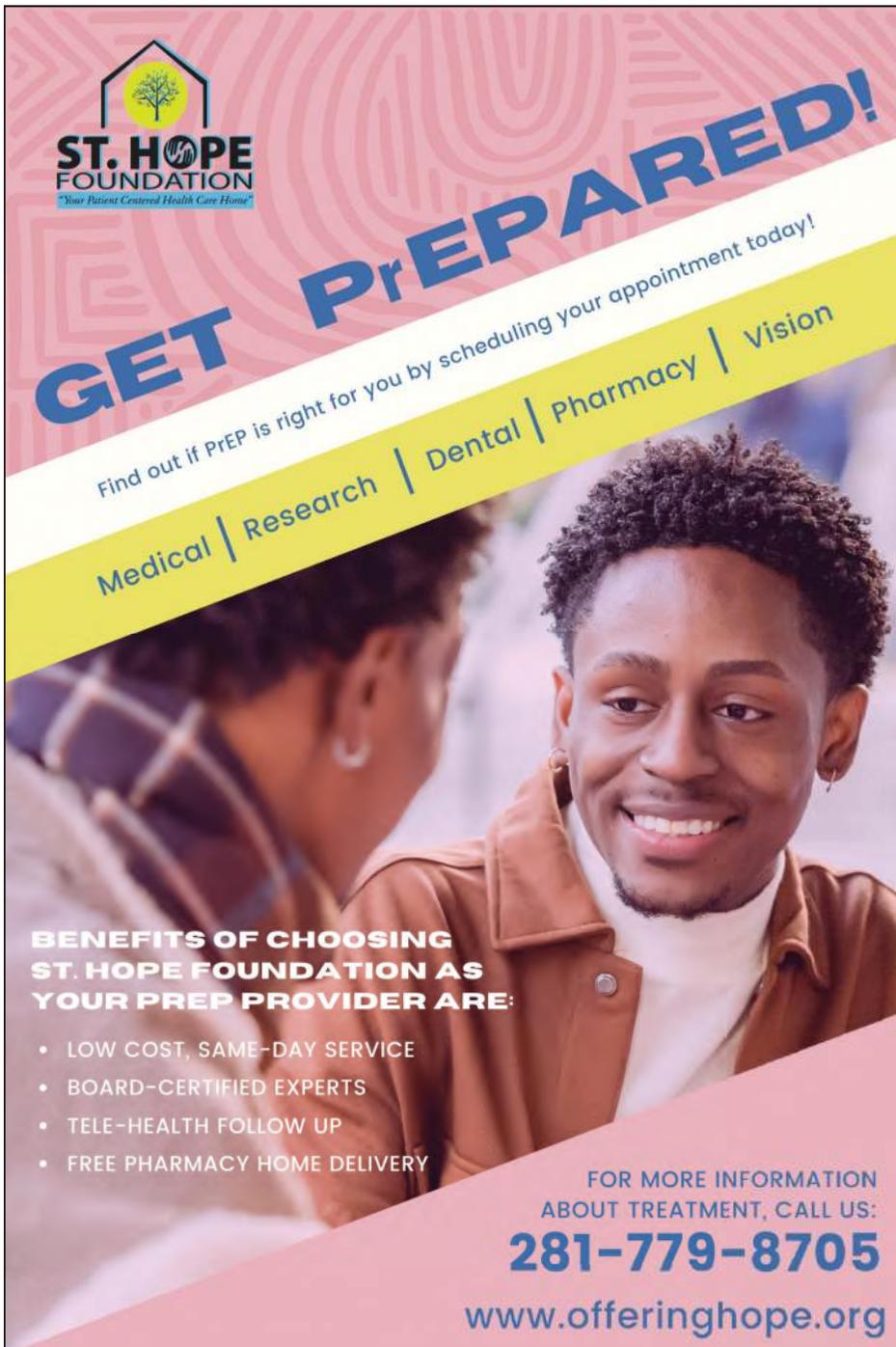
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### TEXAS TASTEMAKER

Jo Chan is ready to become Bravo's next Top Chef.

Photography by Erica Nix for OutSmart magazine

Instagram: @austinqueerweddings

Photographed at the Eberly restaurant in Austin on Feb. 23, 2022

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Last year, conservative Texas lawmakers spent 10 months pushing a record number of anti-LGBTQ bills in Austin. Queer activists fought back hard and defeated all but one of the 76 harmful bills that were filed.

Immediately after that far-right victory banning trans youth from school sports, Republican politicians continued their attacks by proposing a ban on around 850 books found in school libraries. Rep. Matt Krause (R-District 93) targeted those books because of their discussions of race or LGBTQ issues. School districts around the state, including Katy ISD in suburban Houston, soon began pulling the books from their shelves.

Then last month, Attorney General Ken Paxton released an unofficial opinion stating

that gender-affirming hormone therapies and other treatments qualify as “child abuse” under Texas law. The next day, Governor Greg Abbott urged State officials to begin investigating families who are supporting their transgender children who seek out those treatments.

While Republicans are certainly making life difficult for LGBTQ Texans, it is encouraging to see queer students in Katy protesting censorship, while trans youth—as well as their families and physicians—are speaking out to advocate for life-saving, gender-affirming care.

The Human Rights Campaign’s Texas state director, Rebecca Marques, wants Texas voters to send anti-LGBTQ politicians the message that you support LGBTQ youth by voting for pro-equality candidates in November. In this March OUTSMART issue, I speak

with Marques ahead of her appearance at SXSW in Austin this month.

On March 3, the highly-anticipated new Houston-based season of Bravo’s *Top Chef* debuts. One contestant looking to take home the Top Chef title is this month’s cover star, chef Jo Chan. Writer Zach McKenzie interviews the out Texan, while photographer Erica Nix shares her exclusive images of Chan at her Austin restaurant.

Elsewhere in this issue, our pet-themed section highlights a few out Houstonians who help us care for our furry friends. Writer Ryan Leach speaks to Brantley Highfill and Cris Steward, the couple behind BakedBones CBD dog treats, while writer Connor Behrens sits down with BARC staffer Cory Stottlemeyer. Then writer Marene Gustin chats with CityPaws Grooming owner Dani

Betancourt, Juno’s Hope Dog Rescue and Adoption founder Frank Atchley, and The Urban Vet’s Dr. Eric Cagle.

Finally, Resurrection Metropolitan Community Church is celebrating its 50th anniversary this month. Writer Neil Ellis Orts speaks to the pioneering LGBTQ church’s longtime members and pastors about their rich history of providing a safe space for queer Christians in Houston.

See you next time!

**Lourdes Zavaleta**  
Managing Editor



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# A Ruling for Financial Equity

Survivor benefits are now available to LGBTQ couples.

By RYAN M. LEACH

**Q**ualifying LGBTQ people are now eligible to access the Social Security survivor benefits of their deceased partners, thanks to changes made by the Biden administration. This change comes on the heels of a November 2021 move by the administration to drop Trump-era court appeals aimed at reversing a pro-equality federal ruling. Biden officials are now siding with two unmarried individuals who were previously denied access to their benefits due to a long history of federal LGBTQ discrimination.

“This has been a long time coming, and it is news that should be celebrated!” says Grace Yung, a certified financial planner with Midtown Financial Group and the financial columnist for OUTSMART. “Having worked with both opposite-sex and same-sex couples over the years, we are not that different from each other. We are all human beings who live and love. Why should LGBTQ+ individual relationships mean any less in the eyes of the law? They shouldn’t. Kudos to Lambda Legal for laying the groundwork for this change, and to the Biden administration.”

The decision in November 2021 by the Justice Department and the Social Security Administration to drop the Trump-era appeals against the favorable federal court ruling paved the way for individuals to receive these benefits.

The legal journey for these federal court cases started when Lambda Legal filed two class-action lawsuits on behalf of two couples in 2018. The law in question required that in order for a surviving spouse or partner to collect survivor benefits like Social Security, they would have had to have been married for at least nine months. For many same-sex unmarried couples, this would have been impossible due to the federal ban on recognizing same-sex marriage. Lambda Legal claimed that the history of unlawful discrimination now requires the government to make whole



those couples who would have otherwise been eligible for spousal benefits.

“We have all heard stories or have friends who have been in relationships for 20, 30 and 40-plus years, where one partner dies and the surviving spouse is left (in most cases, unfortunately) with only memories and no financial support [from Social Security benefits] based on their deceased partner’s work history. That is not right, and I am glad we are finally moving in the right direction,” says Yung.

This change will have a significant impact on the lives of many in the LGBTQ community. According to Yung, the average survivor benefit is \$1,250 a month. That amount can help someone afford a safe place to live, pay for medications, and buy groceries. This will in turn have a positive impact on the quality of life for those individuals.

“Folks who can prove they were in long-term committed relationships—who lived together or owned property together, relied on each other for financial support, raised children together, or held a commitment ceremony—can apply, and have the ability to

appeal if denied,” says Yung.

It is important to note that surviving partners are not required to have been legally married in order to access these benefits, because people in states like Texas were not allowed to get married before marriage equality became the law of the land.

“As long as they are able to prove they had been in a long-term committed relationship, they have a chance and should apply,” Yung emphasizes.

Surviving partners who think they are eligible can contact the Social Security Administration directly. “The SSA has trained staff to work with LGBTQ+ folks to determine whether or not they qualify. Lambda Legal is also a great resource, as they are leading this campaign. And lastly, it would be a good idea to also reach out to get help from a certified financial planner who is well versed in LGBTQ+ needs and issues,” Yung suggests.



For more info on the survivor benefits ruling, visit [Lambda Legal](https://tinyurl.com/57654f2j) at [tinyurl.com/57654f2j](https://tinyurl.com/57654f2j)

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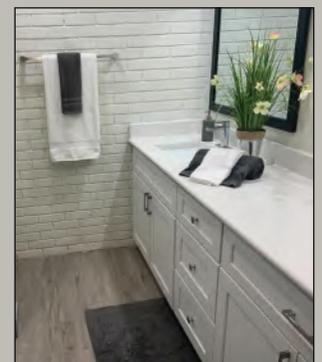
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# Katy Student Groups Rally to Protest Book Ban

Advocates host Katy ISD FReadom week.

By LOURDES ZAVALA | Photo by DALTON DEHART

Exploring LGBTQ-affirming content on the internet, in films, and in literature was an important part of 17-year-old Cameron Samuels' journey to self-acceptance. Samuels tells OutSmart that Katy ISD is limiting access to these crucial resources. A majority of queer websites are blocked on the district's internet server, and at least nine books that discuss gender, sexuality, or race have been banned from school libraries. Parents are notified when students check out young-adult books that might touch on these issues.

"This prevents students from accessing the content they require to support themselves," says Samuels, a Seven Lakes High School senior who uses they/them pronouns. "When they don't have access to this, it can often make them feel like they're alone or not supported."

To combat censorship within the district, Samuels and other students partnered with

Voters of Tomorrow Texas to host the Katy ISD FReadom Week. From February 22 to the 25th, hundreds of copies of *Beloved* by Toni Morrison and *Maus* by Art Spiegelman were distributed to students at four Katy ISD high schools during after-school club meetings.

Following the book distributions, the week-long event concluded with students and community members speaking out about the pro-equality values of Voters of Tomorrow by addressing Katy ISD leaders at the district's board meeting on February 28.

"Voters of Tomorrow chose [*Beloved* and *Maus*] because they have been banned in school districts around the country," Samuels explains.

*Beloved* tells the story of a family of former slaves whose Cincinnati home is haunted by a vengeful spirit, while *Maus* depicts the experiences of a Polish Jew and Holocaust survivor.

"As a national nonprofit focused on engaging, empowering, and representing youth activists, Voters of Tomorrow is deeply

concerned with this recent wave of book banning, especially in regards to books addressing racism, the Holocaust, LGBTQ+ issues, and reproductive rights," Voters of Tomorrow said in a statement.

While *Beloved* and *Maus* have not been banned by Katy ISD, Grace Dehner, the out communications director at Voters of Tomorrow, believes it is beneficial for students to have access to these novels because they give them the opportunity to understand different points of view.

"A lot of the time, we are so wrapped up in our own identity that we fail to consider different perspectives. Having access to books with diverse topics helps us broaden our horizons," Dehner says. "Breaking those barriers [created by our limited] vision helps us become a more sensitive and inclusive society."

During the Katy ISD FReadom Week, students passed out books, voter registration information, and mental-health resources, in →

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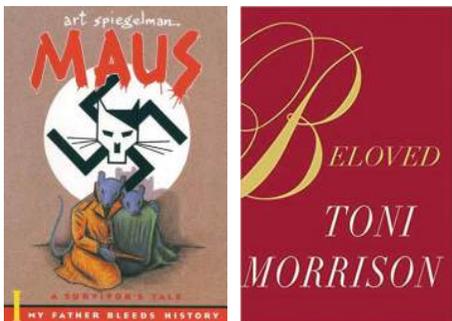
“It’s not only about education, but also validating [students’] identities,” says Seven Lakes High School junior Cynthia Zhang, who passed out books. “In many books, we only see certain races, sexualities, and time periods. We’re not always able to relate to them. Reading modern books about teens with different races and sexualities helps us much more.”

Zhang, an Asian American who identifies as bisexual, says having access to relatable media content allowed her to understand and express herself without shame.

“I’ve been able to validate my sexual orientation and not feel weird about it. I’m happy to know there are other Asian American people like me who are openly out,” she says.

Katy ISD Board of Trustees candidate Dr. Eliz Markowitz has been advocating for the rights of LGBTQ students.

“Having resources available for students to



identify with is imperative for them to grow as human beings and know that they are not alone,” she says. “It’s affirming for them to know that there is nothing wrong with who they are.”

Markowitz, who grew up in Katy during the 1980s and ’90s, found her experience as an LGBTQ student to be difficult. Despite the district’s many conservative leaders, she’s hopeful that today’s queer youth can make a difference.

“I’m so proud of these students for taking an active role in local politics,” she says. “To see them stand against the politicization of human sexuality, race, and other factors fills me with hope for the future. These kids have pure hearts and truly want to make a meaningful change for everyone.”

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By Adriana Salazar

# QUEER THINGS to DO



COMMUNITY

March 6

## AIDS Walk Houston

AIDS Foundation Houston (AFH) is dedicated to HIV/AIDS prevention, education, testing, and awareness. Founded in 1982 at the start of the HIV epidemic, AFH has flourished as a professionally managed organization providing services for adults, youth, and their families.

This year's 33rd annual AIDS Walk Houston is AFH's main fundraising event of the year. The weekend schedule kicks off with the Walk to End HIV golf tournament on March 5, followed by the AIDS Walk beginning downtown

in Sam Houston Park on March 6. And to honor everyone who participated in that fundraising, AFH will host a Walk Celebration and Awards event for all participants on June 16.

Funds raised through the AIDS Walk Houston will go to local HIV/AIDS service organizations that provide assistance to over 30,000 Houstonians impacted by the virus.

**To register, donate, start a walk team, or join a team, visit [walktoendhivhouston.org](http://walktoendhivhouston.org).**



STAGE

March 2

## MIZ CRACKER'S COMEDY AND MUSIC TOUR

The Heights Theater presents drag performer Miz Cracker's one-woman comedy and music show *She's a Woman*—her first American solo tour. [tinyurl.com/2p845jc9](http://tinyurl.com/2p845jc9)



For a weekly roundup of LGBTQ happenings, visit [www.OutSmartMagazine.com](http://www.OutSmartMagazine.com)

STAGE

March 4

## RICKY MARTIN AT THE RODEO

The Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo presents Ricky Martin at NRG Stadium. This is the openly gay Latin popstar's first Houston Rodeo performance, following his Houston appearance last year with Enrique Iglesias. [tinyurl.com/2s4zxxxa](http://tinyurl.com/2s4zxxxa)



STAGE

March 5

### WIGS & WAFFLES WITH OLIVIA LUX

At noon, go to ReBar for their new Wigs and Waffles Saturday brunch show hosted by Mauricio. The first show features special guest Olivia Lux from *RuPaul's Drag Race Season 13*. [tinyurl.com/3vtzpmvb](http://tinyurl.com/3vtzpmvb)

STAGE

March 9

### DODIE "BUILD A PROBLEM" TOUR

Live Nation presents openly bisexual artist dodie at the House of Blues, on tour for her album *Build a Problem*. [tinyurl.com/yky88vu5](http://tinyurl.com/yky88vu5)

STAGE

March 10

### FLETCHER

Live Nation presents Fletcher at House of Blues Houston. The queer rock musician's 2016 song "Wasted Youth" reached #1 on Billboard's Emerging Artists Chart. [tinyurl.com/mr3he8xr](http://tinyurl.com/mr3he8xr)



STAGE

March 10-20

### SYLVIA AT THE HOUSTON BALLET

The Houston Ballet presents *Sylvia*, the story of a mythological heroine and her mortal lover. Tickets at [houstonballet.org](http://houstonballet.org). [tinyurl.com/3dj34z57](http://tinyurl.com/3dj34z57)

COMMUNITY

March 11

### LGBTQ+ VETERANS HAPPY HOUR

At 6 p.m., BUDDY'S hosts its monthly Happy Hour for LGBTQ military veterans. The event occurs every second Friday of the month, and parking and admission are free. [tinyurl.com/5ah7w8rk](http://tinyurl.com/5ah7w8rk)

STAGE

March 11-13

### TEXAS LATINO/A/X CONTEMPORARY DANCE FESTIVAL

MATCH presents the Texas Latino/a/x Contemporary Dance Festival with over 20 artists performing. Tickets: [matchouston.org](http://matchouston.org). [tinyurl.com/2p97hftw](http://tinyurl.com/2p97hftw)

STAGE

March 12

### KINKY CIRCUS

At 9 p.m., Numbers nightclub presents Kinky Circus, a Pride party featuring circus performers and local vendors. Come in costume to showcase your personality! [tinyurl.com/2p9fndt6](http://tinyurl.com/2p9fndt6)

STAGE

March 13

### DENIM, DIAMONDS & DRAG BRUNCH

Scotty's Pub on the Bay hosts its Denim, Diamonds, & Drag brunch. Reservations are recommended by calling 281-339-7474. [tinyurl.com/yc2pexy2](http://tinyurl.com/yc2pexy2)

COMMUNITY

March 18

### BRINGING IN THE GREEN

This year's annual St. Patrick's Day party Bringin' In the Green is a silent auction benefiting the Montrose Center. Tickets at [montrosecenter.org](http://montrosecenter.org). [tinyurl.com/msbttkb9](http://tinyurl.com/msbttkb9)



STAGE

March 27

### TODRICK HALL

Live Nation presents Todrick Hall at House of Blues Houston. The out YouTube personality has appeared on *American Idol* and *RuPaul's Drag Race*. [tinyurl.com/2wsve2yj](http://tinyurl.com/2wsve2yj)

COMMUNITY

March 30

### THE ROCKETS PRIDE NIGHT

The Houston Rockets will face the Sacramento Kings on the night of the Rockets' second annual LGBTQ Pride Night at Toyota Center. \$19 tickets include a Pride-themed Rockets hat.



ART

February 23-April 6

### ANDY WARHOL EXHIBIT AT UH-D

The University of Houston-Downtown presents the free photo exhibit *Instantaneous Beauty: Andy Warhol and the Photographic Process*. [tinyurl.com/yckt8ewh](http://tinyurl.com/yckt8ewh)

ART

Thru April 17

### IMMERSIVE FRIDA

The interactive exhibition *Immersive Frida* showcases the art and life of openly bisexual artist Frida Khalo. Tickets at [immersive-frida.com](http://immersive-frida.com). [tinyurl.com/4zhnajt6](http://tinyurl.com/4zhnajt6)

More QUEER THINGS TO DO →



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Monday, Feb. 28  
**CODY JOHNSON**

Tuesday, March 1  
**KEITH URBAN**

Wednesday, March 2  
**TIM MCGRAW**

Armed Forces  
Appreciation Day  
presented by BHP

Thursday, March 3  
**for KING &  
COUNTRY**

Friday, March 4  
**RICKY MARTIN**

Saturday, March 5  
**JON PARDI**

Sunday, March 6  
**LOS TUCANES  
DE TIJUANA**

Go Tejano Day  
presented by Fiesta

Monday, March 7  
**LUKE BRYAN**  
First Responders Day  
presented by BP

Tuesday, March 8  
**MAREN MORRIS**

Wednesday, March 9  
**KANE BROWN**

Thursday, March 10  
**JOURNEY**

Friday, March 11  
**BUN B'S H-TOWN  
TAKEOVER**

Black Heritage Day  
presented by Kroger

Saturday, March 12  
**PARKER  
MCCOLLUM**

RODEOHOUSTON  
Super Shootout®  
presented by Crown Royal

Sunday, March 13  
**DIERKS  
BENTLEY**

Monday, March 14  
**SAM HUNT**

Tuesday, March 15  
**GWEN STEFANI**

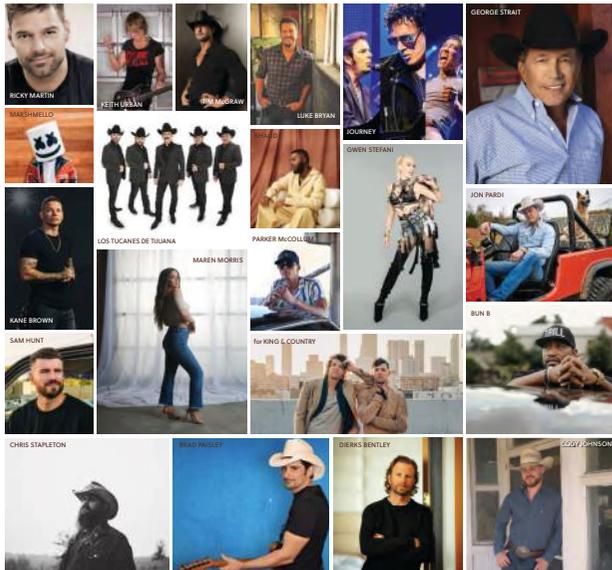
Wednesday, March 16  
**KHALID**

Thursday, March 17  
**CHRIS  
STAPLETON**

Friday, March 18  
**MARSHMELLO**

Saturday, March 19  
**BRAD PAISLEY**

Sunday, March 20  
**GEORGE STRAIT**  
with special guest  
**ASHLEY MCBRYDE**



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### CALENDAR OF EVENTS

## QUEER THINGS to DO SAVE the DATES



### ART

**April 7-10**

### ART CAR PARADE

Team Gillman and Saint Arnold's Brewery present the 35th Annual Art Car Parade weekend at the Orange Show Center for Visionary Arts, a free event for all ages featuring over 250 mobile masterpieces.

[tinyurl.com/ycysks4n](http://tinyurl.com/ycysks4n)



### COMMUNITY

**April 17**

### BUNNIES ON THE BAYOU

Bunnies on the Bayou returns to Sesquicentennial Park on Easter Sunday with Australian DJ Dan Slater and Grammy award-winning musician DJ Tracy Young. Tickets to the 21+ event at [bunniesonthebayou.org/events](http://bunniesonthebayou.org/events). [tinyurl.com/3zvrkta5](http://tinyurl.com/3zvrkta5)

### COMMUNITY

**April 30**

### BLACK QUEER ADVANCEMENT FESTIVAL

Stampede Houston hosts the Black Queer Advancement Festival, a celebration featuring music, advocacy, and community. Tickets at [normalanomaly.org](http://normalanomaly.org).

[tinyurl.com/2p8nxhu8](http://tinyurl.com/2p8nxhu8)



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NIGHT**



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## SCENE OUT

Photos by  
DALTON DEHART AND CREW



On January 26, 2022, a screening of *Dear Fredy* followed by a talk-back session was held in honor of Holocaust Remembrance Day at the Montrose Center. Pictured are **Nova Jones, Reut Bonfil, Kennedy Loftin, Rabbi Gideon Estes** and **Chandler Waite**.



The "Look but Don't Touch" comedy show was held at Bill Arning Exhibitions on January 29, 2022. Pictured are **Ridge Hershberger, Casey Rohlen, Arielle Isaac Norman, Adam Ertl, Rachel Faith McMillen,** and **Reed Becker**.



On January 30, 2022, The Music Box cast and band performed for the residents of The Village of River Oaks, and especially for **Randall Whitmore**. Pictured are **Alex Ramirez, Long Le, Rebekah Dahl, Luke Wrobel, Brad Scarborough, Mark McCain, Aaron Rublein, John Meltzer,** (front row) **Randall Whitmore, Cay Taylor,** and **Kristina Sullivan**.



A Lunar New Year celebration was held at the Houston Public Library downtown on February 2, 2022. Pictured are members of the library staff and the Unity Dragon and Lion Dance Troupe.



On February 3, 2022, the Alley Theatre hosted ActOUT at the Alley for *High School Play - A Nostalgia Fest*. Pictured are **Gene Coburn, Bram Duffee, Richard Trevino, Henry Nash,** (seated) **Xavier Montoya, Lauren Pelletier,** and **Tina Berry**.



AIDS Foundation Houston hosted a reception to announce a \$500,000 gift from Gilead Sciences on February 7, 2022. Pictured are members of the board, staff, and Gilead representatives.



On February 8, 2022, at Chapman & Kirby, HCDP presented a Blue Wave Mixer to support the 2022 Joint Senate District Convention and Get-Out The-Vote. Pictured are **Tim Sullivan, Judge Jerry Simoneaux, Judge Leah Shapiro,** and **Judge Raul Rodriguez**.



On February 10, 2022, Victory Fund presented its Victory in Houston Kickoff at the home of **Richard Holt** and **Mark McMasters**. Pictured are **Seth Schermer** and **Richard Holt**.



On February 11, 2022, a Houston delegation attended the Mardi Gras Krewe of Apollo Ball in Lafayette, Louisiana.



On February 15, 2022, the Human Rights Campaign held its 2022 Gala Kickoff at the PNC soccer stadium's Lexus Club. Pictured are director of community-development banking for PNC **Reymundo Ocanas, Julie Sudduth,** president for PNC in Houston, and **Heather Jones Taylor** of Mad Hat Maven Agency.



University of Houston College Democrats hosted a Week of Action Celebration on February 19, 2022. Pictured are UH Democrats, supporters, and candidates.



The Space City Rugby Underwear Auction was held at BUDDY'S Houston on February 19, 2022. Pictured are members of Space City Rugby.



James Walker



Eric Kirkpatrick

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## IMPORTANT FACTS FOR BIKTARVY®

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

(bik-TAR-vee)

### MOST IMPORTANT INFORMATION ABOUT BIKTARVY

**BIKTARVY may cause serious side effects, including:**

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

### ABOUT BIKTARVY

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

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

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

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

### BEFORE TAKING BIKTARVY

**Tell your healthcare provider if you:**

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

**Tell your healthcare provider about all the medicines you take:**

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

### POSSIBLE SIDE EFFECTS OF BIKTARVY

**BIKTARVY may cause serious side effects, including:**

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

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

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

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

### HOW TO TAKE BIKTARVY

Take BIKTARVY 1 time each day with or without food.

### GET MORE INFORMATION

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





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\*Source: IQVIA NPA Weekly, 04/19/2019 through 05/28/2021.

## CHAD

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**REAL BIKTARVY PATIENT**

# KEEP BEING YOU.

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

**Ask your healthcare provider if BIKTARVY is right for you.**



**ONE SMALL PILL, ONCE A DAY**

Pill shown not actual size (15 mm x 8 mm) | Featured patient compensated by Gilead.

Please see Important Facts about BIKTARVY, including important warnings, on the previous page and visit [BIKTARVY.com](https://www.biktarvy.com).



Scan to see Chad's story.

# Burning Desires

## The dirty truth behind Texas' book bans.



With the quarantine curtain slowly rising and the political season getting underway, kinky stuff is happening faster than a prairie fire with a tail wind. And I am delighted.

Republicans—who most of us look at with squinty eyes and “What the hell?” on our lips—have once again taken to banning books. Remember when they were burning The Beatles' albums back in the '60s? I think now they'd love to burn *Moby Dick* because it just sounds nasty.

They are not actually *burning* the books yet. Although they're just trying to *ban* books from school libraries, you gotta look at it this way: If they do start lighting book bonfires, enough Texas right-wingers will gladly join in to keep us all warm during the next winter power-grid failure.

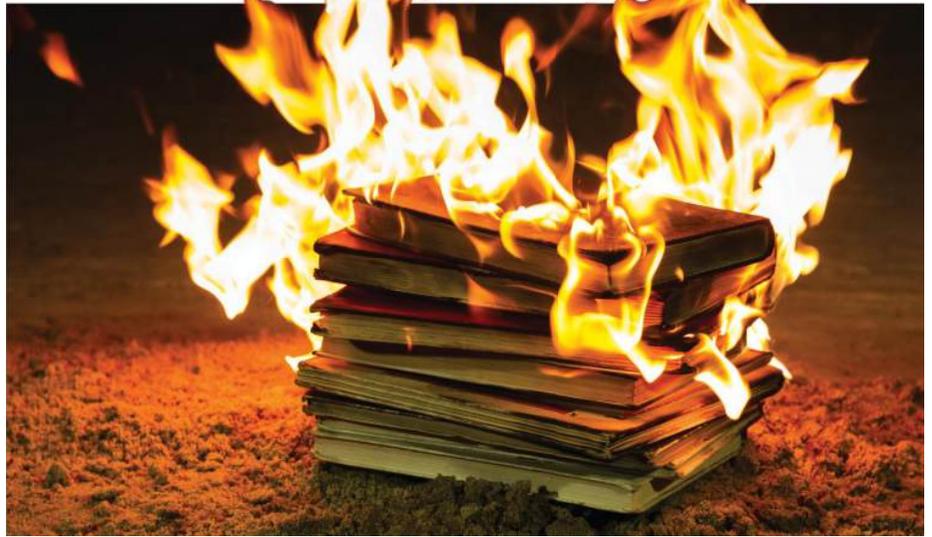
My theory is that these sanctimonious censors really just wanna talk dirty by quoting from the books on their hit list. And of course they just love outrage, which I think substitutes for sexual foreplay in many Republican homes. Mix their outrage with a little *Moby Dick*, and you've got yourself a Kama Sutra-worthy formula for some serious missionary hoochy-koochy.

I have a close friend who works at a library. Did you know that there's a whole genre of books called Cozy Mysteries? They are mystery books with no sex or violence. (It beats me what the mystery could be about—Who spilled paint in the garage? Who didn't flush?

But it gets better: There is also a book genre called Amish Romances. Romance stories with no sex. I can't wait to read their current best-seller *Why Mommy Is So Tense*.

Honey, books have *never* corrupted me. Long-legged men, smoking weed, and quarter slot machines took care of that long ago.

Meanwhile, down South, Florida Republican (are you cringing already?) Governor Rick DeSantis will pass legislation allowing white Floridians to sue their own shadow if that menacing dark figure makes them feel any discomfort. DeSantis (who I am told has the



middle name “Fooking”) is planning to run for president.

DeSantis also thinks it's really important that we never say “gay” in elementary school. Bless his heart, his train of thought has lost its caboose. He thinks that when teachers talk about about “gay,” they'll be talking about mattress-thrashing in the next breath. But savvy 2nd-graders know that all of that adult stuff is boring compared to SpongeBob SquarePants.

So you can't say “gay” in Florida elementary schools, but you *can* say “AR-15,” which is the State Gun of Florida. Now you tell me who has screwed-up priorities. DeSantis and Trump are the pro wrestlers of politics.

Speaking of which, in 2019 Donald Trump went on the teevee and pitched a red-faced hissy fit about “the new toilets” that use less water to flush. Trump did not approve of them, claiming (and I'm quoting here) that “you have to flush them 15 or 20 times” to get everything down.

At the time, I thought he was so full of crap that there couldn't possibly be that much coming out. But now we know he was trying to flush official White House documents down his White House toilet.

Poor Trump, he even thinks that gravity is a big conspiracy to keep us all on the ground.

And lastly, I have a shirt from graphic artist Rob Sheridan's collection that was given to me for Christmas. It says *Fully Vaxxed—Still Anti-Social*.

Actually, as I rethink my social scene, I wonder if maybe that shirt is not the joke it was intended to be. People have forgotten how to behave in public, y'all. There was a brawl at a

Pennsylvania Golden Corral where dozens of people threw high chairs at each other because the restaurant ran out of steak. I am not kidding you—just watch the videos of some poor guy walking around calmly saying, “I just wanted some steak.”

Now, I want to be honest here. I am not an anti-brawl type. There are some things worth fighting over. I came real close to punching a guy for trash-talking about my momma. And if Mitch McConnell ever knocks on my door, I am going to open it and punch that sumbitch right on the nose and tell him to get off my damn property. I'm a big believer in the legal theory of he-had-it-coming.

I looked up Bensalem, Pennsylvania, and found it has a population of 60,000. The Golden Corral is probably a high-falutin' eatery in Bensalem. The only competition in its class would be the Pizza Hut and Lurleen's Pea Soup and More Cafe. (Lurleen's doesn't have a salad bar but she does have ... you know, pea soup.)

Still, I'm not sure I want to be social around people who throw rowdy fits in crowded places. Lurleen respectfully disagrees with me: “Honey, the article says nobody got hurt. If you are throwing furniture in a crowded restaurant and nobody gets hurt, you are not fighting. You're just horsing around.”

Until next time, try to stay tied up or tied down as March blows in. Your preference.

*Susan Bankston lives in Richmond, Texas, where she writes about her hairdresser at The World's Most Dangerous Beauty Salon, Inc., at [juanitajeane.com](http://juanitajeane.com).*

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# Get Up, Get Out, Get Active!

Improve your physical and mental health through behavioral activation.



We've all been there. You told yourself all day that you were going for a walk in the park or a workout at the gym. But then you come up with every

excuse in the book as to why you should stay home. Somehow, you finally convince yourself to get off the couch and go out to exercise. After just 15 minutes of activity you feel better, and by the time you're done, you feel pretty damn good.

As it turns out, this isn't just about endorphins. The phenomenon at work here, called behavioral activation, can greatly improve both physical and mental health, and is a key strategy in reducing depression and anxiety, as well as improving overall mental health and wellness.

## What Is Behavioral Activation?

First introduced by neuroscientists in the 1960s, the concept of behavioral activation originally referred to a method for conceptualizing how antidepressant medications worked. For example, antidepressants were thought to alleviate depression by lifting your mood and improving sleep, but also by increasing your motivation to participate in activities. Behavioral activation in the brain was thought to be a core component of the pharmacological treatment of depression.

In the 1990s, behavioral activation was more narrowly defined to focus on its role in cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), which is used to treat a variety of mental-health conditions, including depression. Not only does CBT focus on changing patterns of thinking, but it also encourages people to participate in

activities directly aimed at reducing negative feelings and low mood.

More recently, behavioral activation has been studied as a stand-alone treatment for depression. In these cases, behavioral activation is used to increase involvement in positive, rewarding activities that can alleviate depression.

While there's still some debate about using behavioral activation techniques outside of the therapeutic concept, there is general agreement that getting active and participating in "antidepressant behaviors" can reduce feelings of sadness and negative patterns of thinking.

## Why Does It Work?

There are a number of biological and psychological reasons that explain why behavioral activation works. As mentioned earlier, endorphins are released when we participate in vigorous exercise. Endorphins are endogenous opioid neuropeptides, or chemicals in the brain that stimulate the opioid receptors. These neurochemicals contribute to an overall sense of reward by creating feelings of well-being and mild euphoria. The term "runner's high" isn't entirely a misnomer. Your brain actually creates chemicals that encourage you to participate in activities that are good for you. Plus, exercise can make it easier to fall asleep and stay asleep throughout the night.

We can also benefit from behavioral activa-

tion from a psychological standpoint. Setting concrete goals is a great way of providing structure to your day. While we all need time to relax and veg out, constantly moving through your day without any sense of structure can make you feel listless. Also, creating structure can reduce the chronic distractions of social media or Netflix. Meeting goals and expectations makes you feel good by creating a sense of accomplishment. Frankly, who couldn't use that winning feeling every now and again?

Participating in positive activities can also decrease participation in negative ones that worsen feelings of depression. Exploring hobbies, spending time in the park, or exercising at the gym may reduce time spent consuming alcohol (a central nervous system depressant) or other substances that can negatively impact mood. Activities also provide opportunities to create community and develop healthier relationships with like-minded individuals.

In some clinical trials, behavioral activation was as effective as antidepressant medication or psychotherapy in treating depression. While psychotherapy and medication is an important (and, for many, vital) component of an overall treatment approach, the potential positive impact of simply getting up and moving around cannot be overstated. →

# If you have diabetes and are overweight, you could have silent liver disease too.



Learn about fatty liver disease and NASH, and see if you may qualify for a clinical trial.

## About NASH

If you have diabetes or struggle with your weight, you may have fatty liver disease. A severe form of fatty liver disease, called nonalcoholic steatohepatitis (NASH), often has no symptoms but can cause significant damage to your liver if not diagnosed early.

While there are no medications approved for NASH (as of May 2020), a clinical trial may be an option for you.

## About the Clinical Trial

The MK-3655 Clinical Trial is evaluating the safety and effectiveness of MK-3655, an investigational medication for people with NASH. This trial will test MK-3655 compared to placebo. A placebo looks like the study medication but contains no active ingredient.

### You may be able to participate if you:\*

- Are a male or postmenopausal female, 18 to 80 years of age [in Japan: 20 to 80 years of age]
- Have NASH confirmed by a liver biopsy
- Do not have type 2 diabetes OR have type 2 diabetes that is well controlled by diet or a stable dose of diabetes medication
- Have had a stable weight for at least 3 months

### If you qualify and decide to participate:

- Your liver and your overall health will be monitored closely by an experienced study team
- You will receive the investigational medication and study-related doctor visits at no charge
- The information gathered may help advance medical knowledge about NASH and may improve patient care in the future
- Participation is voluntary, and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time. Your privacy will be maintained throughout the clinical trial

\*There may be additional requirements to participate. The study doctor can provide you with more information. Additional potential risks and benefits of participation will be fully described to you by your study team.

To learn more, including the possible risks and benefits of participation contact:  
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**GARY GREENE**

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- Obstacle Course

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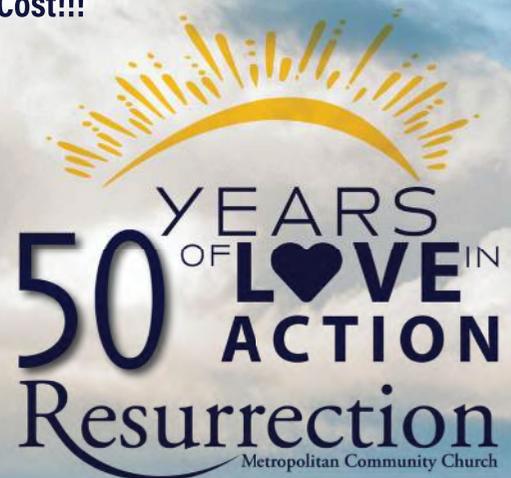
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**3 - 4:30 pm** \$10 for 9 card 4 game pack

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### Get Up, Get Out, Get Active

Now that COVID restrictions have begun to lift, it's a great time to consider how you might get more active. First, begin by setting some achievable goals and creating a plan of action.

Perhaps you can resume a few activities that may have dropped off over the last two years. As they say, "it's like riding a bike." Rediscovering old hobbies is an excellent place to start.

Set alarm clocks and timers to help provide structure. Alarms can remind you when an activity can optimally begin and end. Also, setting your smartphone to alert you about excessive screen time can create more time to participate in activities that provide connection rather than distraction.

Maybe you don't know which activities to choose. Consider that uncertainty to be an opportunity for exploration and adventure. There's an entire world of activities that you could get involved with. Maybe you can start with walking while listening to music, podcasts, or audiobooks. Perhaps you can take on an art project to explore your creative side.

It can be especially nice to pick something that you won't try to force yourself to be good at. Remember, it's about the process rather than the product.

And remember that two is sometimes better than one. Grab a friend to participate in activities with you. You can tag-team and hold each other accountable, making it more likely that you'll adhere to your plan of action.

### What If Exercise Isn't Enough?

In some cases, activity and exercise is not enough to effectively manage depression and anxiety. The effects of working out may not lift your mood or reduce worry long enough to reduce thoughts of self-harm or combat feelings of worthlessness.

While exercise and hobbies are an important part of overall health that can simply enhance your feeling of being alive, there are other mental-health conditions such as bipolar disorder or schizophrenia where new activities alone might not be an effective treatment. In those cases, seeking help from your primary-care clinician or a trained mental-health professional is a next, important step in promoting optimal mental wellness.

*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.*



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# A Quick-Start Guide to Financial Wellness

Taking the first steps to a secure financial future.



We are all aware that when one part of our body isn't in check, it can impact our overall well-being. The same is true regarding your financial plan. Getting your finances in order may

seem like a daunting task, but like any other journey, it all starts with taking the first steps. So where, exactly, should you begin, especially if you're just starting out?

## Reducing Expenses to Save Money Fast

While starting something new can sometimes be difficult, it is often easier if you have a step-by-step plan to follow. In this case, your “roadmap” should include the following five steps:

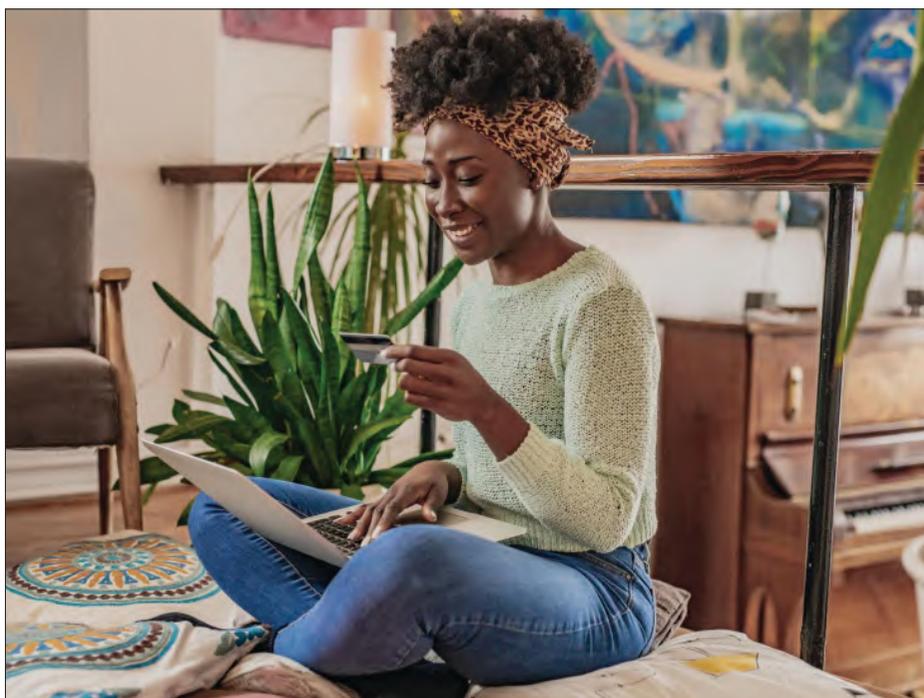
- Save \$1,000 within six months
- Check your “non-essential” expenses and cancel things you don't use
- Review your credit report
- Establish your estate plan
- Maximize the “free money” that you are eligible for

### Save \$1,000 within Six Months

One of the initial goals to focus on is to work toward saving \$1,000 as fast as you can—within six months if you are single, and within three months if you are married or have a partner. This money could be used as an emergency fund, or as a good start on a down payment for a big-ticket item.

While \$1,000 might seem like a steep hill to climb in such a short period of time, the reality is that when you break it down into bite-sized pieces, the steps don't seem so difficult.

For instance, if you're saving the \$1,000 yourself, it equates to just \$167 per month for six months. If money is tight and you don't have that much left over after all your living ex-



penses have been paid, you may have to “find” the money elsewhere.

Once you have \$1,000 in place, you could repeat the exercise. Before you know it, you would have \$2,000 in six more months! You can also increase your goal for the next six months to \$1,200 or \$1,500. From there, you will soon get to a point where you can enhance your savings and investments even further by opening a personal brokerage account and/or starting an IRA (Individual Retirement Account).

### Check Your Non-Essential Expenses

Spending less can lead to saving more. As an example, go through everything that you buy over a period of one month. Then ask yourself if you really need the most comprehensive cable-TV package, unlimited smartphone services, or other subscriptions.

It can also be beneficial to shop around and see if you can get better rates on your auto and homeowner's/renter's insurance. You may be surprised to find that for the exact same cover-

age and deductibles, the premium can vary a great deal.

If you carry a balance on your credit cards, it can help to pay them off. One of the best methods for doing so is to start with the card that has the highest interest rate associated with it. After that is repaid, move on to the loan with the next-highest rate, and so on.

Many employers now offer domestic-partner benefits, so it could be worthwhile to check and see if your partner could be added to your employer-sponsored coverage (or vice versa). This alone could help you save quite a bit every month.

### Review Your Credit Report

Your credit score and report can have an impact on a whole range of areas in your financial life, such as the interest rate you are charged on mortgages and other loans, credit-card approvals, apartment leases and other types of contracts (such as cell phone and internet

CONTINUED ON PAGE 34

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## Ryan White Planning Council CALENDAR OF MEETINGS FOR 2022

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

Council meetings are open to the public and although only Council members are allowed to vote, Public Comment is welcome at the beginning of every meeting. **The Council currently meets virtually via Zoom Teleconference** on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Thursday of each month at 12noon.

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

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

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

The calendar of all Council and Committee meetings and a wealth of other information is available on our website. Check the calendar regularly for topics of specific interest to you. Request to join our E-List (feedbackRWPC@hctx.net) to receive info about Council and community events. We hope to see you soon!

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services), and job applications.

While a quarter- or half-point difference in the interest rate on a loan or mortgage might not seem like a big deal, the reality is that it can make a huge difference in the total amount of money you end up paying for something.

As an example, a \$25-per-month difference on a 30-year mortgage can add up to paying \$9,000 more for a home—money that could have been put toward savings and investments instead.

Some of the things that can affect your credit score include the amount of debt that you carry, whether or not you make your payments on time, the type of debt you have (such as “good” debt like a mortgage, versus “bad” unsecured credit-card balances), and the length of your credit history. (A longer credit history is typically better than a short history, because potential creditors can get a better sense of how you’ve handled debt over time.)

Oftentimes, there are mistakes made on your credit report such as old paid-off loans still showing as open, and even incorrect data regarding purchases that you did not make. Therefore, it is important that you review your credit information on a regular basis so that you can check for errors and ensure that everything is accurate.

With identity theft on the rise, it is also essential to make sure that you do not become (or have not already become) an innocent victim. A stolen identity can wreak havoc on your ability to borrow money or obtain credit in the future.

Each year, you are eligible to obtain a free copy of your credit report from all three of the large credit-reporting agencies—Experian, TransUnion, and Equifax. You can do so by going to [annualcreditreport.com](http://annualcreditreport.com).

### Establish Your Estate Plan

Many people mistakenly believe that they must be wealthy in order to have an estate plan. But this is not necessarily the case. In fact, in many ways, keeping assets protected with an estate plan can be extremely important for those who do not have an abundance of financial resources. We all need to maximize what our loved ones actually have available to spend, instead of having the money go into Uncle Sam’s pocket.

Having your legal documents in place is extremely important, as it can spell out who is authorized to make financial and medical decisions for you if you become unable to do so yourself.

Whether you are single, married, or with a domestic partner, you should have a plan in place for the tax-efficient transfer of assets



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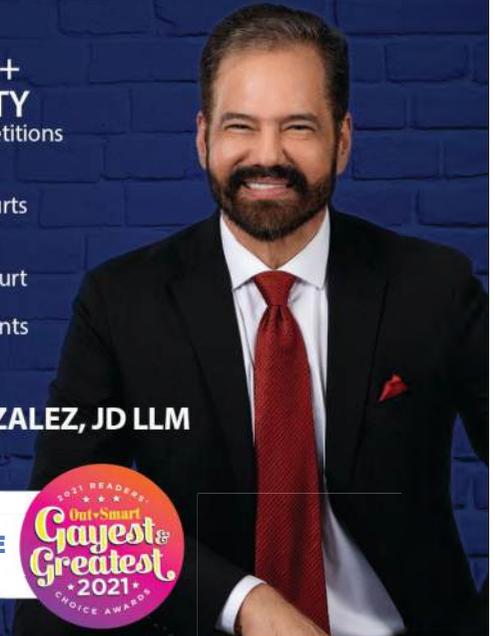
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# Rebecca Marques

HRC's Texas State Director discusses LGBTQ rights and politics at SXSW.

By LOURDES ZAVALA  
Photo by POL KURUCZ



## Tell me about your journey to becoming HRC's Texas state director.

I previously worked at the ACLU of Texas for some years, focusing on LGBTQ and reproductive rights. I advocated against the 2015 anti-trans attack in Houston around the Houston Equal Rights Ordinance and the bathroom bill filed during the Texas legislative session in 2017. That sparked something really important to me—that LGBTQ rights were going to be on the forefront of which direction Texas goes for the next few years. During this time, I got to partner with the Human Rights Campaign, Equality Texas, ACLU of Texas, the Transgender Education Network of Texas (TENT), Texas Freedom Network (TFN), and Lambda Legal. As coalition partners, we've worked very closely since 2015. While we were working side-by-side with the Human Rights Campaign, I really saw the investment that they were bringing to the table here in Texas. They were looking for a Texas state director, and I'm happy to say I've been working in this position since about 2018.

## What do your day-to-day operations look like?

It depends. This year, we are looking ahead to November and the elections. We think this is going to be a very critical election for the future of Texas and our country. We had seen the most egregious legislative session last year in Texas. We had more anti-LGBTQ bills—and specifically more anti-trans bills—than any other state in the country. It's going to be a difficult midterm, but we have to give it our all to make sure we are in the best position for the next legislative session by supporting pro-LGBTQ candidates.

Right now, our day-to-day looks like working with our state partners like Equality Texas, TENT, and TFN, and our cross-movement



**"SOMETHING SXSW DOES THAT IS REALLY HELPFUL IS TO BROADEN OUR MESSAGE OUTSIDE THE STATE. FOLKS WANT TO HEAR WHAT'S WORKED AND WHAT HASN'T WORKED IN TEXAS, AND HOW THEY CAN IMPLEMENT OUR STRATEGIES IN OTHER STATES SO THAT WE CAN FIGHT BACK AGAINST ANTI-TRANS LEGISLATION ACROSS THE COUNTRY."**

—Rebecca Marques

partners like Planned Parenthood and the Texas Organizing Project. We're making sure we are prepared to support pro-equality candidates and hold anti-LGBTQ candidates and elected officials accountable. Right now that's really where our focus is, but it really depends. Last year we were in a legislative session that lasted 10 months, which is really unusual. For 10 months of the year we were fighting back anti-trans laws specifically, every single day at the Capitol with our partners.

## What was your role in advocating against that unprecedented number of anti-LGBTQ bills last year?

As a state director, you coordinate a team of our national advocates and professionals, including our legal advocates. You provide bill analysis and testimony for the anti-LGBTQ bills in question. Of course, we also coordinate with our partners. We have a really strong state coalition table with Equality Texas, TENT, TFN, and Lambda Legal. This has been a core group, so we work really closely every day with a mixture of lobbying and grassroots mobilization. We spend a lot of time making sure that folks are talking to the representatives and letting them know that they oppose the pieces of legislation coming down, and also advocating for our constituents' needs at the Capitol directly.

## You're going to be talking about your work at SXSW this month, joined by leaders from TENT, Equality Texas, and Texas Competes. Can you tell me about how that panel came together?

The panel came together by looking back at the session and how difficult it was, as well as the journey our state has been on for the last 10 years. In Texas in 2017, and even before that, a focus on anti-trans legislation began to take shape here. Unfortunately, what happens in Texas doesn't stay in Texas. If we are not successful at defeating as many of these bills as possible, it won't just impact LGBTQ Texans, →

but LGBTQ rights across the country. That's why the role that Texas and our advocates play is so important. One bright spot in these difficult past few years is our state coalition. We have a really strong trans-led statewide organization with TENT and its executive director, Emmett Schelling. TENT has played a key part in fighting back against these bad bills and making sure that we have a strong statewide trans-led organization. Having partners working so closely with folks and organizations, day in and day out for this many years, has been really helpful. It shows the legislators that there is a united front as we move through each legislative session. A lot of states have looked to what we've done in Texas to defeat their own bills, because even though Texas had the most anti-trans and anti-LGBTQ bills in the country, we defeated the majority of these bills. There's still something to look back on that's really powerful.

**Are you anticipating people from across the state attending your SXSXW discussion?** Definitely. Something SXSXW does that is really helpful is to broaden our message outside the state. There are going to be a lot of folks wanting to hear what's worked and what hasn't worked in Texas, and how they can implement our strategies in other states so that we can

fight back against anti-trans legislation across the country.

**In addition to the large number of anti-trans attacks here in Texas, are there any other issues that you identify as impacting our community?**

There are two examples that come to mind. One is the anti-abortion legislation that passed last year. SB8 has done tremendous harm to Texans who seek abortion access. We are very concerned about it. Our legal director has been watching very closely as the events unfold in the courts. Of course, everybody knows people within the LGBTQ community also need access to abortion, particularly the bisexual community and trans men. This is an incredibly important issue for our community, and Planned Parenthood and other reproductive-rights groups had our back at the Capitol fighting these bills. We're very invested there, so we're going to be engaging the community around SB8 a lot in the coming year. We're also very concerned about voting rights. We opposed all of the attacks on voting rights that happened in the last legislative session. We've been working with our partners there—like the Texas Organizing Project, ACLU of Texas, and Move Texas—and really following their lead, because our community absolutely needs equitable ac-

cess to the ballot box. We're thinking with our partners on how to best educate our community around these bills that have passed, because they are two examples that directly impact our community.

**Since SXSXW is happening in your home city, do you have any spots around Austin you recommend to folks visiting for the festival?**

Cheer Up Charlies is my favorite queer bar. There's also a lot of outside patio seating, so if you're like me and are still concerned with COVID, it's a great option. It's also really welcoming, chill, and they have really good music and a vegan food truck.

**Are there any final thoughts you'd like to share with our readers?**

HRC is really grateful to work with amazing state partners. I know how hard this last year has been in Texas for everybody, so I hope people in our community are getting rest and preparing for more challenges. We have an opportunity to fight back, and I'm looking forward to that.

 For more info on the LGBTQ Rights and Politics panel at SXSXW, visit [tinyurl.com/4hm8nhum](http://tinyurl.com/4hm8nhum).

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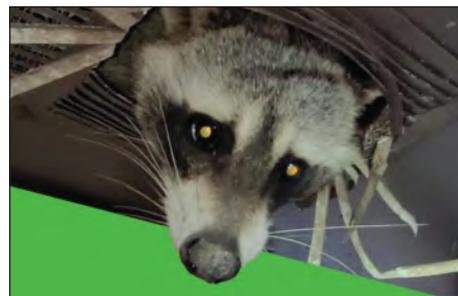
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# Fourth Generation Cowgirl

Arqueze Girdy defied the odds to continue her family's rodeo legacy.

By JENNY BLOCK

**P**roud rodeo star Arqueze Girdy has spent her life jumping barrels and breaking barriers—but neither of those things have ever been easy. She was bullied so badly in high school that she had to drop out. When she came out as transgender to her family, her grandfather kicked her out of the house. And when she started to win barrel races again and again, officials tried to disqualify her for her gender identity.

But the one thing that has always been a constant throughout her life is raising horses for the rodeo.

Horses have had a hold on Girdy since she was a youngster growing up in Victoria, Texas. “I’ve always been on a horse. As I got older, getting so much help with learning how to ride just made me a natural. The first time I saw the barrel racing at a rodeo, I told my grandma, ‘That’s what I want to do!’”

Girdy is a fourth-generation cowgirl, and barrel racing is now her full-time career at age 30. “All my family rodeoed, and some still compete. They passed it down to me starting when I was 5 years old,” she says. “I started running barrels on and off starting at 7. I stopped when I was 16, and found my way back after my transition when I was 20. From then on, it’s been a roller coaster of bad, good, scary, fun, and joyful. It’s my love, and I’ll do anything to keep doing it.”

But the journey for Girdy has not been an easy one, and she found herself in a dark place with all of the bullying. “I was just trying to recover and find myself. I just put all my time into my horses. I wasn’t always great. I worked and put in the time [whether it was] cold as heck or hot as heck. I put in the time,” she says.

When she first came out as transgender, her grandfather couldn’t accept her. “That’s why I was on the streets for a while. I escorted for maybe three months. It wasn’t for me. I tried to commit suicide three times. Hospital-



ized each time. That’s when I left and started dancing,” Girdy admits.

She began dancing in strip clubs throughout Texas to provide for her horses and herself until 2018. “I had a girl make me a fake ID so I could get into the big clubs. I was the first transgender dancer to dance at High Rollers Strip Club,” Girdy says. “The owner there said he knew there was something ‘different’ about me. ‘He asked if I was transgender. I said, ‘Yes’ and he said, ‘I see a biological female.’ That was the most wonderful thing anyone has ever said to me.”

She continued to build her rodeo career while she was dancing up until 2018. She identifies as straight and has been in a relationship since 2019 with her best friend, a man she’s known for 16 years. “He is the love of my life!”

Girdy has a transgender daughter, Royalty, who transitioned at 10 years old. “But I also have two boys I raise—my godsons and nephews,” she says.

Her rodeo career really took off in the summer of 2014. “My horse Boycyfus is the reason

that happened. Bo was like Charmayne James’ horse Scamper, but on the Black rodeo circuit. He was unstoppable. Even if there were mistakes, he still won. He was wild. He’s in semi-retirement now,” Girdy explains.

People on the circuit used to call her “the trans girl on the sorrel horse,” she remembers. “I went to so many rodeos when I was transitioning, and everyone was accepting. Then it became a problem once I started winning. I didn’t have the pretty saddles or the clothes or the blankets. They all laughed at me. When I started to win, they still laughed. But when I *really* started winning, they stopped laughing and started trying to ban me.”

Girdy says her competitors had no problems with her participating in rodeos, but for two years starting in 2015, a man who attended the competitions began harassing her. The first time, he targeted her by closing the gate on her as she and her horse were about to run.

“He did that at five different rodeos,” Giridy continues. “He was making drama at the rodeo, and people saw it was just jealousy. He did that for two years. People blasted me on the internet and talked about me. And I was dating his brother at that time. Turned out he was gay and in the closet. There were times I just drove to the barn and cried. There were too many people picking at me and trying to keep me from competing. Bo was taking care of me, doing what he loved to do—running barrels.”

In 2019, her story went global when she was excluded from the MLK Scholarship and Rodeo in Rosenberg. After submitting her application to compete in the event, Giridy was told she could not compete because she didn't bring her birth certificate to register.

The MLK Scholarship and Rodeo, governed by the Women's Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association (WPRCA), required her birth certificate at the fairgrounds.

“There were stories about me all around the world,” Giridy says. “I was fully transitioned by then, and the head of the rodeo was trying to make trouble. So we went to the media and they came to Rosenberg when I was there practicing. By the time we were having dinner [that night], we had gone viral.”



KEVIN GOODMAN

Arqueze Giridy barrel racing at a Texas rodeo event

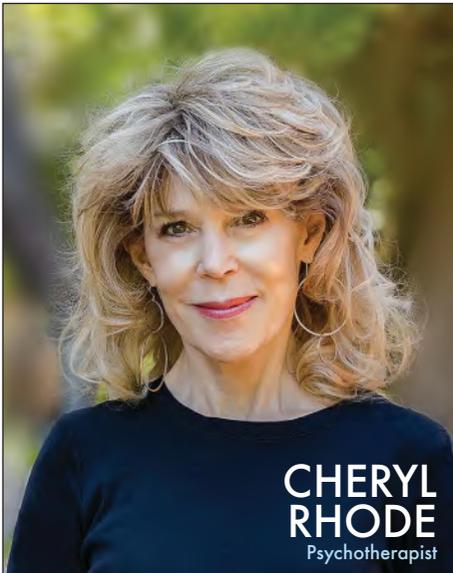
“Nothing will stop us unless we *let it* stop us,” Giridy reminds us.

In 2019, thanks to Giridy's tenacity, the bylaws of the Women's Professional Rodeo Association were changed to include transgender people, similar to the current rules for the Olympics.

Giridy is currently working toward earning her Women's Professional Rodeo Association permit and getting the colts she's now riding to a higher level of competition. “It's rodeos left and right coming up!” she adds.

Even today, people still try to keep Giridy from competing. “The world is changing, and I'm glad I've made history. I want to be a good example for others, including my daughter, by staying strong and fighting. You have to be as tough as the nails that stick in a board. You'll never get as far if you don't fight back. I love to share my story, because it shows the demons we have to fight.”

For more info on Arqueze Giridy, visit [tinyurl.com/2p98ehkp](https://tinyurl.com/2p98ehkp)



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# CULINARY CHAMPION

Texas-based Jo Chan vies to become Bravo's next Top Chef.

By ZACH MCKENZIE

Photo by ERICA NIX

**H**ouston just got a whole lot tastier! Bravo's hit show *Top Chef* has landed in H-Town for its 19th season, and the stakes couldn't be higher considering the top-notch culinary scene that our city is known for.

One contestant looking to take home the Top Chef honor is Austin's Jo Chan. The out-and-proud chef is counting on her sure-fire combination of grit, cultural influences, and vast experience to impress the judges and add a Top Chef title to her lengthy résumé.

"When I was 15 years old, I took my first geometry class and realized I wasn't going to be an architect. That dream was basically dead," Chan laughs as she recalls how she got her start in the culinary world. "From a cultural perspective, food brought my family together. My family is full of immigrants, and one day it just clicked. I started to spend more time in the kitchen and it felt like a one-way street to where I wanted to be."

Chan, a first-generation American, explains that her multicultural upbringing was heavily influenced by both food and career expectations. "My family is Chinese, but my parents were born and raised in the Philippines. Ethnically we are Chinese, but culturally we're definitely more Filipino."

When her family emigrated to the States, they landed in Los Angeles. "Since my family are immigrants, it was really important for me to get a college degree—whether I ended up

using it or not," she says. "I went to San Diego State University and then went directly to culinary school." Her ability to attend San Diego Culinary Institute was part of an agreement she had with her parents. "I told my parents I would get a college degree if I could go to culinary school. I was so hungry to get there." After graduating, Chan's career took her to New York City. "My internship was in New York, and from that point my career took off. My very first restaurant I worked at was Nobu Fifty-Seven."

Today, Chan resides in Austin while serving as the executive chef at Eberly. Being chosen as a *Top Chef* contestant is a dream come true for this queen of the kitchen, who has spent years keeping her head down while honing her craft. "When I was growing up and wanting to become a chef, *Top Chef* was at the height of its popularity. I remember watching early seasons and setting the benchmark of being chosen to compete as a goal." Chan paid her dues, did the work, and saw her dream come true. "I put it on the back burner because I didn't think I was at that level. But last year I was approached by casting to apply, and I was chosen to be on the show!"

Combining the many influences from her upbringing, her work in New York, and now her experiences in Texas, Chan explains that her culinary style is quite eclectic. "From a cultural perspective, I've learned to cook a lot of Asian food, but my focus is California Italian. [I picked up a lot of that influence in New York] working for Justin Smillie and Jonathan

Waxman," she explains. "Coming to Texas, I quickly realized that the seasons are very different. We have two: hot, and not very hot. In New York, everything was hyper-seasonal."

At Eberly, Chan celebrates and blends her experiences seamlessly into the restaurant's menu. "Eberly classifies as a New American restaurant. We incorporate a lot of Italian and Asian flavors, combining influences from my upbringing and where I'm at today."

Anticipation for the latest season of *Top Chef* has been building in Houston ever since it was announced that the city would host *Top Chef* judge Padma Lakshmi and her crew. Although Chan can't give away too many spoilers, she says the Texas influence will be heavily featured on-screen. "Texas offers its own unique flavor. We have a real pride and style of food that's quite different," she says. "I was in culture shock when I first got here. The way we use smoke, the styles of food, and the way we do casual food is really incredible."

As a cultural hub that prides itself on having some of the best food in the nation, Houston has definitely made an impact on Chan. "Houston has such a different landscape than Austin. My fiancée and I love going to Houston for a change of pace from Austin," she says. "Chris Shepherd's restaurants are a big stop for us. My friend Travis opened Ostia in Montrose. We worked together at Barbuto in New York, and I never →

"GROWING UP, IT'S RARE TO SEE PEOPLE LIKE YOU WHEN YOU'RE WATCHING TV. *TOP CHEF* WAS A SHOW THAT HAD CHEFS THAT LOOKED LIKE ME, AND THAT MADE ME FEEL OK TO BE WHO I WAS."

—Jo Chan



Jo Chan photographed at Eberly, where she serves as executive chef of the chic Austin-based dining, drinking, and thinking location.

thought we'd end up being neighbors. It's a huge flashback for me to go to that space. It feels a lot like home." Rounding out her list of favorite things to do in Houston, Chan says, "I love Rosie Cannonball, and I always try to get dim sum when I'm there because it's a little harder to get that in Austin."

Her newfound platform is one that Chan doesn't take lightly, particularly as an out gay woman. "Growing up, it's rare to see people like you when you're watching TV. *Top Chef* was a show that had chefs that looked like me, and that made me feel OK to be who I was," she recalls. "You don't realize how good the moment is because you're putting in so much work, but this process made it so visible to me. I went to a Catholic high school that didn't claim me when I was there, but they do now [after I made it on *Top Chef*]. There are small ways we've moved the needle with representation. Everything I've done in my life has been to further my career and celebrate the people in my restaurants, but if there's some way I can move the needle by just being me, it's really incredible and I feel the epic responsibility of that moment."

From cooking in the kitchen with her family to being on *Top Chef*'s national stage, Chan has put in the work from a very young age and is



DAVID MOIR/BRavo

*Top Chef* Season 19 contestants Monique Feybesse, Jo Chan, and Buddha Lo

now basking in the moment. She sums up her advice to aspiring chefs by saying, "Put your head down and work hard. In most kitchens I've worked in, I let my work speak for itself. I was so fortunate to work for such amazing chefs that made space for me and celebrated who I was. They never made me feel strange, or like an outsider."

Pulling from her experience with another culinary expert, Chan sums it up well: "Anthony Bourdain once said, 'The restaurant kitchen may

indeed be the last, glorious meritocracy.' That is so true. Every single day, I work so hard and try to be the best I can be. That speaks volumes, and gets you very far in this industry. I never chase down recognition—it's always just found me, based on the hard work I put in. And I'm really grateful for that."



Bravo's *Top Chef* Houston premieres on March 3. Keep up with Chef Jo Chan on Instagram @chefjochan.



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# 50 Years of Love in Action

Resurrection Metropolitan Community Church  
celebrates their golden anniversary.

By NEIL ELLIS ORTS

**W**hen a handful of queer folk started gathering for prayer meetings in a Houston apartment in 1972, marriage equality was a distant dream. Sodomy laws were on the books—and still being capriciously enforced in Texas. The American Psychiatric Association was still one year away from removing homosexuality from its list of mental illnesses. LGBTQ Houstonians sometimes lost their jobs and housing after being publicly outed.

It was into this world, at the dawn of the post-Stonewall civil rights era, that Resurrection Metropolitan Community Church (RMCC) was born.

## The Early Years

In 1972, RMCC founding member Gregory Shelton was a student at Prairie View A&M University. He had been thrown out of both his family's home and the Roman Catholic Church for being gay and unrepentant about it. In the university library, he discovered the book *The Lord Is My Shepherd and He Knows I'm Gay* by Rev. Troy Perry, who had founded the first MCC in Los Angeles in 1968. Encouraged by this book, Shelton began looking for gay-affirming church groups, a search that led him to the Houston prayer meetings. Having no car at the time, Shelton attended by hitchhiking or taking a bus from Prairie View.

Assisted by missionaries from Hope MCC in Dallas, this prayer meeting grew and, in

1974, started meeting in a former bicycle repair shop on Waugh Drive. In February of 1975, Resurrection became an official congregation of the MCC. Shelton was among the signers of the original charter and remains a church member to this day.

The young congregation endured the same police harassment that was common in the gay bars at the time. When the Ku Klux Klan learned of RMCC, they burned a cross outside the church and made threats on the life of the pastor. Since no help could be secured from the police, congregants formed their own security team.

Those early years were full of anxiety, Shelton notes. "We were scared at the beginning! They knew who you were, and

sometimes you'd get abuse coming here." Still the congregants summoned the courage to keep going. "Sometimes we had a sign-in sheet. [Those who] were afraid to sign in would use a pseudonym."

RMCC's current pastor, Rev. Elder Troy Treash, describes that era as Resurrection's "sanctuary-oasis years." Despite the dangers they encountered, it was nonetheless a place for queer people to gather for spiritual support and safety.

### Called to Action

As the congregation grew in numbers, they kept outgrowing their rented spaces. In 1979, they were able to purchase a church building at 1919 Decatur Street near downtown Houston. The relationship between the growing church and the broader LGBTQ community is evidenced by a story from Iris Rodriguez, an RMCC member of over 25 years. She first learned of Resurrection from her friend Marion Coleman, the owner of Houston's pioneering lesbian bar Kindred Spirits. "At the time—early 1980s—that bar was the community center for every lesbian in Houston," Rodriguez says. Coleman

**"AGAINST ALL ODDS,  
THE CHURCH HAS  
ALWAYS SHOWN  
COMPASSION.  
I EXPERIENCED THE  
COMPASSION OF  
MCC WHEN PEOPLE  
HAD NO ONE."**

—Annette Beall,  
longtime church member

asked Rodriguez to attend the various religious organizations around Houston, including RMCC. "It all started [for me] because there was a leader in our community who said, 'We need to help our churches.'"

This sort of community connection became central to the overriding story of the 1980s and 1990s: the AIDS crisis. Annette Beall, another long-term member and former church-office employee, speaks of those years as a defining

time for her. "Against all odds, the church has always shown compassion" she says. "I experienced the compassion of MCC when people had no one. People were not allowed to go to their partners' funeral services. The families took that away from them." Into that void, Resurrection served people whether or not they were church members.

Rev. Carolyn Mobley-Bowie was on the pastoral staff during the height of the AIDS crisis, and she echoes that sentiment. She conducted funerals and memorial services at multiple sites around Houston—people's homes, the gay bars, and even down on the bayous. "I used to keep track, and I stopped after 100," she says.

Relating to the church's name, Rev. Mobley-Bowie says, "There's a lot of church ritual that includes the words, 'I am the resurrection and the life.' At every funeral we said that. And so as we celebrated the life. We had to believe in the life beyond."

Rev. Treash sees the AIDS crisis as a turning point in the church's history. "The church shifted to being a more active voice, to make sure people were being taken care of—that shift from retreating to a sanctuary to engaging with the world on behalf of others." →





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**Growing Pains**

That shift to becoming a more outward-focused world-engaging congregation was greatly aided by RMCC’s move to its current location on 11th Street at T.C. Jester in the Heights. Having outgrown the Decatur building, the era of quietly gathering on a neighborhood side street ended when they moved to a very visible campus on a busy intersection. Rev. Elder Dwayne Johnson, the senior pastor at the time of the transition, says, “We were able to expand our voice in some important ways.”

Almost immediately, Resurrection began opening its doors to other community organizations for meeting space and events—whether spiritual, political, or celebratory.

But just one year after moving into their new space, Tropical Storm Allison severely flooded the church campus. The congregation responded without hesitation when they met the following Sunday for a “Work and Worship” day.

“We had a short service that Sunday, and then we immediately got to work,” Rev. Johnson recalls. “I saw the determina-

tion in their faces, the fire in their eyes.” He grows emotional as he tells the story. “When people think of ‘church,’ they think of looking a certain way and wearing certain clothes. I looked out and saw people wearing old work clothes and boots. To me, that’s church. How people showed up that Sunday was absolutely in their ‘Sunday best’—ready to work and love their neighbor.”

Over the next few weeks, two work teams were formed: one for the church campus, and the other to address the needs of congregants’ homes that were also damaged in the flood. That outreach project soon expanded to the homes of the congregants’ neighbors.

Resurrection MCC has been at the center of a number of ongoing social-justice battles. In the years leading up to the Supreme Court’s marriage-equality ruling, RMCC members and clergy would make annual protest appearances at Harris County’s downtown offices to ask for marriage licenses.

The church continues to be visible and vocal in response to the inevitable blowback to the advances in LGBTQ civil rights. They work to address issues such as sexual identity, non-hierarchical family relationships, or promoting non-colonial ways of being in the

world—topics that are not always addressed by other churches.

“I would consider us a ‘justice’ church,” Rev. Treash says. “We are committed to anti-racist work. That’s a little more difficult for churches than [simply being a] ‘come feel good on Sunday morning’ place. We want you to come feel good, and be supported, and find a place of comfort, and be challenged to work to make the world a better place.”

**50-Year Celebration Events**

Three major events are planned for the church’s 50th-anniversary celebration, whose theme will be “50 Years of Love in Action.”

**March 26, 10 a.m.**

The RMCC “50 Fest,” a family-friendly fair with activities for all ages

**April 23**

Gala at Hotel ZaZa—Memorial City, with entertainment, dancing, stories, food, and drink

**April 24**

50th-anniversary Sunday worship service

 For more info, visit [resurrectionmcc.org](http://resurrectionmcc.org).

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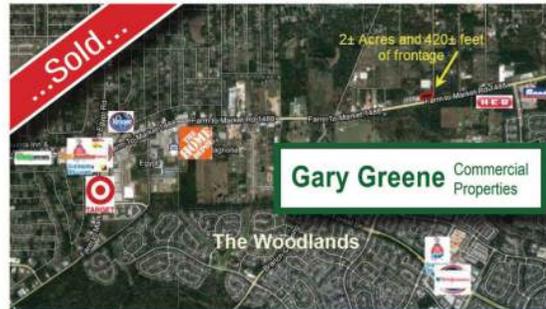
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to your loved ones—or at least have someone pre-selected to make important decisions in case of the unexpected.

One of the first questions to ask yourself when creating your estate plan is whether anyone would be impacted financially if something happened to you. This can be particularly important for those in the LGBTQ community, as assets may not automatically transfer to the people that you intend them to go to. In addition, many in the LGBTQ community want to make sure that our four-legged family members are taken care of, too.

To make sure that your plan remains current, be sure to check the names of beneficiaries that you have listed on life insurance and/or retirement accounts.

Reviewing your plan at least on an annual basis is highly recommended—or even more often if you have had major changes in your life such as marriage or divorce, the death of a spouse or partner, or the birth or adoption of a child.

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If you have access to an employer-sponsored retirement account such as a 401(k), you may be eligible to receive “free money.” Many companies will match (up to a certain percentage) the funds that their employees contribute to the plan. So even if you aren’t “maxing out” the full amount of allowable annual contributions, it is recommended that you deposit at least enough to qualify for the company match.

**Taking the Next Step**

Making sure that your financial house is in order is an important goal at any age. One reason for this is because the decisions that you make today—even the seemingly small ones—could have a big impact later on.

If you’re ready to get started, or if you have a plan in place and would like to have a second set of eyes to look things over, talking with a financial-planning professional is a great place to start. And aligning with an advisor who is well-versed in issues that affect the LGBTQ community can be even more beneficial.

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





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# WHEEL LOVE 2022

This year's most intriguing automobile trends.

By JAMES T. HURST



The auto industry and consumers will remember 2021 as the year of the pandemic, critical shortages of semiconductor chips, empty lots at the dealerships, and insane prices for both new and used cars. As we look optimistically to the future, 2022 will continue to see limited inventories, limited choices, and prices that continue to rise for the automobile industry. Electric and

hybrid vehicle choices will continue to expand, which should offer some light at the end of the tunnel. The battery-powered revolution, while disconcerting for traditional car enthusiasts, will offer buyers both innovative technology and the promise of a cleaner and healthier planet.

Here are four automotive highlights for 2022 that should intrigue OUTSMART readers looking for style and value.

## TOYOTA 4RUNNER



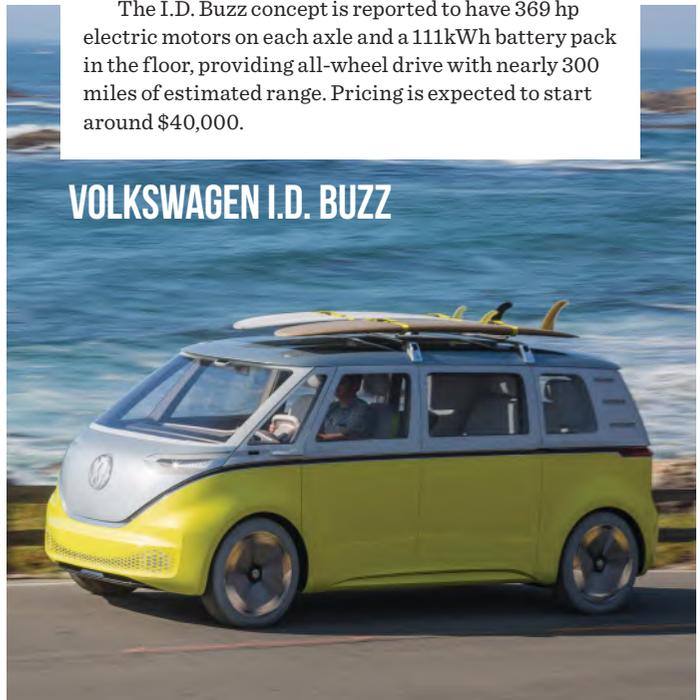
Toyota has resisted change when it comes to its tried and true success story known as the Toyota 4Runner. This current generation of body-on-frame SUV was introduced in 2009 as a solidly built, off-road-capable SUV with unmatched reliability. For 2022, Toyota is offering the 4Runner in eight different models—from the basic SR5 at \$37,305 to the TRD Pro, which lists for \$52,120.

All 4Runners are powered by a 4.0-liter V6 gasoline engine producing 270 hp and 278 lb-ft of torque mated to a 5-speed automatic transmission. Standard equipment includes 4-wheel vented disc brakes, LED headlights, LED taillights, pre-collision warning, lane departure, and even a sliding glass tailgate. EPA estimated mileage ranges from 16 mpg city to 19 mpg highway. Toyota will undoubtedly be offering a redesigned 4Runner in the near future to update its very iconic success story. I hope they listen to buyer feedback and continue building on a great legacy.

The iconic Volkswagen Microbus went into production on March 8, 1950, and became a favorite of the hippy generation and a mainstay of the American counter-culture movement. Welcome to 2022 as Volkswagen introduces the seventh-generation all-electric I.D. Buzz. It's packed with technology, has room for seven adults, and is loads of fun. It will begin production this year for European markets, and a three-row passenger van should arrive in the United States in 2023.

The I.D. Buzz concept is reported to have 369 hp electric motors on each axle and a 111kWh battery pack in the floor, providing all-wheel drive with nearly 300 miles of estimated range. Pricing is expected to start around \$40,000.

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## NISSAN Z

It is official: Nissan has introduced the next generation of its favorite sports car known as the Nissan Z. It was originally launched in 1969 for the 1970 model year as the 240 Z—a modern sports coupe that immediately became very popular with car enthusiasts. The recast 2023 Nissan Z retains the long-hood fastback

we are accustomed to, while promising to be quicker and more fun.

This latest Z is powered by a 400 hp twin-turbo 3.0-liter V6 producing 350 lb-ft of torque. Choices of transmission are a 9-speed automatic or a 6-speed manual gearbox with a high-performance clutch. It will be offered in two models: the base model known as the Sport, and the step-up model known as the Performance.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 55



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# Valuable Veterinarian

Dr. Eric Cagle offers comprehensive care for canines and felines.

By MARENE GUSTIN



**E**ric Cagle always wanted to be a veterinarian. Growing up in Mansfield, Texas, he watched *Bill Nye the Science Guy* and nature shows, and he loved animals.

“We always had dogs and cats, and we even had a pet raccoon once,” the 39-year-old recalls.

After graduating from the Texas A&M College of Veterinary Medicine in 2008, he relocated to Houston and fell in love with the city and its people. When the city was hit hard by Hurricane Harvey in 2017, he watched the community come together and realized he wanted to stay.

"I moved to Houston after graduating veterinary school," Cagle says. "I had an opportunity with a great veterinary hospital as my first job out of school. I've loved Houston ever since!"

After working at several clinics, including eight years as an emergency vet at Gulf Coast Animal Emergency Hospital, Cagle decided to open his own clinic—The Urban Vet—in 2019.

"After years of working in emergency medicine exclusively, I really missed building relationships with my clients and patients," he explains. "In emergency medicine, we often never see our patient again. I was also very excited to create an open, welcoming practice for my clients and staff. I still work some emergency shifts on the weekends, as I really do love practicing emergency medicine. The pandemic has really limited our ability to do house calls, but I'm looking forward to being able to do this more in the future."

At The Urban Vet, Cagle and his staff specialize in feline and canine medicine that includes surgery, diagnostics, pre-

## "THE ABSOLUTE BEST PART OF BEING A VETERINARIAN IS GETTING TO SEE THE AMAZING BOND BETWEEN MY CLIENTS AND THEIR PETS."

—Dr. Eric Cagle

ventive care, and oral health. Their modern Midtown clinic is warm and inviting, and very Houston-centric in the way it embraces the city's diverse population. Clients are greeted by Astros logos and artwork on the walls—and also by Potatoes, the clinic cat. The feline was rescued by Cagle after suffering extensive injuries at a young age, including two broken legs.

"Besides our clinic cat, I have a pit-bull mix and two cats at home," he says. They are all rescues.

It's clear that this doctor loves pets, and his job. "The absolute best part of being a veterinarian is getting to see the amazing bond between my clients and their pets. The toughest part of my job is not having a way to make our pets live forever!"

Cagle is a huge Astros fan who lives within walking distance of Minute Maid Park. When not working (or at an Astros game), he can be spotted trying out new food joints. He loves the food scene in Houston and was a big fan of the now-shuttered Pass & Provisions. His new favorite spot is the ever-popular Barnaby's Cafe, which he currently thinks he might have an addiction to.

This single gay man is also an avid fan of Johnny Cash, Dolly Parton, and Buddy Holly.

"I love live music, traveling and visiting big cities, and going to as many Astros games as humanly possible," he admits. He's also a three-time Ironman finisher.

But mostly he's just an animal lover at heart who loves his job helping to keep Houston's fur babies in good health.

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PHOTOGRAPHY BY ALEX ROSA FOR OUTSMART

Frank Atchley with his Plott Hound, Echo, and black Lab mix, Hex.

## Saving Houston's Strays

Frank Atchley finds loving homes for rescue dogs.

By MARENE GUSTIN

**B**orne of tragedy, Juno's Hope Dog Rescue and Adoption is now a labor of love.

In 2019, Frank Atchley, a 27-year-old transgender man, rescued a six-month-old Jack Russell terrier mix from Tennessee. Back home in Houston, Atchley and little Juno were soul mates for several months until a speeding truck took Juno's life on a tragic Mother's Day in 2020.

But after a period of grieving, Atchley decided he still had more love to share with dogs. A lot of dogs. "I ended up with two more rescue dogs," he says. "And then more started showing up. I figured four was enough for me, but I couldn't just ignore the others that needed homes."

Houston's Bureau of Animal Regulation and Control (BARC) shelter estimates there are more than one million stray dogs in the city. After Hurricane Harvey in 2017, thousands

of strays were rescued from floodwaters. While that's not an everyday occurrence, strays in Houston are so prevalent that, according to No Kill Houston, 80,000 stray pets are euthanized in Houston pounds and shelters every year because there just isn't enough room for them—or fosters and adopters to save them.

Clearly, Atchley couldn't take them all in, so he started Juno's Hope as a nonprofit to foster as many as possible and find them

permanent, loving homes.

Atchley, who is studying to be a paramedic at Lone Star College, grew up in Virginia and has had rescue pups since he was five years old. He's also been involved in volunteer rescue groups and dog-walking companies for several years. He currently works as the kitchen manager at BUDDY'S, a popular Montrose gay bar. He's also enlisted his co-workers at the bar to support his foster project.

"They have just been amazing," Atchley says. "We've hosted all of our fundraising events there, including a dog-kissing booth where Johnny and June, two husky mixes, found loving homes. And when the [bar-tenders] hear about people finding strays, they always give them my card."

Now one year old, Juno's Hope pulls dogs from shelters, picks up strays, and occasionally takes dogs that are being given up by their owners. They even check Craigslist for "free dogs" to make sure the animals go to vetted homes and don't wind up as bait dogs.

"It's horrible," Atchley says. "We get about 20 messages a day [on our Facebook and website] from people finding stray dogs.

**"RESCUE DOGS ARE THE BEST BREED. WHEN I WAS GROWING UP, WE ONLY HAD RESCUE DOGS. THEY WILL BE YOUR BEST FRIENDS FOR LIFE."**

—Frank Atchley

We would say yes to all of them, but we just don't have enough fosters."

Right now, Juno's Hope is foster-based and does not have kennel space. But Atchley is hoping to find a permanent space so they can take in more dogs. Foster volunteers and donations are always welcome.

Even with a dedicated board of directors and volunteers, Atchley still finds himself updating the website and doing paperwork at 2:00 a.m. after getting off work at BUDDY'S. But he doesn't mind since he still has free time to spend in the gayborhood with friends, eating

Thai food and listening to live music.

His current furry crew at home consists of four rescued large-breed mixes—Hex, Echo, Queso, and Cooper. They all have unofficial titles at Juno's Hope, such as Chief Cuddle Officer, Chief Snack Officer, Chief Toy Officer and, of course, Chief Nap Officer.

"Yes, they sleep in my bed with me," he says with a laugh. "Queso loves me so much she sleeps on my face, so I can't breathe!" Besides being spoiled, they enjoy a healthy diet of dry and raw food—with the occasional treat, of course. "They're all a bit chunky," he admits, "so I try to limit the treats."

Atchley says he isn't against buying dogs if people shop responsibly. Look for a registered breeder, rather than a backyard operation or pet store. But he would much rather see people adopting rescue dogs.

"It's hard, but it's one of the most rewarding things I've ever done," he says of Juno's Hope. "Rescue dogs are the best breed. When I was growing up, we only had rescue dogs. They will be your best friends for life."

 Follow Juno's Hope at [junoshope.com](http://junoshope.com), or call 832-902-0985.



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## ‘Baking Dogs Happy’

Brantley Highfill and Cris Steward’s CBD treats help pets cope.

By RYAN M. LEACH

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ALEX ROSA FOR OUTSMART

Brantley Highfill (l) and Cris Steward with their Catahoula mutts Olive and Emma



Houston couple Brantley Highfill, 36, and Cris Steward, 40, have been together for eleven years. In that time, they have grown their family to include two Catahoula “super mutts,” Olive and Emma, and started a small business called BakedBones. They specialize in the production of baked dog treats that include cannabidiol, or CBD. And for them, business is a family affair.

“When Olive was a puppy, she had demodectic mange that spread quickly and became very painful for her. She was losing her hair and itching so badly that she was scratching her face until it bled. At that time, our preventative measures were limited mainly to the cone and prescription sedatives while we waited for the medication treating the mange

to resolve the issue. She would basically just sleep and seem almost drunk while she was on those medications,” Steward says.

“We wanted more options to be able to help. CBD has played an important role in our own approach to wellness, so naturally we wanted to share that key to balance with our pet.”

“We think of our dogs as family,” adds Highfill. “Seeing them uncomfortable is a terrible feeling that other pet parents can often relate to. Armed with oven mitts and rolling pins, we’ve been helping dogs cope with everything from anxiety to arthritis, and it has been incredibly rewarding and inspiring.”

CBD has grown in popularity since becoming widely legal. According to the Harvard Medical School, it is the second-most prevalent active ingredient in cannabis (marijuana). It

is derived directly from the hemp plant, a “cousin” of marijuana, and it can also be manufactured in a lab. CBD by itself does not cause the “high” commonly associated with marijuana. It has been touted to help reduce afflictions like anxiety, insomnia, chronic pain, and even addiction cravings.

According to the men, BakedBones combines the effectiveness of CBD with other natural, organic ingredients selected for a dog’s health. Their CBD is sourced from organic full-spectrum, American-grown hemp, and is third-party lab tested.

“It really is fascinating how one plant can do so much. Derived from the hemp plant, CBD is a compound that interacts with your dog’s endocannabinoid system. That is the biological system that helps

regulate major processes like pain, sleep, mood, and inflammation. People use CBD for a lot of different reasons, and the benefits for dogs are just as varied. While anxiety, pain management, and overall wellness are most common, a lot of the dogs we work with use BakedBones to reduce inflammation and increase mobility. Separation anxiety is another big reason, especially as many pandemic puppies are adjusting to their parents no longer working from home,” Highfill says.

These men come from backgrounds that one wouldn't normally associate with their current bakery venture. Highfill is an architect who manages his own practice, and Steward has a background in oil and gas trading. He now focuses full-time on the bakery business.

“Between baking, shipping, and all of the other hats I wear on a regular basis, there's just enough time left at the end of the day to take a walk with the girls before the sun goes down. It's been very exciting to be able to create the opportunity to apply my business degree toward actually starting and running a business,” Steward says.

“I've always thought of architecture

being more about building experiences and less about making buildings. Running BakedBones really isn't that different—just at a smaller scale and with cuter clients!” Highfill laughs.

Running the business has created space for the couple to thrive together. Sometimes this can be challenging, but through those challenges they have taken advantage of the opportunity to also grow as a couple in business and in life.

“Creating the opportunity to work together was one of the reasons we decided to start BakedBones, but it certainly isn't for everyone. We balance each other in a lot of ways and are slowly learning to set boundaries and be more intentional with our work/life balance. It's not always easy,” Highfill notes.

“Differences might not always seem like a blessing, but when starting a small business they're certainly an asset because we have to wear a lot of hats. Sometimes we spend too long debating over a minute detail, but we really stand behind our product and it is important that we are making something we are both proud of,” Steward adds.

They also realize that giving back is a key component of their mission to improve the lives of dogs—including those without a home.

Long before the business was profitable, they committed to donating a portion of every sale to their no-kill rescue partners, and they've been able to help support shelters across Harris County. That mission is a big motivator for the work they do.

BakedBones can be found in a few stores across the country, and at local retailers like Manready Mercantile in the Heights. However, the most popular way to get their product is by subscribing to their “monthly boxes” online. They release a new seasonal flavor each month, and shipping is free.

“Our extra-strength blends are the most popular. Most people come to us looking for solutions to help their dog, and the extra-strength blends always deliver. The monthly Explore Box has been a big hit. People enjoy the convenience of easy dosing and sharing the flavors of the season with their pets,” Highfill says.

Unfortunately, cat lovers will have to wait for BakedBones to expand their market to become feline-inclusive.

“We get requests for cat (and human) recipes a lot. Maybe one day. But for now, we 'bake dogs happy.’”

 For more info, visit [bakedbones.com](http://bakedbones.com).

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# Puppy Pampering

**Danni Betancourt**  
provides luxury  
grooming in River Oaks.

By MARENE GUSTIN



Danni Betancourt with  
her Dalmatian, Polo

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ALEX ROSA FOR OUTSMART



Sometimes it takes an odd turn of events to find your passion in life. Just ask 28-year-old CityPaws Grooming owner Danniella

“Danni” Betancourt.

“I wanted to work with dogs,” Betancourt says. “I’ve owned other businesses and worked many jobs, but this is my passion. I was misdiagnosed with a brain tumor and spent a year on bed rest. I created my business plan during that time and reached out to investors. As soon as it became clear I did not have a brain tumor, as they thought, I set my plan in motion. I enrolled in grooming school and opened CityPaws just a month after graduation. I dedicated every waking moment to my business and its future.”

Born in Mexico and raised in California, Betancourt, who identifies as gay, grew up in a loving home with her mom and dad and two brothers. Her dad is a self-made businessman, and she describes her mom as an exceptional homemaker.

She opened CityPaws in August of 2019 in Rice Village, but had to move to the River Oaks area in February of 2021 after the freeze and power failure caused a leak that collapsed the ceiling at the old location. The cozy new spot offers full pet pampering, including options for either a full grooming, a bath and basic groom, or an express bath (when a dog’s two-legged parent is in a hurry), de-matting, de-shedding, nail cutting and grinding, teeth brushing, and even doggie facials.

An added perk is the glamour shots Betancourt takes of her four-legged clients—before-and-after snaps of pets luxuriating on overstuffed chairs looking like royalty (at least in the “after” shots).

Betancourt says getting the perfect pic is fairly easy to do at home, too. “We say the dogs’ favorite words, like ‘treat’ or ‘outside,’” she says. Having actual treats on hand doesn’t hurt, either.

But it was a bumpy start for CityPaws. Besides the freeze from Winter Storm Uri, there were the long pandemic months.

“It was very hard to survive through COVID times,” Betancourt admits. “We were a new business, and shutting down for almost two months pushed back our

original plans for growth. We survived with loans, advice, love, and support from our clients.

"I would like clients to understand how grooming works. We have every pup's best interest at heart. We analyze their personality and the way they react to the grooming process so we can give their parents the best advice regarding current and future care for their pups. We don't believe in harming a pup to satisfy their parents' expectations. Sometimes, when a pup is extremely matted, it is better to give them a fresh start and shave them down so they can regain confidence and trust the grooming process by scheduling regular visits." CityPaws also sells at-home grooming kits with a recommended brush, comb, de-matting tool, detangling spray, and a step-by-step tutorial for those at-home, in-between grooming sessions to keep your pooch perfect.

**"WE HAVE EVERY PUP'S  
BEST INTEREST AT HEART.  
WE ANALYZE THEIR  
PERSONALITY AND THE  
WAY THEY REACT TO THE  
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SO WE CAN GIVE THEIR  
PARENTS THE BEST  
ADVICE REGARDING  
CURRENT AND FUTURE  
CARE FOR THEIR PUPS."**

—Danni Betancourt

It goes without saying that her own three fur babies are impeccably groomed. "Kobu, Polo, and Nova," she recites. "Kobu is a Golden Retriever, Polo is a Dalmatian, and Nova is a German Shepherd mix.

"We love to explore Houston as a family. The pups love to go to the dog park and on car rides through the city. We enjoy checking out new spots where they're able to roam free."

But best of all, Betancourt loves her job and her new business.

"We believe dogs have personalities, just like people," she concludes. "[Although we hate to see] rescued pups who were previously abused, the best part of my job is working with the dogs. I love being surrounded by them and getting to know each one as an individual."

 For more info, visit [facebook.com/citypawsgrooming](https://www.facebook.com/citypawsgrooming).

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# A Platform for Pet Care

**Cory Stottlemyer**  
promotes BARC's shelter  
and adoption services.

By CONNOR BEHRENS



Cory Stottlemyer believes cats and dogs aren't just pets, they're family. This compassionate Houston native is on a mission to make sure those family members get the care and respect they deserve.

"From their everyday needs to preparing for an emergency, pets deserve your commitment to be cared for throughout their entire lives," he says.

Stottlemyer is the public-information officer (PIO) for the City of Houston's Animal Shelter and Adoption Facility, also known as BARC. The organization's mission is to promote and protect public health and animal care through sheltering, pet placement programs, pet ownership education, and animal law enforcement.

"In addition to providing shelter and veterinary care to all animals brought to the shelter, we work diligently to find homes for these animals," Stottlemyer notes. "We collaborate and coordinate with our Houston pet-rescue groups and through communications networks to cast the widest possible adoption net. BARC is also committed to promoting responsible pet ownership, and helps Houstonians with micro-chipping, routine vaccinations, spaying and neutering in the community through mobile trailers, and other services."

Stottlemyer has always had a passion for helping worthy causes through better public awareness, and he found his work in communications was a great way to help both public



Cory Stottlemyer with Jessie, a dog up for adoption at BARC.

and private groups. "That eventually led to an interest in journalism. After working as a local reporter for a few years, I transitioned into government media relations and then became a public-information officer. Between marketing essential City services and sharing emergency public information, communications is a crucial part of any government operation. Houstonians have a right to know what is happening in

their city, and the services being offered."

It wasn't until four years ago that Stottlemyer found a way to combine his love of animals with his communications background.

"I jumped at the opportunity to work at BARC as their PIO last summer, since I've had pets all my life and have worked closely with rescue groups in the past," he says.

“While in the Office of Emergency Management in 2018, I was able to partner with the BARC team to develop creative content promoting pet preparedness.”

Currently, his job is to raise public awareness about BARC’s services through creative campaigns and programs. People may not realize that BARC can also help pet owners with the initial adoption process. They even offer vaccinations at their low-cost wellness center.

Having two dogs and a cat with his husband, Stottlemeyer can attest to how much work goes into caring for an animal. “Pets are not a passive part of your life. They require foresight and planning. Once you know how to take care of a pet, however, you will find that they add a ton of excitement and unconditional love to your life.”

Because of the economic hardships caused by the pandemic, many people forgot about the ongoing needs of animals and the importance of adoption. Thankfully, BARC has been able to keep pets in the public eye over the last two years.

“It has been inspiring to see how much our network of rescues, volunteers, and

**“IT HAS BEEN INSPIRING TO SEE HOW MUCH OUR NETWORK OF RESCUES, VOLUNTEERS, AND FOSTERS HAS BEEN ABLE TO HELP US MAINTAIN OUR LEVEL OF SERVICES DURING THE PANDEMIC.”**

—Cory Stottlemeyer

fosters has been able to help us maintain our level of services to help Houston’s pet population during the pandemic,” Stottlemeyer says. “Especially during puppy and kitten season, we had fosters show up who were willing to take on the demands of fostering abandoned infant kittens and puppies—often involving bottle

feedings every two hours. We’re also grateful to Mayor Sylvester Turner, who provided BARC with federal CARES funding to host pet pantries and supply giveaways to Houstonians impacted by the pandemic.”

Going forward, Stottlemeyer will continue to work with BARC to improve the lives of pets throughout the city, as well as educating the public on new pet laws.

“BARC was thrilled in January when the City Council unanimously approved updates to Chapter 6 of the City’s Code of Ordinances, relating to animal welfare,” he says. “One of the changes was introducing mandatory microchipping for all owned pets inside City limits—which replaces the existing license tags for owned pets. Microchipping animals makes it easier to return lost pets to their owners. Animal enforcement officers can reunite lost pets with their owners in the field, bypassing the need to bring them to the shelter for intake and care. The ordinance changes are currently in effect, so BARC is committed to a campaign throughout 2022 to education the public on the new requirement.”

➔ For more info, visit [houstonbarc.com](http://houstonbarc.com)

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# Eat, Drink, Listen

93 Til brings Tokyo's record-bar culture to Montrose.

By MARENE GUSTIN  
Photos by ANNIE MULLIGAN



The chorus of “93 ‘til Infinity,” the breakout hit from that debut album released in 1993 by the West Coast hip hop artists Souls of Mischief, inspired

the creation of the 93 Til record bar and lounge in Houston. Founded by California chefs Gary Ly and Lung Ly (no relation), the restaurant and bar occupies the former Montrose home of Night Heron.

“My family and I moved from California to Conroe in 1993,” says Lung. “So the song has a special meaning to me, and it just seemed to fit the vibe I wanted here.”

Opened in late 2020, Lung had a rough time dealing with the pandemic and waiting for the liquor license. He says they just gave away free alcohol, beer, and wine. “But that wasn’t sustainable!” he laughs.

93 Til is the epitome of Tokyo’s record-bar culture, with its Mid Century design and furniture from Austin’s BRWN Collective. The Audio-Technica turntable spits out hip hop, jazz, rap, and funk tunes, among other styles. (The playlist is printed on the menu.) The bar sends out carefully curated craft cocktails and spirits, and the kitchen (now helmed by Lung and chef Jeff Potts, who took over from Gary) creates instant classics such as foie gras, PB&J, and a classic chicken sandwich that may be one of the best fowl sammies in town. It’s topped with



93 Til chef Jeff Potts (l) and owner Lung Ly

slow, house pickles, and honey mustard on a brioche bun.

“I think the main reason to come is the music and the neighborhood vibe,” Lung says. “But we also have really good food and drinks.”

The dinner and weekend brunch menus are mostly locally sourced, and items change throughout the seasons. But right now, Ly is really liking the beef carpaccio, an Italian-style roast beef rub, horseradish crème fraîche with marinated beech mushrooms and chive oil, and a parmesan crisp.

“We also have a redfish dish from Turtle Creek Aquaculture,” he says. Turtle Creek runs a sustainable fishery in Palacios, Texas, near Matagorda Bay. “It’s so fresh, I think they grab it right out of the pond and bring it to us.”

With a small kitchen space, Lung now leaves most of the cooking to chef Potts and spends most of his time on the management side. 93 Til’s other team member is bar manager Tim Vaughn, who makes a mean version of an Old Fashioned in a smoked glass. “He likes to be creative, and I love watching him play around with drinks,” Lung says.

Tuesdays through Fridays from 4:00 to 6:00 p.m., you can enjoy Happy Hours with bar-special bites like flavored popcorns, wings, and deviled eggs, all under \$10. Cocktail specials are \$8, and beers are \$4. Brunch, which is served Saturdays and Sundays from 11:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m., features a spicy chicken pozolé, a huge hangover burrito, churro French toast and, of course, the traditional biscuit and gravy with eggs your way.

But food and drink aside, 93 Til is a great place to just, as the song says, chill. “Honestly, I just think 93 Til is a cool place to hang out,” says Lung. “When we started off it was a lot of the young dating crowd, but now it’s all walks of people, and we have real neighborhood regulars.”



For more information, visit [93-til.com](http://93-til.com).

# Powerhouse Performer

Todrick Hall brings his new tour to House of Blues this month.

By GREGG SHAPIRO  
Photo by POL KURUCZ



Is there anything Todrick Hall can't do? The gay Texas native sings and dances. He writes songs. He acts on Broadway, in movies, and on TV. He's also an outspoken

activist. On Hall's blockbuster new album *Femuline*, he is joined by all-star collaborators including Chaka Khan, Brandy, Tyra Banks, and Ts Madison, and the queer energy and spirit is through the roof. In fact, Hall tears off the roof and turns it into a fabulous costume. Hall was kind enough to take a few minutes to talk with OUTSMART about his new album as well as his upcoming concert tour, which stops at Houston's House of Blues on March 27.

**Gregg Shapiro: Todrick, in "The Foreplay," *Femuline's* album opener, you describe it as a "Gay National Anthem" (which I think actually applies to the entire album) and an "open love letter to the LGBTQ community." As an LGBTQ ambassador, what do you think of the rapid strides the community has made in recent years?**

Todrick Hall: It makes me feel optimistic about where the world is going. I feel like we're nowhere near where we need to be. As a queer person today, I don't think I can list a single song where a man is singing to another man using a pronoun that would typically be used to describe a man. We have all the technology in the world, and we can fly people to outer space and do insane things with science and technology, but the fact that we have not yet advanced to the place where men can sing to other men on the radio without it being kind of sugar-coated and not addressed head-on is a sad thing. I'm grateful for the strides that we've made, but we're nowhere near where we need to be in normalizing being a part of the LGBTQ+ community. That is my goal with every project that I do: to introduce my music and my message not just to people who are from my community, but to the allies and people who are heterosexual fans and followers that happened to tumble across my videos on YouTube.

**The divas came out to play with you on *Femuline*, beginning with the goddess Chaka Khan who can be heard on the song**

**"Fabulosity." Please tell the readers how your collaboration with Chaka came to be.** Chaka Khan and I did *The Color Purple* on Broadway in 2007 or 2008. She didn't actually remember that I was in the ensemble because she was only in it briefly. But I've always had such a huge love for her, and was able to watch her from the wings [during those Broadway shows] and hear her in a way that most people wouldn't be able to. When you hear someone sing eight shows a week on a Broadway stage, you [gain] a huge amount of respect for their instrument and their gift. When she walked into the room to sing "Fabulosity," she needed no warmups. She just said, "Press record and let's go." [Laughs] It was incredible to watch. It was like one of those moments in my life where I was like, "This is iconic!" To be able to soak up her energy and listen to her stories about working with [so many iconic] people. To talk to someone who knew Prince or Luther Vandross, or was friends with Whitney Houston, was a remarkable thing that a lot of people don't get to experience. That was eye-opening and life-changing for me—one of those bucket-list things, and a milestone in my career that I'll never forget.

**Talk about fabulosity! Brandy is another grand diva with whom you teamed up on the song "Click Clack." What was it like working with her?**

Brandy and I have been friends for a while. It's really cool to work with Chaka Khan, but to be in the presence of Brandy is otherworldly to me. She was the first Black princess that I saw [in the 1997 television movie *Cinderella*], and it was one of the first times I realized how beautiful a Black woman could be. I had seen many beautiful Black women around me growing up, but to watch everyone become obsessed with how gorgeous she was in that movie—I didn't realize how impactful that would be for me! Not just at that moment, being a kid in fifth or sixth grade, but throughout my entire life. To get to work with her is game-changing. That movie is what planted the seed in me that made me want to be a Broadway performer and pursue dancing and singing. In a lot of ways, Brandy has been an icon to me my whole life. She's now a mentor to me, and in some weird way she is my fairy godmother—the way Whit-

ney Houston was *her* fairy godmother in that movie, and in real life. In so many chapters in my life, I've gone through things that celebrities or public figures go through. And you can't really get advice from your close personal friends, because [they can't] imagine the heartaches and back-stabbings that I've gone through [professionally]. If you look through Brandy's career, she has gone through such tragic things so many times, and she's come through victorious and still her voice shines. She's been able to give me some lifelong advice that has helped me. She's not just somebody that I collaborate with, she's somebody I consider to be a very good, close friend.

**That's beautiful! None other than Tyra Banks joins you on the song "Fashion." Please say something about the role that fashion and style plays in your life.**

It's everything to me. When I grew up, I used to try to fit into the status quo and wear the things that young Black boys were supposed to wear in Texas at that time. It took me a while. I've made some questionable fashion choices. My mom called me at one point and asked, "Why do you have to wear waffles and ice cream on your head?" I think it was a form of expression for me to scream out and stick out from the crowd. Wearing T-shirts and jeans wasn't something that ever spoke to me—no offense to all the people who follow the Simon Cowell look. I always wanted to wear things that were one-of-a-kind and you wouldn't even know where to get it. I love when I see Beyoncé wearing something and I'm like, "Where would they even make that?" Or Lady Gaga wearing clothes that look like they're art pieces. Or boundary-pushing drag queens like Aquaria—from the way she does her makeup and her hair to the jewelry and clothes that she wears. It's been incredible to be inspired by so many different things. Being a part of the drag community, the fashion even extends further than it does for the real fashion world. You can do anything, and no amount of campiness goes too far. Fashion plays a huge part in how I build my brand. I love when I can take something like a Solo cup and make a dress out of it—And make it such an iconic part of that era of music that my fans go home and do DIY projects, trying to figure out how they can construct a similar



**"I WANT IT TO BE A CELEBRATION. IT'S GOING TO BE FUN, NO MATTER WHAT. IT ALWAYS FEELS LIKE A HUGE CELEBRATION OF PRIDE AT MY CONCERTS. THAT'S WHAT THIS TOUR IS ABOUT. I'M GOING TO MAKE SURE THAT THE FANS KNOW THAT AND SEE THAT WHEN THEY WATCH THE SHOW."**

—Todrick Hall

dress [laughs] out of Solo cups. It's just so much fun, and it allows me to express myself in ways I've never been able to before. I love that it's constantly evolving. I just *live* for fashion! I was so grateful that Tyra Banks found the time to squeeze me into what I'm sure was her crazy schedule.

**The versatility inherent in the album's title comes through loud and clear on the song "Both." How important do you think it is to be versatile and flexible, both in life and in love?**

I think that it was something that was so scary for me. Even if you're a proud member of the LGBTQ+ community, there are so many rules within that community that [lead to people being] shunned and judged and put into boxes. Oftentimes, somebody who blurs with the feminine side, at least publicly, gets shunned and becomes less desirable to other gay men. That was a part of being in the community that I was super-insecure about. In my relationships, I never wanted the guys that I was dating to see me having heels or wigs around. I know a couple of guys who told me that when people come over for dates they hide their heels. It was such a sad part of our community. I think writing an anthem that made people feel comfortable and confident about that aspect of being gay was something that was really important. I wrote that song, and it is actually my favorite song. I think it's such a powerful song. As far as I know, there are no other songs that tackle that topic. I'm grateful that people have gravitated toward that song in the way they have.

**The song "Dick This Big" features Ts Madison, and the aptly named "Berserk" uses the terms of endearment "sis" and "bitch," which were also utilized to great effect in a scene in the movie Zola, in which Ts Madison appears. Have you seen the movie, and what did you think of her performance?**

I have not seen that movie, but I have experienced Ts Madison on so many levels, so I can only imagine how incredible she would be in that movie. She is a superstar and has been doing so many things to break down barriers and boundaries—things that, at the time, could have seemed like a grotesque statement. But now look at the things that she's done. She's always been trailblazing and standing up for people who are in that category that people didn't understand. She's somebody who's been unapologetically herself for so long. She's given so many people the confidence to walk in her footsteps. I just think she's incredible. She's such a badass. That term gets thrown and stamped onto people who I don't feel possess that badass energy. But Ts Madison is the definition of what it means to be badass after living her truth, even if everybody doesn't understand

CONTINUED ON PAGE 78 →



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# Women Who Rock

MFAH screens a new documentary about a historic queer-led, all-female rock band.

By DON MAINES



The four gutsy women—including two lesbians—in a 1970s all-girl band are called “the first ladies of rock & roll” in the new documentary *Fanny: The Right to Rock*, which screens March 18 and 19 at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.

“Fanny was the first all-woman rock band that could really play and really get some kind of recognition in the music community,” says Bonnie Raitt, a Rock & Roll Hall of Famer who is one of many music legends who sing Fanny’s praises in the film.

In a December 1999 issue of *Rolling Stone* magazine, the late David Bowie wrote, “One of the most important female bands in American rock has been buried without a trace. And that is Fanny. Revivify Fanny. And I will feel that my work is done.”

“They had balls,” adds Gail Ann Dorsey, a bassist who played in Bowie’s band.

Director and co-producer Bobbi Jo Hart heeded Bowie’s call several years ago, about the same time that Fanny’s out lead guitarist, June Millington, was being honored for founding the Institute for the Musical Arts, a groundbreaking underground music camp and recording studio for girls and women in the woods near Goshen, Massachusetts.

Millington told OUTSMART that Hart’s camera crew also “happened upon” Millington’s reunion with fellow Filipina American bandmates (her bass-playing sister, Jean, and Fanny’s original drummer, Brie Darling) to record a new album for the group’s 50-year anniversary.

Out drummer Alice de Buhr, who joined Fanny after Brie got pregnant, also spoke to OUTSMART. She reveals in the documentary that becoming the first all-girl band to release a major-label album (Warner/Reprise, 1970) thrust the group into the headwinds of sexism and homophobia.

“Being gay was still a disease back then,” she recalls, “so you could not be [out as a lesbian] in the band. We had to have

boyfriends or significant others. The record company did not know what to do with us.”

Alice was the first to leave the band, followed by June. Fanny continued by using replacement members dressed in skimpy costumes. However, by the time Fanny released its biggest hit, “Butter Boy,” the group had disbanded.

“I think Fanny was 10 years too early,” says Alice, who manages the website [fannyrocks.com](http://fannyrocks.com), which is dedicated to preserving Fanny’s history.

Nevertheless, it was a wild ride for a group that almost became the female Beatles. Other high-fives in the film come from Kate Pierson of the B-52s, Cherie Currie of The Runaways, and Kathy Valentine of The Go-Go’s. Among the men who confess their love for Fanny are Todd Rundgren, Charles Neville of The Neville Brothers, John Sebastian of The Lovin’ Spoonful, and Def Leppard’s Joe Elliott.

Hart’s film reveals the band’s origin story

as a backyard band of teenagers in 1960s Sacramento. In its heyday, the group rented Fanny Hill, a Hollywood Hills home that hosted jam sessions with the likes of Joe Cocker, Little Feat, and Bob Dylan’s The Band.

Alice told OUTSMART that her road to rocking and rolling began as a second-grader in a school band in Iowa. In her junior year of high school, she graduated to a small drum kit. Then at 17, she fled for California.

June and her sister started by playing ukuleles, and June progressed to an acoustic guitar. When her sister’s boyfriend let her “jump on” his electric guitar, “It was empowering and liberating.”

**What:** *Fanny: The Right to Rock* screening at MFAH

**When:** March 18 and 19 at 7:00 p.m.

**Where:** Brown Auditorium, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, 1001 Bissonnet

**Tickets:** [mfah.org](http://mfah.org)



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# OUT THERE

Photos by DALTON DEHART & CREW



## GILEAD'S CHECK PRESENTATION TO AIDS FOUNDATION HOUSTON February 7, 2022

Gilead Sciences, a leader in the development of HIV antiretroviral therapies, presented AIDS Foundation Houston (AHF) with a \$500,000 grant at BeDesign in honor of National Black HIV/AIDS Awareness Day. AHF will use the funds to continue providing HIV/AIDS prevention, education, and services to the Greater Houston area.



## VICTORY IN HOUSTON KICKOFF February 10, 2022

The LGBTQ Victory Fund, which works to elect queer politicians, kicked off its 2022 season in Houston with a reception at the home of Richard Holt and Mark McMasters. The event featured out Representative and Austin mayoral candidate Celia Israel, who is the recipient of this year's Annise Parker Leadership award.

# WEDDING GUIDE



## ‘JUST THE TWO OF US’

Aurora Harris and Shala Russell celebrated their love with an intimate elopement.

By JENNY BLOCK

Photos by NADINE BERNS | JUST LIKE HONEY

Aurora Harris (l) and Shala Russell



Aurora Harris and Shala Russell are one of those couples whose love seems to radiate a light that warms everyone around them.

That light was present from the day they met, and it shined through on their wedding day, which was a big to-do for a party of two.

Charleston, South Carolina, native Aurora, 33, is a regional director for Young Invincibles, a nonprofit organization mobilizing young people to create solutions for higher education, health care, jobs, and civic engagement. She received her bachelor’s degree in English from the College of Charleston.

Shala, a 33-year-old Houston native, works in cloud-based network security and received her bachelor’s in psychology from the University of Houston-Downtown. The couple now lives in downtown Houston.

They met on OkCupid in 2014. “I took her out to lunch and began having her volunteer at the Lesbian Health Initiative, an organization

I worked for at the time. She would hang out with me at events across the city and help me do community outreach to promote queer-friendly health fairs. I fell in love with her free spirit and creativity,” Aurora says. “Shala felt like home right after our first date. She is a free spirit and inspires me to live freely. We have been inseparable ever since.”

The feeling was beyond mutual. “When I first met Aurora, she just had this inner light in her that made me want to get to know her more,” Shala says. “Her smile and her eyes just twinkle—unlike anyone I’ve known before. And her laugh! Aurora is hilarious. Her name fits her so well. She really spreads light, and to know her is to love her.”

As queer feminists who didn’t come from families “with the healthiest romantic relationships,” neither Aurora nor Shala thought marriage would ever be a possibility for them. “A year into dating, queer-rights activists won the fight for marriage equality. Suddenly, [the

dream of] marrying the love of my life became a reality,” Aurora remembers. “The day we heard about *Obergefell v. Hodges*, I remember waving a huge Pride flag around during a celebration in Discovery Green with her, and dancing the night away at Pearl Bar. It opened up possibilities and pushed us to unpack our feelings around marriage as an institution, and what it means to us.”

This happy couple discovered that being queer and navigating who should propose to whom can be tricky. “We were always like, ‘We’re both pretty feminine, we both don’t like surprises, and we don’t like gendering things. We would say, ‘I love you. I want to be together for the rest of our lives,’” Aurora says. Shala would often casually ask Aurora to marry her, but Aurora thought she was joking.

In 2019, they decided to “intentionally ask each other and do the thing,” Aurora says. “We chose a special day and proposed



to each other. We did one of our favorite dates—a picnic on the lawn of the Menil. We got our favorite snacks, a bottle of wine, and asked for each other's hand in marriage."

The couple then eloped on December 17, 2021, at the Oak Atelier. "Fall is Shala's favorite season because she's a native Houstonian. It's when she loves the weather the most," Aurora says. "One of Shala's good friends, Lakeia Ferreira-Spady, another Black queer woman, officiated the ceremony. I really wanted a special day for just the two of us, and to eliminate the stress of planning a large event—although elopements are still, surprisingly, a bit stressful."

When it came to choosing their wedding customs and traditions, the couple says they tried to leave out as much "patriarchy" as possible.

"We definitely left in 'jumping the broom,' for which a friend of ours decorated a broom. As Black queer women, not only was there a time we couldn't get legally married due to our queerness, but also due to our Blackness. During slavery in the United States, enslaved people would jump over a broom to marry, since they could not be legally wed," Aurora explains.

But they still wanted some elements of a traditional ceremony. "Dress for me, suit for her. I wanted everything but the people, the arch, and the bouquet." They got their wish, but the event made both brides realize something about elopements. "This is a lot. I was a traditional bride in a lot of ways. The wedding day was so hectic. Elopements aren't as simple as they look in photos. It's

still an event, and requires intention and more planning than you think," Aurora says.

For their wedding vows, they danced and sang Al Green's "Let's Stay Together" to one another. All of their vendors were women of color, queer, or queer allies. "Our florist, Karren Terrazas, is an out and proud bisexual who volunteers with trans-rights groups when she's not making beautiful arrangements," Aurora says.

Their wedding cake was strawberry-almond flavored. "A big one!" Aurora says. "For, like, 16 people. We had cake for days—for breakfast, for lunch. It was really good."

And the readings for the ceremony were all from Black writers, including bell hooks and Nikki Giovanni. "We really added our own flair to it. I want people to see that you can make it however you want," Shayla says. "You don't have to follow a script," Aurora adds.

Early on, the couple had considered simply going to the courthouse to get married. But, Aurora says, "I'm so glad we made the decision to elope. The pandemic taught us so much, including the importance of celebrating these things. People got so much joy from seeing our photos and seeing us celebrate our love out loud. I'm really against courthouse weddings now. People should really celebrate."

This, she says, is especially true for queer couples and women of color. "Visibility is like chocolate. You can never have enough."

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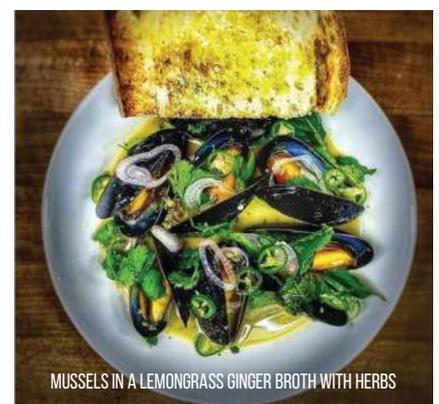
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it. I just love that! I'm so grateful that she was willing to join me and the cast of characters on this album. [Laughs] To have a trans woman of color on the album is revolutionary. For her to sing on that song, specifically, is boundary-pushing. I sent her a few songs that she could have done, and that was the one she chose. I hope this is the first of many times [I can work with her], because I love her energy.

**That definitely comes through! "Rainin' Fellas," your homage to "It's Raining Men," made me wonder if you ever had the chance to meet Martha Wash, one of the original Weather Girls.**

I have not been able to meet Martha Wash, but I think that she's incredible.

**By extension, because of Martha's association with Sylvester, how much of an influence would you say that Sylvester has had on you?**

There have been so many projects that have come up where people have compared me to Sylvester. A couple of years ago, I went down this rabbit hole and I started watching interviews with Sylvester's parents and his closest friends. I saw how groundbreaking he was. The fact that he used his head voice, which a lot of people don't have or shy away from. There

are few singers that have become known for singing in their head voice, similar to the way that Prince sang. It crossed the boundaries of masculinity and femininity, which I think is what this entire movement is about. And the clothes that Sylvester wore! I think he was so fabulous! I wish that I could go back in time and meet him. I hope that someday I'm able to work on a project or something that is a tribute to him. I think that even though I didn't directly watch his work as a child, I definitely knew "You Make Me Feel (Mighty Real)." I think he was one of the most trailblazing people. I don't know any other LGBTQ+ people who have been able to break into mainstream radio. I think Sylvester is the only person that I know that has been able to successfully do that because of his talent and his gift. I'm a huge fan of Sylvester. I wish that more people knew about how legendary he was, and how difficult it was for him to do what he did at the time.

**Yes! We're speaking shortly before you're going to begin this big concert tour.**

I am doing something that I've never done before. I'm proud of the inclusivity that I have on my tour. I looked back on it this year and realized that I didn't have enough trans representation. I think that I could do bigger and better and more, because I'm learning and growing

with every single project that I do. I really wanted to encompass the whole *Femuline* era. I want you to watch the show and not be able to tell if someone is male or female—or to even care, because it's an irrelevant point. I want you to see incredible, talented people bringing this show and this music to life. I want it to be full of fashion and epic costumes. I want it to be a celebration. It's going to be fun, no matter what. It always feels like a huge celebration of Pride at my concerts. But this time, more than ever, I want people to feel like they can come out of their house, dressed however they want, wearing whatever they want, and know that this is going to be the one night out of the entire year that they won't be judged by anybody. In fact, they're going to be celebrated for the fact that they're so different. That's what this tour is about. I'm going to make sure that the fans know that and see that when they watch the show.

**What:** Todrick Hall Live  
**When:** March 27, 7 p.m.  
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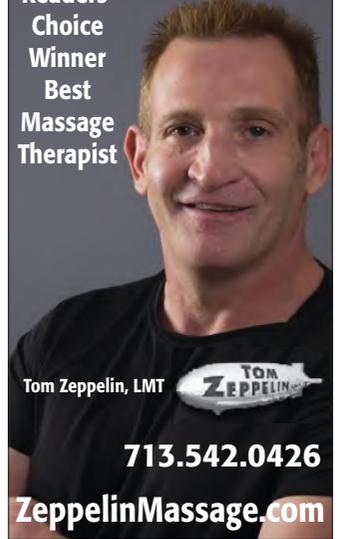


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By LILLY RODDY

# Time to Take Action

Pisces season brings us into a creative and intuitive period.



Pisces, inspired by fashion designer Alexander McQueen

SEBASTIAN GOMEZ DE LA TORRE



For the next couple of months, we are in an active time to put our new plans and projects into play! The first couple of weeks of March flow along the easiest, while in the latter half of the month there is more resistance. Our New Moon is on March 2 in Pisces—a creative and intuitive time when we seek more inner peace. The Full Moon on the 18th in Virgo helps promote better health and improve the flow of things at work. The sun begins the month in Pisces and eventually enters Aries on the 20th. This is the Spring Equinox at 10:33 a.m. Mercury is extra-busy traveling from Aquarius to Pisces on the 9th, and into Aries on the 27th. Venus and Mars move from Capricorn to Aquarius on the 6th.

Good days this month are March 5, 6, 17, 18, 21, and 26. Days to stay in bed are March 2, 3, 13, 19, 22, 23, and 28.

## ARIES (Mar. 21–Apr. 19)

As the month opens, you are in a time of rest and retreat. You are more sensitive to your environment, and other people's quirks can rub you the wrong way. Friends can be supportive listeners, especially in the first half of the month. Career activities continue to be strong, but work can be very demanding this month. This may inspire you to look elsewhere or start something on your own. By the end of the month, you are feeling more energetic and like your old self. You are clearer and more confident about where you are going.

## TAURUS (Apr. 20–May 20)

There is a lot of career emphasis this month as you look at long-term plans for more education, relationship commitments, and opening your own business. You've been more than ready to make some major changes in your life for the last two years. This month could easily trigger you to take some action. You will be taking life more personally, and it may be harder to keep your temper in check. Friends and business associations can be very helpful. In the latter half of the month, it is very important to pay attention to your intuition. You are ready to make decisions. Step forward and take on the leadership role that is being offered. Some of you who are older will consider alternative career paths and possibly semi-retirement. But the need to reinvent yourself stays strong for the Bulls and Cows!

## GEMINI (May 21–June 21)

The first half of the month is a mentally creative time for you. There could be new goals and interests that really keep your brain active this month, so you'll want to use your time efficiently. You have an expanded world view this month. You can see beyond the fray and offer alternatives that satisfy all

involved. By midmonth, your career sector is open to alternative career paths and doing something on your own. You are more visible, and are therefore able to promote yourself or your services to others more easily. In the latter part of the month, getting involved with community or business groups can be very important to creating new markets and financial rewards. Career activity remains strong over the next three years. Your relationships will improve as you get clearer about the direction you are headed in.

## CANCER (June 22–July 22)

You Crabs continue to be busy. Relationships have been very important over the last several months, and we are not through processing them yet! This is a time to renew commitments for some, while others need to confront the issues that impinge on intimacy. This is a good month to clean out all those negative emotions and move forward. Improving your finances continues to be an important issue. You are putting more emphasis on debt and improving your investments over the next 40 days. You may have more money concerns, even if there is nothing visible to make you feel that way. You may be looking at refinancing or investing. Cancers are more creative in the first half of the month. In the latter half, you are ready to put some new goals on your career path. You are exploring new ways to get your products and services to new markets throughout March. Put those plans into action in late March.

## LEO (July 23–Aug. 22)

Relationships continue to dominate your life this month. This has been an ongoing theme since the end of last year. However, action will need to be taken during March. You may not have the time to think through all the possibilities before you make a choice. Your relationships need some TLC! Business

partners may seem crabbiest, but they just need to feel like they're important in your life. If you ignore this, there could be fireworks to get your attention! Your career should be going through a renewal of sorts. You want to feel more connected to what you are doing, whether or not it's part of your career. By the end of the month, you need a break from your routines. This is a good time for a vacation or a weekend at the lake!

## VIRGO (Aug. 23–Sept. 22)

This is a creative month for you that is good for writing, painting, weaving, and even dancing. You are more in touch with your psychic energies this month. Negative people can be especially hard to deal with, even those you meet with regularly. Your relationships need more of your time and attention this month. If you are single and interested in a partnership, this is a great time to put yourself out there. It will be easier to attract people to you for both personal and business reasons. If you have been waiting for a good time to restart your exercise and diet program, this is the month! You've been trying to bring more order and routine back into your life, and you're ready to make that happen this month. Co-workers can be more demanding, and you won't have as much patience as usual. At the end of the month, it's easy to spend money. This can be a good time to make investments—if you take your time to explore options.

## LIBRA (Sept. 23–Oct. 23)

This is a busy month as home and family issues are finally being resolved in early March. You may have power struggles with family members not ready to face the future. If you have children, they are demanding a lot of your attention as they choose future educational options.

They can be very self-focused about doing things their own way. For some, this is a time of turning your hobbies into something more substantial. You are looking to improve your work environment, and it's also a great time to upgrade your internet or your electronic devices. You are also more motivated to live a healthier life with more exercise and fresher food. In the latter part of the month, your relationship sector is very active. This is a good time to renew those bonds or, if you are single, to be out and about! But be sure you make some time for yourself.

### SCORPIO (Oct. 24–Nov. 21)

Home and family take the lead this month. On a mundane level, this can be a time to do some remodeling or possibly to relocate. You are going through a downsizing of things you have been collecting your entire life. On a deeper level, this can indicate changes in the family as you get more of a voice in what goes on there. Don't be afraid to step in and take charge. You have a clear agenda and just want things to be peaceful. The health and diet sector of your chart is very active this month. You may want to do some hot yoga, tai chi, or consider more plant-based products in your diet. You will need more peace and quiet at work, since some co-workers can be really annoying. Don't forget to have some fun—all work and no play makes Jane a dull girl!

### SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22–Dec. 21)

For the last couple of months, you have been working on your finances, investments, and debt. As March begins, you are making choices about what you are going to do with your money. You will have lots of small chores to do

during March as you attempt to put some order back into your life. This month, your home is the best place to retreat to. Family needs and demands can feel overwhelming, even if you manage them well. There may be no "best" solution for those shifts in the family, so choose what works for you so you don't have any resentments about your choices. In the latter part of the month, you are looking to have more fun. If you have children, this is a great time for an adventure. They can help you feel more childlike. You will be making some improvements to your work environment this month.

### CAPRICORN (Dec. 22–Jan. 19)

The last couple of months have been crazy for the Sea Goats. As the month opens, you are finally ready to make some decisions and move forward. Your confidence level should be strong, especially early in the month. Debt and future security is still a hot topic for your horoscope. You will definitely be taking action on this area of your life over the next month and a half. If you are in debt, you will be working to get yourself free. If you have extra resources, you will be exploring places to invest and create a safer future for you and your family. You need some time to yourself this month in order to maintain your sanity. You may be able to find this through some yoga, meditation, or binge-watching your favorite TV show. At the end of the month, family and having a safe nest become more important. This could be a great time for a family adventure or reunion.

### AQUARIUS (Jan. 20–Feb. 18)

It's going to be a busy month for the Water Bearers, with Mars (planet of action, adventure, safety, and confrontation) visiting your sign for the next 40 days or so. You will be feeling

strong, confident, and not very patient. You will have your say this month, and you won't be waiting for anyone to give you permission to speak. You may also have a harder time getting restful sleep. Exercise is always suggested when Mars is around. This can help burn off some of the excess energy you are experiencing. This is a great month to initiate a health program! Relationships may be more edgy as you say whatever comes to mind without much filtering. Be careful about being accident-prone from the 19th through the 26th. This is also a good month to explore your creative skills and turn that into a side hustle. You continue to speak your mind at the end of the month as you attempt to get your daily activities organized more efficiently.

### PISCES (Feb. 19–Mar. 20)

This is a big year for the Mermaids and Mermen! There are all kinds of opportunities for an improved position at work, better relationships, more friends and social activity, and finding your place in the world. Pisces is a very mutable energy, so you tend to adapt to your environment rather than impose your demands on it. This is a great year for school, travel, getting a law degree, international politics, blogging, podcasting, taking an art class, and studying dance or tai chi! Yes, there are all kinds of possibilities this year. You are creating your own "tribe" so that you really fit in! People will be drawn to your magnetism. In relationships, this makes your existing partnership better. If you are single, it's a good time to meet new people for potential alliances. Toward the end of the month, you are ready to spend some money, so you'll want to watch your impulse-buying during that period.



For more astro-insight, log on to [lillyroddyshow.com](http://lillyroddyshow.com).



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By SAM BYRD

# Brave and Beautiful

**Leilani Jackson-Ross** dances through life and into our hearts.



Dancing queen Leilani Jackson-Ross—better known as the Texas Tornado—is definitely a stunt devil. When she steps foot on the stage, she both commands and destroys it with graceful yet technical moves. In her words, she could “drop into splits from the second floor of a building.” Read on for more about this nimble enchantress.

## Pronouns?

She, her, hers.

## Drag Birthday?

January 29, 2015.

## Inner Avatar?

An earth bender—strong, yet stubborn.

## What inspired you to start performing?

Being a natural entertainer who has worked on Broadway, and being a trained dancer. I loved the artful expression and the fearlessness that I saw on stage at Meteor in 2015, and it pushed me to try new experiences. Also, with that being said, performing gave me the outlet to find out who I really was.

## Who are your inspirations?

My inspirations would have to be my grandmothers—from biological to drag! Rose White, Lawanda Jackson, and Tommie Ross inspire me to succeed not just in my career, but in my personal life. They taught me to take care of myself first, and then have fun later! Everything happens and is done at the right time. God makes no mistakes!

## March is Women’s History Month. Any thoughts you’d like to share?

Being transgender, you learn to fight for your rights as a person. I’d like to use this interview to speak with the younger trans community: There is nothing wrong with you being who you are, and asking questions to find the resources you need to be the best *you*. There’s nothing wrong with you. You are perfectly made to be different. I love you, we love you, and the community is here for you!

## Any pageant titles?

At the moment, I’m Miss Texas Continental and also Miss Alamo City USofA. And I’m a former Miss Gulf States Continental, and a Miss Houston Continental.



## What’s on your bucket list?

My bucket list is to go to Switzerland and vacation.

## What has drag taught you that you use in your daily life?

Drag has taught me to be consistent and punctual. Drag is my full-time job, and in order to succeed in life you have to always stay on top of things and make sure you take care of yourself.

## Most embarrassing moment on stage?

My most embarrassing moment was when I kicked myself in the forehead while doing a death drop and knocking myself out while performing “Turn Me Out”!

## Talk about your history in dance.

I’ve been performing since I was 5. I was a natural dancer, and my mother thought that dance could be an outlet for me, especially because she knew I was going to be different. I went to some of the best performing-arts schools when I was younger. I studied at the Joffrey Ballet School in New York. I was also featured in the Broadway musicals *Hairspray* and *The Wiz Live*.

## What’s a “must have” in your purse?

A must-have in my purse is eyelash glue.

## #TeamJanet or #TeamJLo?

#TeamJanet, based on history.

## What inspires you every day?

Just knowing that I can make someone happy by just smiling. I’m known for being sweet, or for cracking a joke here and there.

## Where can fans see you perform?

I perform mostly in the Montrose area, at JR’s on Wednesdays and Sundays. Hamburger Mary’s will be opening soon, so you can catch me there throughout the week and on Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays.

## Any final thoughts?

As an upcoming drag entertainer, I learned from Kofi of Houston to “dare to be different.” I walk with that every day! ▼



Follow Leilani Jackson Ross on Instagram @Leilani.JackRoss, on Facebook at /Showgirl2.0, and on Twitter @TexasTornadoLJR.

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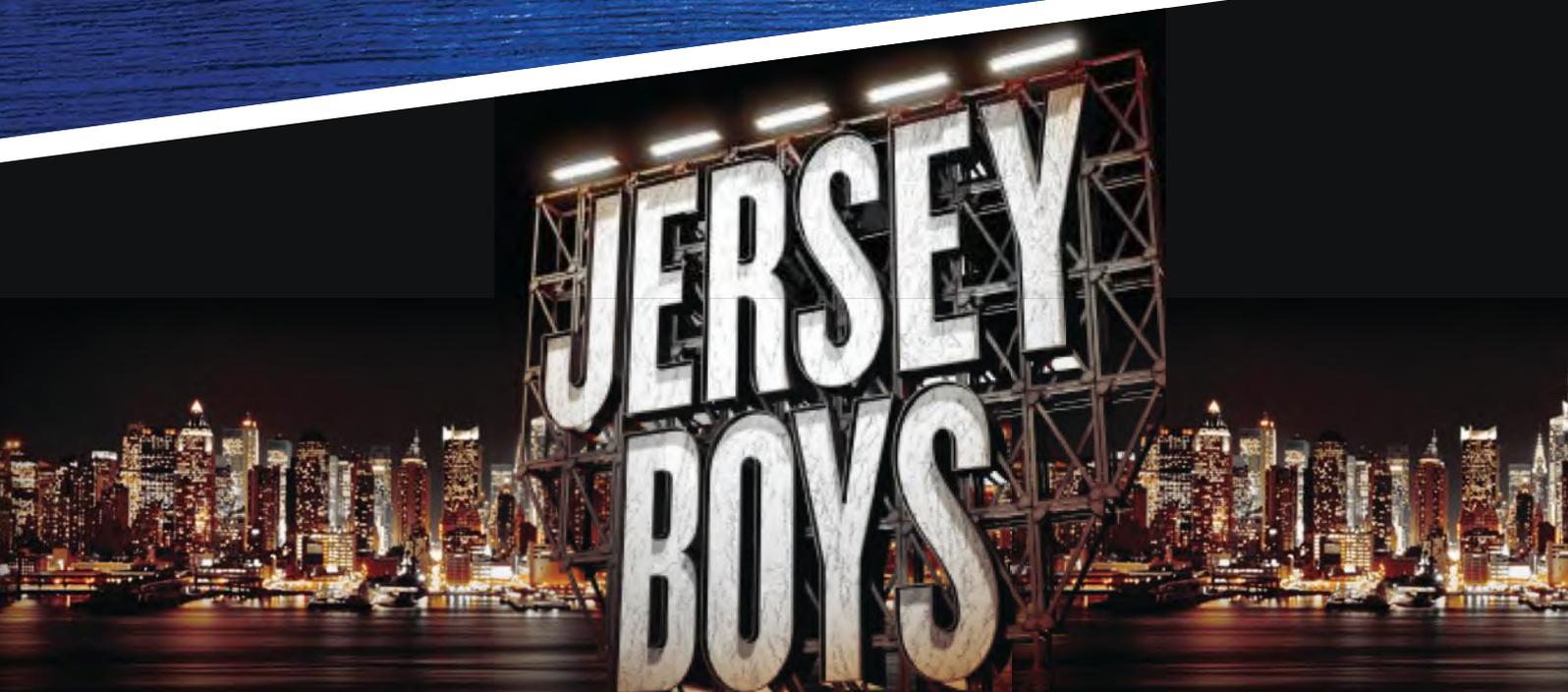


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