

# OutSmart

OCT. '22

HOUSTON'S LGBTQ MAGAZINE

25<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL  
**Gayest & Greatest**  
READERS' CHOICE  
AWARDS

## COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT

LANDON RICHIE wins Most  
Prominent Youth LGBTQ Activist

Pg.56

SEE ALL THE G&G WINNERS INSIDE!

CHRISTINA  
WELLS

Pg.60

KENNEDY  
LOFTIN

Pg.68

ATLANTIS  
NARCISSE

Pg.76

JANUARI  
FOX

Pg.80

AND  
MORE

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**DOUG SMITH**  
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OCTOBER 2022



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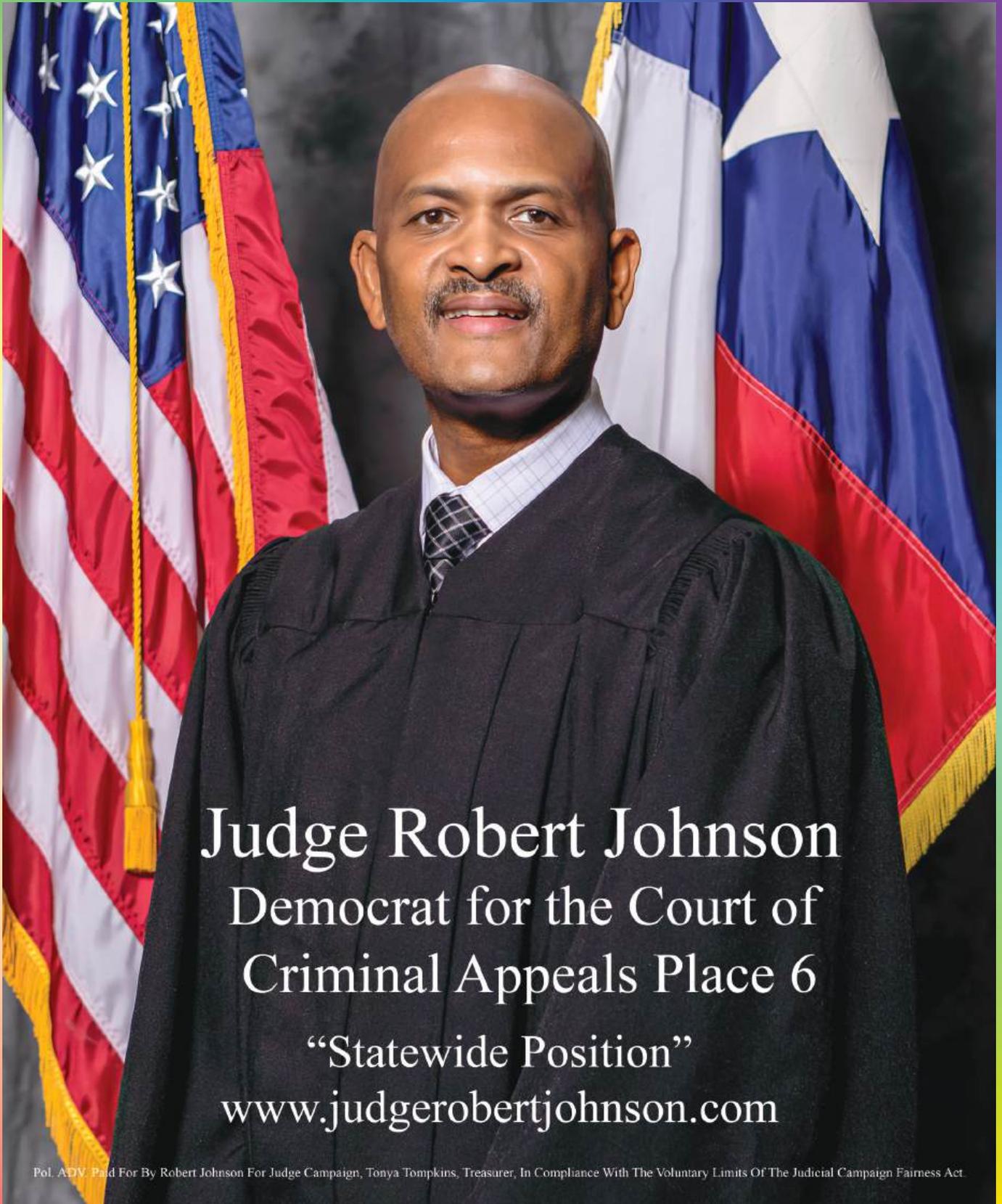
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# OutSmart

Houston's LGBTQ Magazine

OCTOBER 2022

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### COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT

Landon Richie wins Most Prominent Youth LGBTQ Activist.

Pg. 56

Photo by Frank Hernandez for OutSmart

Styling by Orlando Herrera

Shot at the Sabine Street Studios, September 26

“I LOVED MY DENTIST SO MUCH, I MARRIED HIM!”



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In this issue, we announce the winners of OUTSMART'S 25th Annual Gayest & Greatest Readers' Choice Awards. This annual celebration of Houston's best and brightest has become a community tradition, thanks to our loyal family of readers and advertisers.

This silver anniversary is indeed a milestone that points to the strength of Houston's LGBTQ community. We had an energetic contest this year, with more than 131,000 votes cast to decide the winners and finalists in 372 categories. Voters logged in from 47 states, several American Indian territories, and countries as far-flung as New Zealand. Some of our perennial winners continued their winning streaks, while ambitious newcomers toppled a few old favorites.

We profile 17 of this year's G&G winners beginning on page 48. Christina Wells, who ap-

peared as Ursula in TUTS' *The Little Mermaid*, is our new Favorite Local Female Actor. The former nurse is now on tour with *Chicago: The Musical* playing Matron Mama Morton.

Wells also won Favorite Local (Non-Drag) Female Entertainer and Favorite Female Nurse.

Dancer/choreographer Rivkah French takes the top honor as Favorite Local Dancer, while her dance company, Rivkah French Choreography, is a Best Dance Company finalist.

In a more serious category, Best Human-Rights Attorney winner (and Best Immigration Attorney finalist) Luis Ruiz is being recognized for his stressful work guiding clients through our nation's broken immigration system.

Houston's LGBTQ+ Political



Caucus again won the Best Political Advocacy Group honor this year, while teenager (and this month's cover star) Landon Richie is the 2022 Most Prominent Youth LGBTQ Activist. (Frank

Hernandez photographed Richie at the Sabine Street Studios for OUTSMART, and Orlando Herrera was the stylist.)

Please plan to attend the Gayest & Greatest Readers' Choice Awards party on October 26 from 6 to 9 p.m. at South Beach, where you can congratulate many of this year's winners.

This October issue also features two local LGBTQ history stories. The Women's Group has for decades accepted all women while allowing each member to define feminism for herself.

And, don't miss our look back

at the landmark *Lawrence v. Texas* Supreme Court ruling that legalized consensual homosexual conduct (and laid the groundwork for same-sex marriage nationwide). Both of those LGBTQ civil rights are now threatened in light of the *Roe v. Wade* decision that could strike down the fundamental constitutional right to privacy.

We look forward to seeing you at our Gayest & Greatest Awards celebration on October 26 at South Beach!

**Olivia Flores Alvarez**  
Interim  
Managing  
Editor



olivia@outsmartmagazine.com

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# QUEER THINGS to DO

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



**MUSIC**  
**October 26**  
**LIZZO IN CONCERT**

Get ready for some Big Grrrl fun when Lizzo comes home to Houston. Lizzo went to school here and studied classical music at the University of Houston before the untimely death of her father—which prompted her to spend a year living in her car before she moved to Minneapolis, where her career really took off.

The three-time Grammy Award winner has had plenty of hits, including “Truth Hurts,” “Good as Hell,” and “Tempo.” Along with great music, Lizzo is known for her stage show filled with high-energy, life-affirming vibes.

And Lizzo is doing more than just music; she recently won a Primetime Emmy

Award for Outstanding Competition Program for her reality television series *Lizzo’s Watch Out for the Big Grrrls*. (That Emmy statue is keeping her Billboard Music Award, BET Award, and two Soul Train Music Awards company.) The Big Grrrl took home *TIME* Entertainer of the Year honors in 2019—a year that was especially productive with multiple Grammy nominations.

Expect to hear the hit single “About Damn Time” and lots more music from her latest album, *Special*. Lizzo opens the show at the Toyota Center.

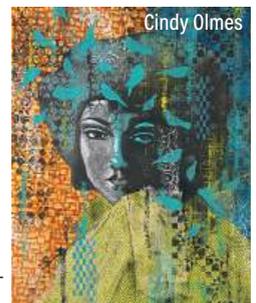
[tinyurl.com/nk6vdp2d](http://tinyurl.com/nk6vdp2d)



**MUSIC**  
**October 7-9**  
**SHE’S GOT SOUL (WITH THE HOUSTON SYMPHONY)**

Singer Capathia Jenkins joins the Houston Symphony for their **She’s Got Soul** concert. Jenkins interprets hits by divas such as Chaka Khan, Adele, and Toni Braxton, all backed by the full orchestra. As if the music isn’t enough, audience members attending the Saturday-night performance enjoy a free post-show party. Mix and mingle with Houston Symphony musicians while you sip some special cocktails and dance to curated DJ tracks. Oh, and you’ll take home some free swag.

[tinyurl.com/4u66s8ru](http://tinyurl.com/4u66s8ru)



**FESTIVAL**  
**October 8-9**  
**BAYOU CITY ART FESTIVAL-DOWNTOWN**

The two-day festival features art, music, food, live music, and entertainment. 250 national and international artists, representing 19 artistic disciplines, will come together in Sam Houston Park (and along Allen Parkway) downtown

[tinyurl.com/2x4j4dsf](http://tinyurl.com/2x4j4dsf)

FASHION

October 10

### THE QUEER KOUTURE FASHION SHOW 2022

Local fashion designers, celebrities, and other couture devotees will gather at The Ballroom at Bayou Place for a runway spectacle sponsored by The LGBT Marriage Club, a nonprofit dedicated to promoting healthy relationships in the LGBTQ community. [tinyurl.com/2c7wrzra](http://tinyurl.com/2c7wrzra)



FILM

October 11

### THE LESBIAN BAR DOCUMENTARY

Houston's Pearl Bar is featured in filmmakers Erica Rose and Elina Street's 20-minute film chronicling the history of lesbian bars. It's screening at Pearl Bar (one of 20 or so remaining lesbian bars in the US) on National Coming Out Day. [tinyurl.com/yv83mtb3](http://tinyurl.com/yv83mtb3)



MUSIC

October 12

### ROSALÍA: MOTOMAMI WORLD TOUR

Spanish singer Rosalía's first major tour celebrates her recently released *Motomami* studio album. The concert will have a TikTok vibe, with backup dancers holding cameras that project the faces of audience members onto large screens. The tour wraps up in Paris on December 18.



MUSIC

October 11

### LIL NAS X: THE LONG LIVE MONTERO TOUR

The first openly LGBTQ Black artist to win a Country Music Association award comes to Houston for a concert featuring music from his latest album, *Montero*, as well as previous hits. [tinyurl.com/y3fbk3fw](http://tinyurl.com/y3fbk3fw)

FUNDRAISER

October 14

### OUT FOR GOOD GALA HONORING LINDA MORALES

The Montrose Center will honor Linda Morales, a longtime advocate for social justice, with their 2022 LGBTQ Community Vision Award gala at The Ballroom at Bayou Place downtown. [tinyurl.com/2tbc64m5](http://tinyurl.com/2tbc64m5)

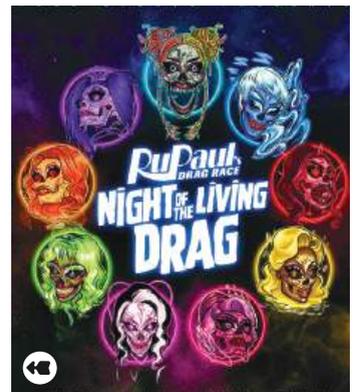


FESTIVAL

October 20

### RUPAUL'S DRAG RACE-NIGHT OF THE LIVING DRAG

Get in the Halloween spirit with Yvie Oddly and scary queens Aquaria/Sloth, Asia O'Hara/Envy, Bosco/Lust, DeJa Skye/Greed, Kim Chi/Gluttony, Lady Camden/Pride, Rosé/Vainty, and Vanessa Vanjie/Wrath. [tinyurl.com/2tm33fhc](http://tinyurl.com/2tm33fhc)

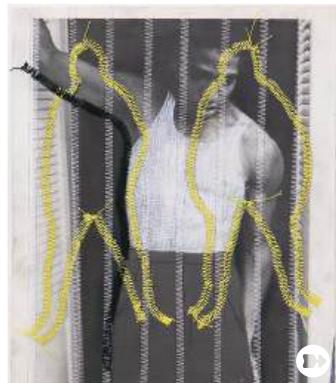


FESTIVAL

October 22

### THE WOODLANDS PRIDE FESTIVAL

LGBTQ Pride comes to The Woodlands with a family-friendly festival. Expect exhibits, food trucks, entertainers, swag, and more—all to celebrate love and family in The Woodlands! [tinyurl.com/53f83wd4](http://tinyurl.com/53f83wd4)



ART

Through January 29

### TROY MONTES-MICHIE ART EXHIBIT

El Paso visual artist Troy Montes-Michie's new exhibit *Rock of Eye* opens at Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, focusing on classic Black male fashion-model images. The exhibit continues through January 29, 2023. [tinyurl.com/3p7h4yyc](http://tinyurl.com/3p7h4yyc)

More QUEER THINGS TO DO →

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**November 3**  
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**JAM**

Work on your comedy chops at the free Queer Improv Jam, a workshop especially for LGBTQ performers, students, and allies. Hosted by Aaron Michaels, this is an open practice, not a show. All levels of experience are welcome, from complete newbies to seasoned veterans. Everyone attending must be willing to perform. At Station Improv & Sketch Comedy Theater.  
[tinyurl.com/f4tmtjy](http://tinyurl.com/f4tmtjy)

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**COMMUNITY**  
**November 5**  
**HOUSTON GAYMERS**  
**EXTRA-LIFE 2022**

Have some fun (and save a few lives while you're at it) at ExtraLife, a 24-hour game-a-thon to raise money for Texas Children's Hospital. This is an all-ages, in-person game-a-thon and sleepover event for LGBTQ gamers. So hit up your Discord servers, stream on your Twitch accounts, and get the party started. [tinyurl.com/4rys8be4](http://tinyurl.com/4rys8be4)



**BURLESQUE**  
**November 11**  
**FEMININE FRIDAY**  
**BURLESQUE SHOW**

The female-owned Social Beer Garden HTX proudly brings you a special show dedicated to "womenpowerment" every Friday night. The free burlesque show features performers Gia Vaughna, Ramona Rose, Fox Monroe, Nikki Knockout, and others.  
 11 p.m.  
[tinyurl.com/5y75cz3x](http://tinyurl.com/5y75cz3x)

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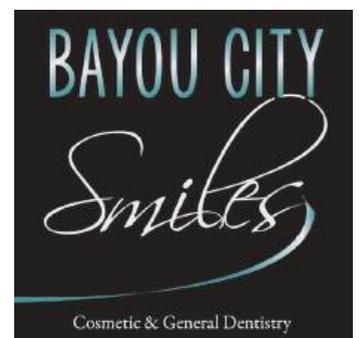
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## SCENE OUT

Photos by  
DALTON DEHART AND CREW



On August 25, 2022, the Greater Houston LGBT Chamber of Commerce held a BIZ Connect Mixer. Pictured are (front row) **Ashley Barnes, Samantha Garrido, Tammi Wallace, Cheryl Ruiz, Jennifer LeBourveau, and Jack Berger**; (back row) **Tiffany Tosh, Adam Madi, Mariah McKinstrey, and Kirk Baxter**.



On August 27, 2022, Pride Sports Houston's dodgeball finals were played at Q&B Sports Complex. Pictured is the winning team, The Houston Assbros.



The Montrose Center held its Kindred Spirits Dance at The Ballroom at Bayou Place on August 27, 2022. Pictured are **Judy Woods and Meleah Jones**.



The NAGAAA Softball World Series was held in Dallas, Aug. 27-Sept. 3, 2022. Pictured are members of The Houston Herrerians, who finished second in the World Series E Division.



The NAGAAA Softball World Series was held in Dallas, Aug. 27-Sept. 3, 2022. Pictured are The Houston Cub-ee's, who finished fourth in the World Series D Division.



On September 10, 2022, the Harris County Democratic Party held its Johnson, Rayburn, Richards Dinner at the Marriott Marquis downtown. Pictured are **Susan Lynn, Sean Wiggs, Olivia Juliana, and Sudy Samandari**.



On Sept. 16, 2022, EPAH presented its "One Home, Many Hearts" VIP party. Pictured are (row 1) **Todd Shell, Lannie Bluethmann, Sandy Stacy, Brent Braveman**, (row 2) **Dr. Charlene Flash, Tim Stokes, Bob Burress**, (row 3) **Tom Seymour, and Glenn Dickson**.



The Diana Foundation hosted a benefit for Pet Patrol and Friends for Life on September 18, 2022. Pictured are **William Green, Jeremy Ronquillo, Mark Brown, Karie Thomas, Linne Girouard, Nery Rubio, Howard Huffstutler, and KM Cooper**.



On September 18, 2022, Puppy of Montrose 2022 presented a Jukebox Jeopardy dance competition at Buddy's Houston. Pictured are Pups members.



On September 19, 2022, a fundraiser for Judge Jerry Simoneaux's re-election campaign was held at Saint Arnold Brewing Company. Pictured are **Crispin Clarke, Margaret Solomon, Judge Jerry Simoneaux, Ryleigh Wolverton, Hannah King, and Samuel Hodges**.



JD Doyle's 75th birthday celebration, with a proclamation from Mayor Sylvester Turner, was held on September 24, 2022. Pictured are **JD Doyle** and friends.



The Queer Kouture Fashion Show kickoff party, hosted by Brutus, was held at JR'S Bar & Grill on September 25, 2022. Pictured are **Jessyka Linton, Tereza Suessman, Rosa Alejandra, Hunny Phillips, Raven Burns, Sara Cline, Angela Adams, Jacoby Harris, and Kay Walker**.



HoustonBallet

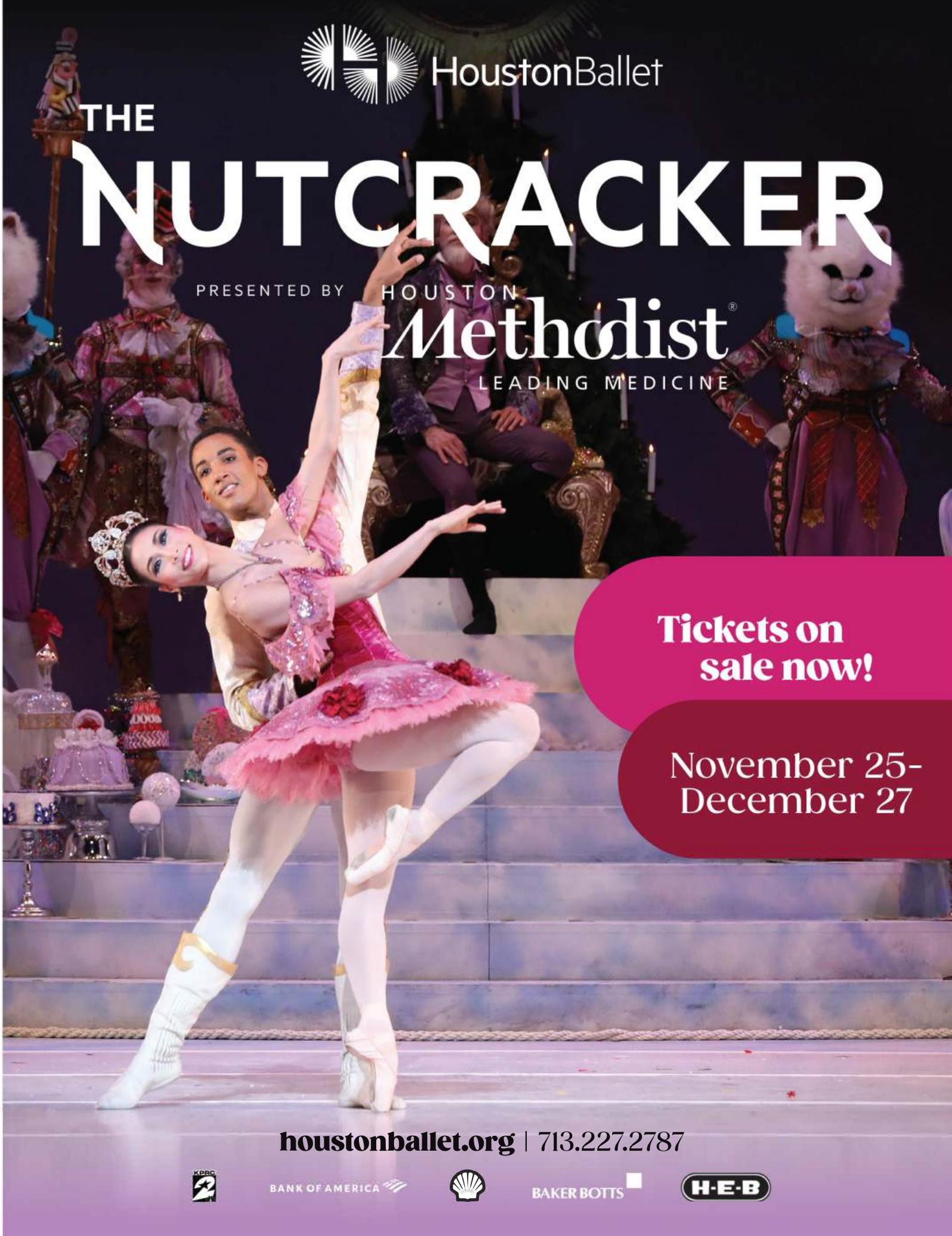
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# Texas, National Races Tighten in Wake of Roe

Analysis shows Texas Democrats facing stiff headwinds.

By RYAN M. LEACH



Even as the 2022 midterm elections are tightening up, Texas Democrats will likely remain bridesmaids in their perennial quest to regain political power in a state

run by Republicans, who continue to tighten restrictions on voting.

But hope springs eternal for the blue party, and one race in particular might signal a turn of the red tide.

The UH Hobby School of Public Affairs and Texas Southern University's Barbara Jordan/Mickey Leland School of Public Affairs have published their Texas Trends election survey for 2022. In it, the most intriguing race—and the best hope for Democrats—is *not* the Beto O'Rourke vs. Greg Abbott race for governor, in which O'Rourke currently trails the incumbent by 7 percentage points. Rather, it is the race for attorney general between the indicted incumbent, Republican Ken Paxton, and his opponent, Rochelle Mercedes Garza, with only a 3-point separation.

"With the possible exception of the race for state attorney general, the blue wave once again appears nonexistent among Texas' top positions. But some races will be close. Paxton's lead over Garza is just half the size of the gap in either the governor's or lieutenant governor's race," said Michael O. Adams, director of Texas Southern University's Executive Master of Public Administration degree program.

"Everyone is talking about the governor's race, but the most competitive race is actually the attorney general race between Paxton and Garza. Although the races for governor and lieutenant governor are competitive, it is going to be very hard for either O'Rourke or Collier to break into the stronghold that Abbott and Patrick have. It's not impossible. If he can make up ground with outreach to young people, women



Beto O'Rourke



Rochelle Garza

AP PHOTO/OTERO

(even Republican women) and to Hispanic voters, it is feasible he could win, but I don't think it's likely," says Renee Cross, 60, executive director at UH's Hobby School.

The overturning of *Roe v. Wade* by the Supreme Court is part of the reason why Republican women may be swing voters this cycle, says Cross. "Even though Texas is certainly still a conservative state, this is not the Texas of 1973. The majority of women have grown up having abortion rights, and when the government takes away a right, it is very different than trying to convince the government to provide a right. I think it is a unique occurrence—thankfully—and that alone has really awakened the need to vote, especially among women in Harris County and other metro areas. We will see if this particular issue can be the real mobilizer in this race."

LGBTQ Texans also have a lot at stake. During the 2021 Texas Legislative Session, trans Texans, in particular, were on the menu for Republicans. That session was one of the most brutal in recent memory, complete with restrictions on trans kids playing sports, an executive order to investigate the parents of trans kids, and threats on doctors providing gender-affirming trans medical care.

"I think that there is going to be more of the same in the next legislative session, even if O'Rourke and Collier win. There will still be a struggle because of the structure of the Legislature. The Senate and House will most certainly remain dominated by Republicans. It will be a challenging session for the LGBTQ community

either way," says Cross.

On the federal level, it appears more likely that Democrats will retain control (and possibly gain a couple of seats) in the Senate, which is positive news considering the Senate's role in appointing federal judges, confirming Cabinet positions, and approving Supreme Court justices. It is less likely that Democrats will retain the House, based on current polling, although things are trending more in Democrats' favor almost daily.

Locally, Harris County continues to trend blue, but Cross warns that we should not expect the intense blue wave of 2018 that ushered in an entire slate of Democratic judges—including political newbie Lina Hidalgo's surprise win by a narrow margin.

"Keep in mind that things were a bit different in 2018, compared to 2022," Cross notes. "Back then, we still had straight-ticket voting. That, coupled with the Beto explosion in 2018 against Ted Cruz, helped a tremendous number of Democratic candidates down the ballot. We don't have straight-ticket voting any more. Even if O'Rourke is able to turn up a lot of excitement, our ballots are long. That being said, Harris County is blue, and if the turnout is high it will remain blue."

*Election day is November 8, and early voting runs October 24 through November 4.*

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# LGBTQ Online Resources Restored in Katy ISD

Websites such as The Trevor Project are now accessible after years of censorship.

By MARENE GUSTIN



The Katy Independent School District has finally restored access to LGBTQ-affirming websites at its nine high schools after a complaint filed in April

by the American Civil Liberties Union of Texas (ACLU) and Lambda Legal on behalf of Cameron Samuels, a former senior at Seven Lakes High School.

Samuels, who uses gender-neutral pronouns, told *OUTSMART* magazine last year that they had been fighting the district's "Human Sexuality" internet filter for years.

"My freshman year, I attempted to visit *advocate.com* to conduct research for a school project in my Digital Art Animation class," →



Cameron Samuels, center, led the fight to restore LGBTQ-affirming websites to Katy ISD high schools.

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Samuels said. “*The Advocate’s* website redirected to a blocked page that told me it was not accessible because the content fit the category of ‘Alternative Sexual Lifestyles (GLBT).’ I was shocked and disturbed to see this LGBTQ+ news website blocked on campus internet simply because it was labeled ‘Alternative.’

“These policies [affect] more than just political discourse,” Samuels added. “When the situation comes down to a student contemplating suicide and they do not have a supportive home environment, a district policy that blocks access to The Trevor Project is a matter of life or death for them.”

Last week, after two grievance hearings, Katy ISD agreed to remove the Human Sexuality filter at the high school level and create a process for students and parents to request to unblock sites individually at the elementary- and middle-school levels.

“Katy ISD’s decision was a step in the right direction; all students should have access to resources that affirm who they are and who they can be, rather than erasing their existence,” said Shelly L. Skeen, senior attorney for Lambda Legal.

**“WE WILL HAVE A UNITED FRONT OF LIBRARIANS, EDUCATORS, TEACHERS, AND STUDENTS TO STAND UP AGAINST THIS LARGE-SCALE ATTACK ON OUR QUEER IDENTITIES. WE ARE HERE, AND THIS IS WHAT WE BELIEVE: BOOKS UNITE US.”**

**—Cameron Samuels**

Some 20 websites have been restored, including *OUTSMART* magazine, the Human Rights Campaign, the Montrose Center, Equality Texas, and PFLAG.

“This discriminatory internet filter erases our queer identities and demonstrates the refusal that many school districts, and the State of Texas, have in affirming our most marginalized and vulnerable students,” Samuels said. “I am pleased to see critical, life-saving websites become available to many students in Katy ISD, but I am disheartened that younger, possibly more vulnerable students may still have to out their queer identity in requesting access to resources that could save their life. It’s gravely irresponsible to uphold policies like this.”

Samuels, now studying politics at Brandeis University in Massachusetts, has been named the first-ever youth honorary chair of Banned Books Week, an annual event celebrating the freedom to read. The 2022 observance was held September 18 to the 24th.

Banned Books Week was launched in 1982 in response to a sudden surge in the number of challenges to books in schools, bookstores, and libraries. Typically held during the last week of September, it highlights the value of free and open access to information.

“This year, Banned Books Week is all about how censorship divides us, but books unite us,” Samuels said in an interview with *School Library Journal*. “That message, that motto, will bring people together through books. We will have a united front of librarians, educators, teachers, and students to stand up against this large-scale attack on our queer identities, our BIPOC identities. It will be a week-long effort to show that we are here, and this is what we believe: books unite us.”

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### MOST IMPORTANT INFORMATION ABOUT BIKTARVY

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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.

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- ▶ 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:**

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- ▶ **Severe liver problems,** which in rare cases can lead to death. Tell your healthcare provider right away if you get these symptoms: skin or the white part of your eyes turns yellow, dark “tea-colored” urine, light-colored stools, loss of appetite for several days or longer, nausea, or stomach-area pain.
- ▶ **The most common side effects of BIKTARVY** in clinical studies were diarrhea (6%), nausea (6%), and headache (5%).

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Scan to see Dimitri's story.

By SUSAN BANKSTON



## 30th Birthday Blowout

The celebrations are serious in Fayette County, Texas.



If you've been around these parts for a while, you know about Fayette County, Texas. Fayette County is just east of Austin and was home to the original Best Little

Whorehouse in Texas, known locally as The Chicken Ranch. They have all the best news in Fayette County because they seem to attract the most fun-loving people on the planet.

This story comes from their newspaper's front page. On August 25, a woman named Julie May Mack was found sitting in a stranger's hot tub.

Okay, so first of all, your name is Julie May Mack, which is the best name ever. I mean, you could be voted Watermelon Queen at the county fair on that name alone. You wanna be the district clerk? Honey, nobody could vote against that name on a ballot. Or how about Texas Senator Julie May Mack? Damn.

I looked it up, and the official temperature for Fayette County on August 25 was 104 degrees with a heat index of 471. And that's not a typo, mind you. Also, all of southeast Texas was in a serious drought. I feel sure that Ms. Mack was hunting for a stock tank to dive

into, and a hot tub was as close as she could come. (Remind me to tell you about the time my cousin Dirt Janochek got drunk and turned his stock tank into a jacuzzi with some Gorilla Glue and his Evinrude outboard motor.)

The police report says that Ms. Mack got out of the hot tub and went and hid in a car in the neighborhood. I'm gonna guess it wasn't her car, because she didn't try to drive it away. Or she might have left her purse back at the hot tub, so she didn't have her car keys. The police ordered her out of the car and she complied, but then ran away.

Okay, stop right here and see if this doesn't sound fishy to you. She outran two police officers while she was wearing wet clothes. Wet clothes are heavy. It's unlikely she was wearing shoes, because you can't run at all in wet shoes. But (and please stay with me here) the cars would be parked on cement or tar, either of which would cause severe burns on bare feet in August in Texas.

Then she found a recreational vehicle with the door open and ran in there. They found her, but she still outran them. Okay, I'm gonna ask it right here: Are these guys on crutches? I know she was wearing clothes because if she wasn't, there would have been a parade of tractors fol-

lowing her around, and lively shouts of "Buster, come look! She's *nekkid!*"

So, through the miracle of modern journalism, we discover she ran into a house and resisted arrest. No shoot, Sherlock! A slow-poke deputy had to wrestle her to the ground.

Sadly, this story—long and colorful as it is—does not end well. It isn't until we get to the breathless end that we discover all of this mayhem happened on the day before Ms. Mack's 30th birthday.

What the hell kind of world do we live in where a woman cannot borrow a handy hot tub on the day before a decade-shifting birthday?

Sometimes, baby, you just gotta get that foolishness from your 20s out of your system before you face real life in your 30s.

In the end, Ms. Mack was charged with burglary and resisting arrest. Bad cop, no donuts for you!

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

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# The Journey to Self-Acceptance

National Coming Out Day is an opportunity for greater connection with your community and yourself.



Each year on October 11, we observe National Coming Out Day—an opportunity to celebrate the liberation and freedom that comes from being an “out” member of the LGBTQ community.

On its surface, National Coming Out Day may feel redundant or perhaps even unnecessary, particularly given the spectacle, pageantry, and community experienced throughout the June Pride Month celebrations. However, there’s also something quite powerful about coming out and reaffirming your sexuality and/or gender identity on a designated day—something that could become a critical part of the process of self-acceptance.

## Is Coming Out Important?

Several researchers have closely examined the role and importance of self-acceptance in promoting and maintaining the positive mental health of LGBTQ people. Sadly, lower rates of self-acceptance exist among LGBTQ folks, contributing to psychological stress as well as depression and anxiety. Additionally, factors such as age, race or ethnicity, geography (rural versus urban living, for example), or living

with a disability can further complicate one’s ability to accept our queer identity.

Importantly, the lower rates of self-acceptance among LGBTQ persons are rarely caused by an inherent “low self-esteem” issue. Rather, it is the negative judgments, discrimination, and victimization widely experienced by many LGBTQ individuals that can create substantial barriers to self-acceptance. When frequently bombarded with negative messaging about queer identity, it is hard to avoid internalizing negative societal attitudes and beliefs. Over time, these internalized messages can result in increased self-criticism as well as negative views of the self. Ultimately, it is this socio-cultural lack of acceptance that drives our individual lack of self-acceptance.

## Examining Cultural Influences

“Heteronormativity” is the assumption that narrowly defined, cisgender-heterosexual ways of being are the cultural default setting. These types of beliefs can be communicated both overtly and covertly. For example, overt messages come in the form of anti-LGBTQ legislation or homophobic statements from family members and church pulpits. Hetero-

normativity is also communicated in the relative lack of media representations of queer people, or the insistence on using a person’s designated sex assigned at birth as the predominant way to understand their gender identity.

Ideas about “the right way” to be masculine or feminine can also contribute to a lack of self-acceptance. Additionally, telling people that bisexuality is “not real” (or just a stopover on the way to a gay or lesbian identity) is profoundly invalidating, and contributes substantially to a lack of acceptance of bisexual orientation. Ultimately, these damaging statements and ideas tell queer people that they are wrong, immoral, and unwelcome.

## The Path to Self-Acceptance

Self-acceptance is the opposite of internalized heterosexism. It is the development of a non-judgmental attitude toward all aspects of the self—both positive and negative. In addition to directly challenging and rejecting the ideas of inferiority and wrongness suggested by →



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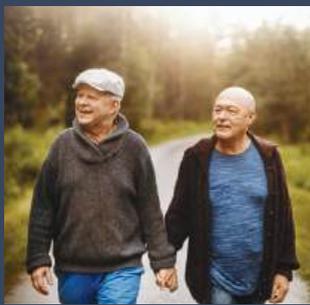
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heteronormativity, it's also important to redefine yourself according to personal values and goals. For example, rather than focusing on culturally dictated ways of creating relationships or family, you can live in a space of self-acceptance by forging whatever types of connections you find most fulfilling and meaningful—regardless of a person's sexual orientation or gender identity.

**DISCLOSING YOUR  
SEXUALITY OR  
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ANOTHER PERSON  
INVITES THEM INTO  
YOUR EXPERIENCE  
AND CREATES  
OPPORTUNITIES  
FOR GREATER  
CONNECTIONS WITH  
YOUR COMMUNITY.**

Coming out to others is an outward expression of your inner process of self-acceptance. Disclosing your sexuality or gender identity to another person invites them into your experience and creates opportunities for greater connections with your community. It allows you to build positive feelings about yourself and enhance your sense of pride. Ideally, your LGBTQ identity becomes an integrated part of your whole self.

Are there still areas in your life where you are withholding and “not out”? What would it look like to develop both greater self-acceptance and an openness with others? On National Coming Out Day this year, how will *you* celebrate?

*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](mailto:dr.darylshorter@gmail.com).*



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By GRACE YUNG, CFP

# Thinking About Starting a Family?

First make sure you're financially prepared.



Many same-sex, transgender, and other LGBTQ couples want to build a family. But unlike opposite-sex cisgender couples, the process of getting started isn't so simple. There

are logistical issues, legal hurdles, and financial obstacles that you could face.

But the good news is that you have several options for having or adopting a child, so it is essential to have a plan in place as early as possible that covers various needs throughout the years. That way, you'll be prepared as your family grows, and you can better navigate even the toughest financial challenges.

## Understanding Your Options

In the United States, it is estimated that approximately 3 million LGBTQ individuals have had a child, and that roughly 6 million children have an LGBTQ parent. Couples who are of the same gender—as compared to heterosexual couples—are six times more likely to be raising foster children, and four times more likely to be raising adopted children.

But no matter how you identify, if you want to raise children—or even have a baby—there are actually many potential options for you. These can include in vitro fertilization, insemination, adoption, and surrogacy.

In vitro fertilization typically involves taking eggs that are received via an ultrasound and then placing them in a petri dish with sperm cells. If these become an embryo, it is transferred to a female's uterus. It often takes a couple of "cycles" (or more) to attain a healthy embryo, so at approximately \$12,000 to \$15,000 per cycle, this process can be ex-

pensive—especially because in vitro fertilization is not usually covered by insurance.

Insemination refers to the placement of gamete in a woman's reproductive tract with the goal of pregnancy. There are different types of insemination, but the most popular is to transfer the semen into the female's uterus using a special type of syringe. Artificial insemination usually costs between \$300 and \$500 per cycle. Because it is less expensive than in vitro fertilization, it is often tried first.

Adoption is another popular option for LGBTQ individuals and couples to start or grow a family. This may be done through an agency, your state, or as a private person-to-person agreement. The cost of adoption can vary widely, with some options costing \$20,000 or more.

The adoption laws can vary from state to state. For instance, in Texas, the birth mother must maintain parental rights for at least 48 hours after giving birth. During this time, she has full parental rights. But after the 48-hour time period has elapsed, the birth mother may place the baby for adoption. It can be more difficult for LGBTQ parents to adopt, though, particularly in highly conservative counties.

Some LGBTQ individuals and couples use a surrogate to help them have a baby. A surrogate is a woman who becomes artificially inseminated and then carries the baby and delivers it. With a traditional surrogate, the woman who carries the baby is considered the biological mother because her egg is used.

However, by going with a gestational surrogate, in vitro fertilization is used with the woman who carries the baby. Therefore, both the seed and the egg can be donated. The average cost of surrogacy can range from \$90,000 to \$130,000, depending on the arrangements that are made. The legal requirements and the

cost of other services can also vary from one state to another.

## The Cost of Raising a Child

Having a child can change your life in many ways—including financially—so it is essential to plan ahead. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the average cost of raising a child to age 18 for middle-income parents was \$233,610 in 2015. And with an annual adjustment for inflation of 2.2 percent each year factored in, the lifetime cost of raising a child that is born in 2022 is now estimated to be closer to \$272,049. The largest expense associated with raising a child is housing, followed by food.

The actual dollar figure can vary, though, based on your geographic area. The good news is that each additional child costs less, based on economies of scale. It is important to note that these figures do not include the cost of higher education.

## Start Saving Early for College

If you would like your child to attend college, it is recommended that you start saving early. In 2022, the average cost of a four-year institution is \$35,331. But this figure can vary, too, based on whether the school is public or private, and whether the student gets a tuition discount for in-state residents.

There are different ways you could set aside money for your child's future education expenses, including some that offer tax-related incentives. These include:

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### Important Parenting Considerations

In addition to the challenges of having or adopting a child, there are several other items to consider as an LGBTQ parent, including:

#### Lack of parental recognition.

When a heterosexual married couple has a baby, both individuals are automatically considered to be the legal guardians of the child. But this is not the case for same-sex or other types of LGBTQ couples.

**Access to healthcare.** It is estimated that sexual minorities are about twice as likely as straight individuals to be uninsured. But even if you are insured, you may not have the same coverage regarding fertility options that heterosexual people do. For instance, insurance policies for fertility treatments are often written in a manner that applies only to heterosexual couples.

**Paid parental leave.** Employer policies that allow paid family leave for the birth or adoption of a child might not pertain to many LGBTQ family structures.

**Legal rights to the child.** A legal parent is a person who is legally recognized as the child's parent and who has the legal right to have custody and make decisions about the child's health, education, and well-being. In many states, though, a person who is not a legal parent has no decision-making authority, even if that individual lives with the child and otherwise functions as the child's parent.

If you are not biologically related to your child, legal experts recommend taking steps to protect your legal status as a parent—even if you are married to your child's biological parent.

#### Putting Your Financial Plan in Place

As a same- or similar-gender couple, having children can be complicated but well worth it to make your family complete. It is recommended that you talk with legal and financial professionals who are well-versed in working with the LGBTQ community, and who can advise you in setting up the necessary short- and long-term financial plans that are needed.

*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](mailto: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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# Defining Feminism, One Woman at a Time

The Houston Women's Group found a way to harness the fury.

By JENNY BLOCK



"We were furious in the '70s," Iris Greer Sizemore says.

The "we" she is referring to is women. That fury is the reason why, in September of 1975, Greer Sizemore and her

then partner, Marguerite Oppinger, founded the Houston Women's Group.

Greer Sizemore had moved to Houston from South Carolina in the late '60s. "We were riding on the message of a great movement that was already in place," she recalls. "I wanted to continue moving forward with that movement. What was unique about the Women's Group was *fury*."

When it comes to creating a new group, finding an affordable place to meet can be a huge challenge that can make or break a group. "The most important thing was the space, and it was given to us. So, we have incredibly deep gratitude for the First Unitarian Universalist Church."

Other than a brief Zoom-only hiatus because of the pandemic, the group has been meeting there every Sunday since that fateful September gathering 47 years ago. They are now offering hybrid sessions, allowing women from all around the world to participate. And they do.

Each week, meetings feature a presenter and/or a general discussion about the lives of group members, as well as current events. Following the group's planned meeting, attendees often head off to lunch together to continue their conversations.

One of the unique things about the group, Greer Sizemore says, is the absence of officers and business meetings. "You walk in, and you're a member," she says. "Each woman defines her own feminism."

The group's understanding of gender-iden-



Deborah Moncrief Bell and  
Iris Greer Sizemore, circa 1994

FACEBOOK

tity issues has always been ahead of its time. "We had the first trans woman at our meetings in the '80s. Trans was not an issue. We have a great deal of diversity. We have always been perceived as open to all women."

Greer Sizemore has attended nearly every meeting from the very start, back when the group didn't have scheduled speakers. Instead, women shared their own stories. "Because every woman has a story, and a lot of them haven't been listened to—especially not with intention—for the first five years it was just the women speaking," she notes.

"It was based on the premise of women learning how to live their own autobiographies through their activism all over the city. It is a very political, radical group looking at a lot of intersectionalities. We are always trying to respond to injustice—gender violence, partner violence. We are transcending three waves of feminism."

And it's working. Members tell Greer

Sizemore that the Houston Women's Group was a part of their awakening. "They will also say 'This group has saved my life,' but I think they have saved their own lives with the help of other women. It's the intimacy of the women coming together, and lots of connections being made. We are trying to create more of that."

As the group grows and changes, so do the people leading the charge. These days, Greer Sizemore says, "Deborah Moncrief Bell has been the heart and soul of the fourth movement." Community organizer and writer Bell attended the group for many years, and was an occasional speaker before she began taking on other tasks a number of years ago, including finding and scheduling speakers, handling communications for the group, and hosting the Sunday Zoom meetings from her home. →

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Houston Women's Group

Bell describes the Houston Women's Group as "a diverse, multi-generational feminist group for all women, where women learn, connect, and rise. The focus of the group is the empowerment and celebration of women, their accomplishments and expertise, as well as their personal narrative."

Bell was drawn to the group because being with other feminists was "a heady experience. It was exciting to be among so many smart, informed women where we could speak a common language with one another and be free of the influence of the patriarchy. Many of us identify as lesbians, and the group offered a space that was accepting and welcoming."

**"YOU WALK IN, AND YOU'RE A MEMBER. EACH WOMAN DEFINES HER OWN FEMINISM."**

—Iris Greer Sizemore

As far as she knows, the group is the longest continuous women-only meeting in the country. "That's in large part due to Iris, because she is a force of nature. She really wants to see the Women's Group continue as her legacy."

As for what that legacy will be, Greer Sizemore looks to the future with confidence. "We want to listen to and learn from young feminists. That is our goal now. This group is an older group. This is the challenge now. I'm 82, so you want to be sure you have younger women who are in place, which I have done. If you're women-centric and you're making decisions about the journey that is your life, the Women's Group helps you to navigate that within the patriarchy," she concludes. "We're all in this together."

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# Back to Square One

In 2003, a few brave Houstonians orchestrated a landmark LGBTQ civil-rights victory. In 2023, that win could be erased.

By STAFF REPORTERS  
Photo by JOHN CONROY



For many Americans, the nation's political landscape seems to be shaking and seizing beneath their feet. And for LGBTQ citizens, it's even worse.

When the United States Supreme Court struck down *Roe v. Wade* in May, it reversed the 49-year-old constitutional protection of a woman's right to privacy regarding her body. For the first time ever, *SCOTUS* revoked an *American right*, and then granted the government authority over the womb.

The revered *Obergefell v. Hodges* decision of 2015—the case that awarded LGBTQ citizens a constitutionally protected right to same-sex marriage—is only seven years old. Like *Roe*, that decision was predicated on an American citizen's right to privacy.

In the written decision striking down *Roe*, Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas suggests that the Court should also revisit decisions such as *Obergefell v. Hodges*. Can marriage equality survive?

What many do not know is that in 2003, the landmark SCOTUS decision *Lawrence v. Texas* helped provide the stepping stones to *Obergefell*. *Lawrence* legalized consensual homosexual conduct, and that case was victorious thanks to a handful of courageous LGBTQ Houstonians. Because of them, LGBTQ Americans were no longer criminalized for who and how they loved.

## Lighting the Torch

On the night of September 17, 1998, two deputies from the Harris County Sheriff's Department responded to a reported weapons disturbance at a southeast Houston apartment



Tyron Garner (l) and John Lawrence

complex.

According to the officers, they entered an unlocked apartment unit to find two adult males engaged in an act of sodomy. John Lawrence, the middle-aged white male tenant of the apartment, and Tyron Garner, a younger Black man, were arrested and charged with “deviate sexual intercourse” under the Texas sodomy law. Both pleaded no contest and spent the night in jail. No weapons were ever found.

Two employees of the Harris County court where the sodomy charges were filed decided to alert Lane Lewis, a local community activist. In 1998, Lewis had just finished a term as president of the Houston Gay and Lesbian Political Caucus and was working at Pacific Street, a popular gay bar now operating as Blur Bar.

“The boyfriend of one of the court employees came in the club and told me about the detention of Lawrence and Garner,” Lewis recalls. “I immediately contacted the two defendants. I explained that I felt we could take this to the Supreme Court, and offered to find them legal representation. They could have walked away, but to their credit, they didn't. We owe them much gratitude for their bravery.”

Lewis wanted the case to be handled by local gay attorney Mitchell Katine. Lewis and Katine had worked together in the past, and Katine's years of volunteer legal work and

ties to the respected law firm Williams Birnberg & Andersen made him an obvious choice.

Lewis then contacted two of his mentors, Houston City Council Member Annise Parker and local queer advocate Ray Hill, to discuss what he thought he had found and to seek their opinion about reaching out to Katine. “This case belonged to the community, and I wanted to make sure I had the advice of others,” says Lewis. Parker and Hill agreed that Mitchell Katine was the way to go.

“Mitchell never failed to fight for our community,” Hill told OUTSMART in a 2018 interview. “He was fearless when it came to protecting human rights. Mitchell is also brilliant, and had all the smarts it would take to win this case in the highest court in the land. There was never any question.”

Katine recalls drawing a deep breath after Lewis approached him. “To ignore the injustice meant that these two men, both just regular guys, would now be registered as sex offenders, affecting their potential for future employment and much more. I could not let that happen; I could not turn away,” he says. The attorney signed on as lead local counsel—pro-bono—at the first request. →



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### Lining Up the Troops

Anti-sodomy regulations were still on the books in 14 states in the US in 1998, but they were seldom prosecuted—thus making it difficult to challenge them. With the arrest of Lawrence and Garner on sodomy charges, it was now possible to drag those unjust laws into the light of day, allowing courageous people to force the courts to look at its prejudice.

Lewis was assigned to keep the wheels moving forward, which meant maintaining the full participation of defendants Lawrence and Garner. It was no easy task for Lewis, who had to keep the men financially afloat and safe.

“The thing about John and Tyron is that they were just ordinary guys—blue-collar, working class, and neither of them was out. They were not the sort of people one would expect to stand up to a law at the level of the Supreme Court, but they did,” Katine emphasizes.

“They both had hearts of gold,” Lewis adds, “but they were tormented by insecurities and fear. They had much to lose. They were ordinary guys who did an extraordinary thing.”

Once the roles were settled on locally, Katine reached out for assistance to Lambda Legal, the national nonprofit agency fiercely dedicated to protecting and advancing LGBTQ rights. They quickly agreed to help. With

Katine as local lead attorney, Lambda appealed Lawrence and Garner’s sodomy charges through three courts—and lost in each one. This, of course, was exactly Team Houston’s intention. They had targeted a Supreme Court case from the start.

“In order to proceed to the Supreme Court, we *had* to lose at every lower court level. It was a slow but necessary process,” Katine explains.

### Sweet Victory

It was a beautiful day in Houston on the morning of June 26, 2003. It was also the morning that the U.S. Supreme Court ruled 6-3 in favor of *Lawrence v. Texas*. The decision granted citizens the constitutional right to privacy, protecting consensual, adult sexual intimacy from government regulation and striking down the sodomy law in Texas. By extension, it invalidated the remaining sodomy laws in 13 other states. In San Francisco’s famous Castro District, all the gay flags were taken down and replaced with the American flag to underscore the day’s Supreme Court decision.

That evening, a rally in celebration of the victory was held on the steps of Houston City Hall. When it was Annise Parker’s turn to address the crowd, she expressed gratitude to all of the team members involved in the effort.

“The fact is, this decision is not about the gay and lesbian community, and it’s not about privacy regarding what we do in the bedrooms. This decision is about the Court deciding that there are places the government does not belong,” Parker said. The crowd roared with approval.

Not to be outdone, Ray Hill spoke next. It was an evening of sheer elation for the aging activist; he had worked throughout his life for this moment. “I am an old man now,” Hill said, “but if I should get lucky tonight and engage in an act of intimacy, it will be the first time in my life I will not be a criminal in Texas!”

Lawrence, Garner, and Hill are no longer with us. But Lane Lewis and Mitchell Katine still live in Houston, so if you see them around and are so inclined, buy them a drink or just shake their hands in gratitude.

Better yet, you can always donate to Lambda Legal. The sad fact is that they are not likely to become obsolete as tireless defenders of LGBTQ civil rights any time soon.

➔ For more on Lambda Legal, visit [lambdalegal.org](http://lambdalegal.org).

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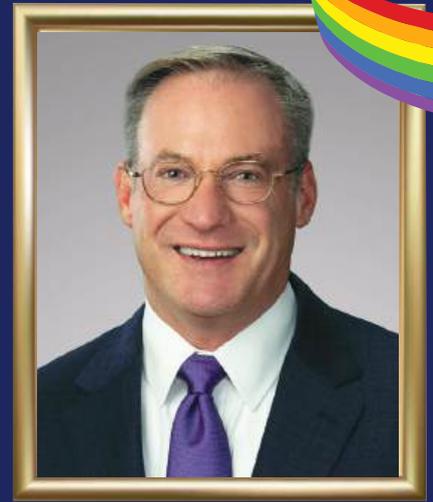




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In the following pages, you'll meet 19-year-old trans advocate Landon Richie, who's been working for trans rights for eight years. Dancer/choreographer Rivkah French has been at the forefront of Houston's queer performing arts scene for more than a decade. Christina Wells, the wonderful actress/singer who stormed the stage in last year's *The Little Mermaid*, snagged the award for Favorite Female Actor.

Januari Fox, a repeat winner for the Gayest & Greatest Most Valuable Female Volunteer award, has dedicated herself to fighting for LGBTQ rights. Kennedy Loftin, this year's Leading Male Fundraiser, was also a finalist in both the Male LGBTQ Community Hero and

Male Commercial Photographer categories. Atlantis Narcisse nearly swept the female trans categories by winning Favorite Female Trans Community Hero, Leading Trans Community Fundraiser, and Female Trans Community Volunteer, while being a finalist in the Female Trans Activist category.

Alyanna IV Bones, this year's Favorite New Drag Queen, relies on her makeup and design skills to craft her dramatic costumes. Noble Contractor Solutions, led by BJ Johnson, focuses on customer service to keep his home-remodeling clients happy. Bludorn restaurant, owned by chef Aaron and Victoria Pappas Bludorn, was voted Best Place for a Romantic Date.



# The Spooky Queen

Alyanna IV Bones blends goth and glamour.

By SAM BYRD

ALYANNA IV BONES



There's a fresh new face who is slaying the drag scene, and she's earning recognition for bringing the drama with every look she gives. Alyanna IV Bones is OUTSMART's pick for Favorite New Drag Queen.

"It feels surreal. It's only been two years since I started doing drag, and it's validating to earn this award because I've been working really hard," she says.

She may be working hard, but she makes it look effortless—likely a result of the background she draws from for inspiration. This dark-hearted queen has consistently held a

penchant for the macabre.

"Ever since I was little, I've always been obsessed with horror movies. My grandmother raised me watching them, and I always gravitated towards the female villain. They always look serious, but they always look better than everybody else," she explains.

"I've always had this character in my head who is a 'glampire' (translation: a glamorous vampire). She's been in the world forever. Through that character, I can channel all sorts of different fashions from different eras. I feel like Alyanna is a perfect combination of what I like: horror films and fashion."

Her go-to muses are characters from *Queen of the Damned*, the *Underworld* series, and, interestingly, the villains from *The Powerpuff Girls*. And to channel those characters, she had to learn how to bring them to life via makeup and artistic skill. Luckily, she had a handy trick up her well-fitted sleeve.

"I learned a lot through YouTube, but also, ever since I was little, I've always been attracted to art. I like drawing. Since I was already drawing, I think learning how to work with makeup naturally came with it because applying makeup is essentially drawing on your face. All my years of drawing was basically practice for creating my look," she notes.

Drag has opened up a world of possibilities for the Puerto Rico-born performer.

"Growing up in Puerto Rico, I felt like I couldn't do drag because the drag scene there is very pageant-oriented. There's not much alternative drag. Once I moved to Houston, I kept thinking about it, and when the pandemic happened, I figured the time was right to take a chance," she says.

From that chance, IV Bones was born, and there's no stopping her now.

"I have a lot of ideas. I'm practicing my sewing so I can create even better looks. I want to practice more on hosting and getting comfortable on the mic so that I can develop my own show. I have this idea for a show that brings in ball culture. I'll call it The Bones Ball. I want people to bring looks for each category to show off their creativity. I feel like Houston doesn't have that many ball opportunities, and I want to change that," she says.

Ultimately, though, Alyanna IV Bones is having a ball simply by living her drag fantasy and using every inch of her skinny-Minnie figure in the process.

"I like to embrace my body, which is super-skinny. I eat a lot, but I just don't gain weight. That's why my last name is Bones. I embrace my skinny body," she adds.

Words to envy, but if she ever gets the chance, she says the number-one illusion she'd like to replicate is Elvira, the queen of curves.

"Elvira is super-different from me—a lot of body, super-big breasts. I feel like it would be very fun to impersonate her. Maybe I will do it for Halloween!"

The time is nigh, and Houston has already given her its stamp of approval. So be on the lookout for something low-cut and sexy during this spooky season.

Follow Alyanna IV Bones at [@alyannaivbones](https://www.instagram.com/alyannaivbones).

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**BUDDY'S**

Finalists: Angel Share, Category Is... Trivia with Hu'nee B, ReBar, Ripcord

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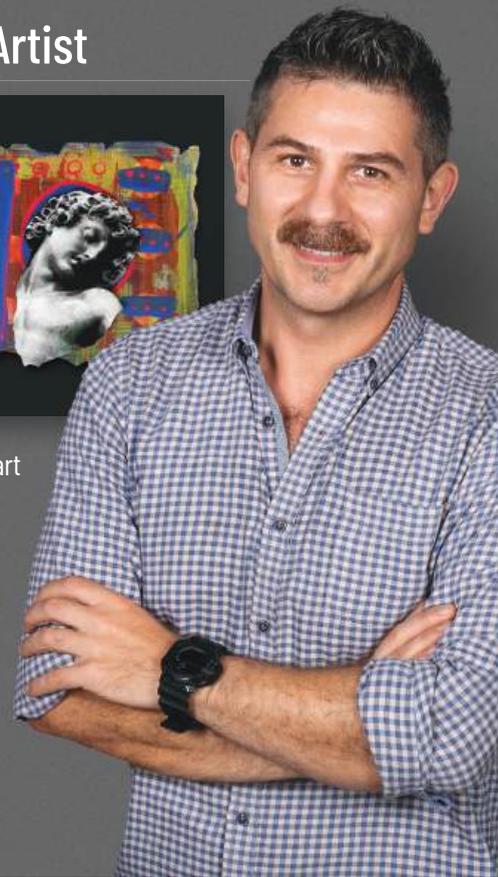
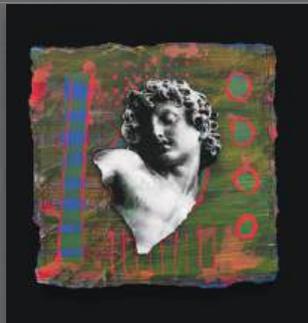
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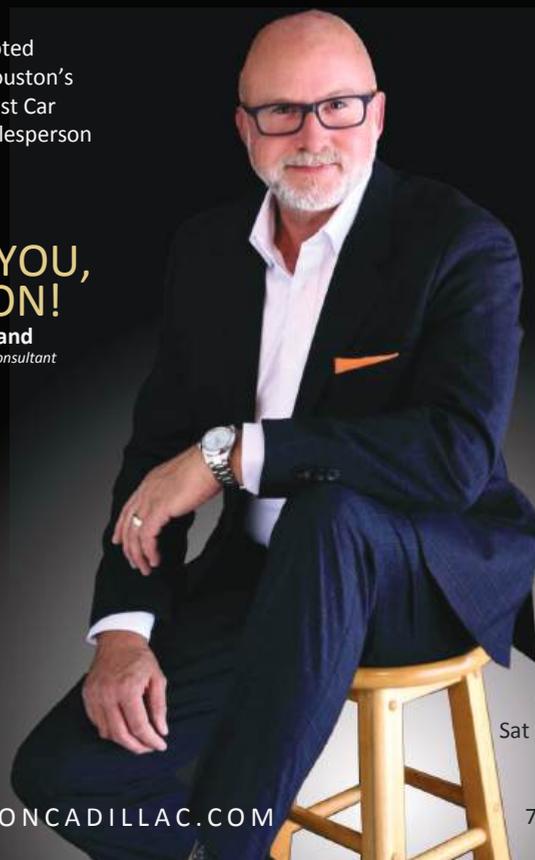
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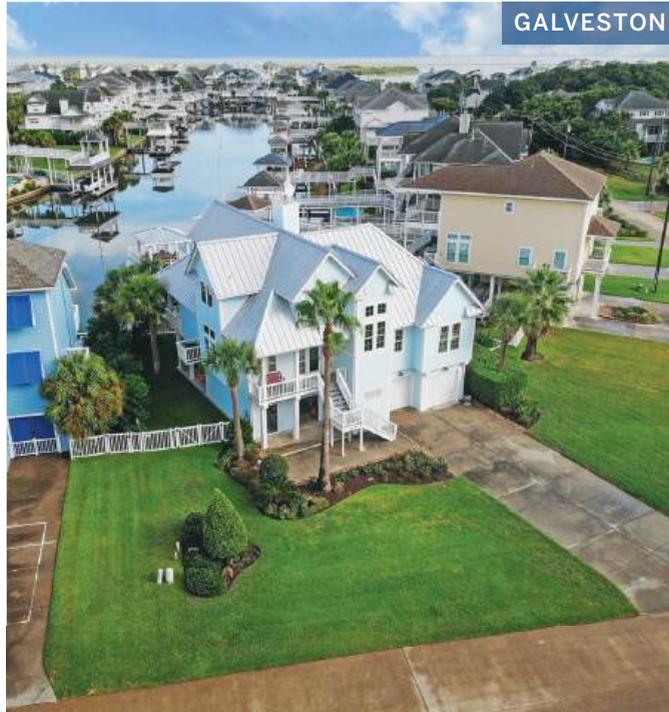
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# Dancing Her Truth

Rivkah French celebrates freedom in Houston's contemporary dance space.

By **SHERYL E. TAYLOR**  
 Photo by **ASHKAN ROAYAEE**



If you know Rebecca French from the Houston dance scene beginning in the late '90s, you probably know about Rivkah French.

But do you know the story behind that new name? Rivkah, who uses they/them pronouns, has siblings who also have cool names. By the time French was born, their mom decided to pull out the Bible and pick the Old Testament name Rebecca. Fast forward to 2019, when French remembered from their teenage years that the Hebrew root of Rebecca is Rivkah.

"When I was young, I never thought I could live up to Rivkah—it was so mysterious, interesting, and exotic," they recall. "In some ways, changing your name can be inherently queer. Once you step into the tent of queerness and are embraced by all the openness and freedom, you realize that you can do whatever the hell you want to do with your life."

French's spirit of passion and freedom is evident in the dozens of original full-length dance and multimedia performances that they created throughout their award-winning 25-year career. French co-founded and directed the nonprofit dance theater FrenetiCore, and was the founder and producer of the Houston Fringe Festival. They also taught movement arts to at-risk children and adults, as well as homeless and incarcerated teens.

Dance wasn't an interest for French until later in life. "We couldn't really afford dance classes when I was little," they recall. "The extent of my dancing before college happened in nightclubs with friends shaking a tail feather at Numbers all night."

It wasn't until French's college years at the University of Houston that they fell in love with dance—and also with a ballerina.

"I knew that dance was hard, but it was so satisfying and rewarding. When I discovered modern dance, it became my passion and I felt



completely alive. Once dance scooped me up, it never let me go."

This year marks the tenth anniversary of French coming out as queer, although they admit they were flirting with queerness in their choreographed work more than 17 years ago.

Today, French remains even more committed to expressing gay love through dance. "Modern dance expresses reality and the human condition in a way that is accessible to real people," French says. "I don't identify with sugar-plum fairies, princes, and princesses. It's nice to delve into such fantasies every now and then, but I want a dance that expresses my life experiences—the joy, pain, and hardships that are brought to life in this beautiful art form and remind us that you are not alone in this life."

So, what's next for Rivkah French Choreography? "I can't stop choreographing. It's in me, and I love it," they say. "I told myself that I'm allowed to keep dancing until at least 50."

That's just four years away, but during the pandemic they found a creative outlet in Houston's drag scene. "The theaters were closed, but the bars were open! I got on stage to see what I could do in exploring gender and orientation."

For now, French's focus is fundraising for two projects—The Q'astle, a new Fifth Ward performance and dance-studio space; and a dance film that incorporates virtual-reality technology.

"I'm excited about the future, and I want to be part of it," they conclude.

"The pandemic showed us the importance of connections, and being more present. Virtual reality creates an intimacy that you can't get in person or experience in a theater."

 Follow Rivkah French on Instagram @rivkahfrenchchoreography.

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# A Teenage Trans Advocate

Landon Richie looks ahead to a brutal legislative session in Austin.

By MARENE GUSTIN  
Photo by FRANK HERNANDEZ  
Styling by ORLANDO HERRERA



Landon Richie, at just 19 years old, is already a seasoned activist. He's also OUTSMART's winner for Most Prominent Youth LGBTQ

Activist, and a finalist for both Most Prominent Male Trans Activist and Favorite Male Trans Community Hero.

Richie, who will turn 20 on Halloween, came out to his mom via email when he was 12 years old. He began working as an advocate soon after that.

"As a trans young adult who has only ever known Texas as home, it's scary and exhausting to exist in this state where legislative aggression and violence toward trans people and our families is so relentless," he says. "Being a trans youth in Texas demands a bravery that shouldn't be asked of anyone, much less of kids."

In 2017, Richie testified against SB 6, the so-called bathroom bill championed by Republican Lt. Governor Dan Patrick. The bill finally died after more than a year in both the regular legislative session and a special session. But the battle took a toll on Richie.

"I have been an advocate/activist since I was 12 years old, and I would be lying if I said it hasn't taken a toll," Richie admits. "Constantly having to defend your humanity—to demand being treated with dignity and respect and care, and to live with the unceasing worry that your life will once again be used as a political pawn—is taxing and demoralizing.

"In 2017, following a grueling legislative session that sought to ban trans and gender-expansive people from using public restrooms and facilities, I was hospitalized for a month with an eating disorder that I developed as a

result of the stress and lack of control I felt during that session, as well as the online harassment I received in response to my visibility. I was 14.

"My family's and community's support during that time was, and still is, essential, and is what has enabled me to continue doing the work that I do."

At just 18, Richie was recognized for his activism in 2020 by being named Pride Houston's very first Tomorrow's Trendsetter Grand Marshal.

"In many ways, today's priorities are no different from what they were 20, 40, or even 60 years ago: to secure for trans and gender-expansive people equity in healthcare, housing, employment, education, and in every sector of public and private life; to ensure that trans and gender-expansive people, regardless of the age at which they come out, can live fully as their authentic selves and be embraced for who they are; and to create a world where trans and gender-expansive people have every opportunity to thrive and reach their fullest potential," Richie says.

Right now, his sights are set on the 2023 Texas Legislative Session, which starts in January. Texans will likely be faced with more bills aiming to strip trans and gender-expansive people of their healthcare, support systems, and access to public life.

In the meantime, he attends Honors College at the University of Houston, where he majors in political science. He is also a part of Gender Cool, an organization focused on creating narratives and visual representations of trans youth.

Richie already has plans for life after college. "My tentative plan is to either pursue a JD degree with the aim of becoming a civil-rights attorney, or to pursue a master's degree in public policy," Richie says.

"As an ambitious person, however, my plan might eventually include both options. Whichever route I take, it's important to me that I continue serving my community through advocacy and working towards actualizing a world in which trans equity is achieved, and where trans and gender-expansive people have the freedom to just be."



Follow Landon Richie on  
Facebook @landonrichie8414  
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Finalists: Let's Talk About Gay Stuff, Ryan Lindsay, The Normal Anomaly, Rainbow Community, Diamond Stylz

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**The Montrose Center**

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**FAVORITE LOCAL LGBTQ FACEBOOK PAGE**

**JD Doyle**

Finalists: AmistadesHTX, BUDDY'S, Eagle Houston, The Montrose Center, Rainbow Community

**FAVORITE LOCAL LGBTQ TIKTOKER**

**Ryan Lindsay (@ryanstmichael)**

Finalists: @drew\_baebe, @bougieBrie, @kay.crayton, @hughdandy, @lordfeatherspolenta, @shiningnathan

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**Derrick Shore (tie)**  
Finalists: Pat Cavlin, Andy Cerota,  
Chancy Glover, Steven Romo

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**Sarah Pepper**  
Finalists: Roula Christie, Kara Leigh, Theresa Rockface

**FAVORITE MALE (COMMERCIAL) RADIO PERSONALITY**  
**Special K**  
Finalist: Carlos Dueno

**FAVORITE MALE (COMMUNITY) RADIO PERSONALITY**  
**Bryan Hlavinka**  
Finalists: Ernie Manouse, Easton Santos

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Finalists: Nicky Bryant, Andrea Simonton,  
Wendy Taylor, Eden Rose Torres, Yvonne Tran

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# The Singer with a Zinger

Christina Wells' turn in *The Little Mermaid* earns acclaim.

By SAM BYRD  
 Photo by DENISE TRUPE



The word that came to Christina Wells' mind was "flabbergasted" when she found out she had won this year's Gayest & Greatest awards for Favorite Local

Female Actor, Favorite (Non-Drag) Entertainer, and Favorite Female Nurse.

The 47-year-old nurse-turned-chanteuse is overwhelmed with emotion that people noted her head-turning portrayal as Ursula in Theatre Under The Stars' production of *The Little Mermaid*.

"I felt like I was going to cry when I [heard I] won the award, because I know how hard I worked, and I hoped what I was doing was good enough. I hoped I was on the right path, and this is a confirmation that I'm doing what I'm supposed to be doing," she adds.

If Wells' name sounds familiar, that's likely because she earned national recognition on *America's Got Talent*. Locally, we know her as a powerhouse vocalist with a heart of gold whose recent dabblings in musical theater are an extension of her passion.

"I love to sing, and I've been trying to focus on [my vocal skills] professionally for the past four years. But acting is something I've only focused on during this last year. I took classes, hired a coach, and transitioned my rawness into something that's craftable on stage," she says.

When Wells performs, she takes painstaking efforts to understand her character's inner workings and deliver a fully developed version. It was quite a departure from her day-to-day self to bring that Ursula character out of the sea and onto the stage.

"When I act, these are characters who are very different from who I am personally. You have to define who they are, and then portray

their role. You want to stand toe-to-toe and do your best. That's why I feel so many feelings while working on these skills," she says.

Those skills have taken her a lifetime to master, and she is finally seeing all of her hard work come to fruition in an almost prophetic way. "I have had these dreams since I was 15 years old. I won tickets on Sunny 99.1 to see *South Pacific* at TUTS. I've had these dreams for 30 years, waiting to be on stage."

"Dreams aren't just for the young. Talent is not just for the young. Opportunity is not just for the young. We can still achieve what we want to achieve no matter where we are in life or what we look like or what we sound like. There's a place for all of us."

Like every great plotline, Wells' arc with Ursula met its own dramatic end. After just 11 performances, the "Poor Unfortunate Souls" belter hung up her tentacles when, halfway through the show's scheduled run, COVID-19 shut down the production. Wells bade farewell to Ursula before she could give the character

her proper final bow.

"I didn't get to say goodbye to her. When I found out the remaining performances were canceled, I locked the door to my office and cried for hours. It was horrible. My heart was broken," she remembers.

Despite the early curtain drop, Wells' talent remains undeniable. She recently inked a deal for the 25th-anniversary national tour of *Chicago: The Musical*, where she'll be playing the role of Matron Mama Morton for its year-long tour. It's a role Wells feels she was created for since it will showcase her naturally theatrical spirit.

"I have so many voices and characters that are inside of me, and when I'm on stage, I get to use *all* of me," she concludes. "I finally found a place where it's okay to burst into song!"



Christina Wells as Matron Mama Morton in *Chicago: The Musical*

FAVORITE LOCAL (NON-DRAG) ENTERTAINER

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

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Finalists: Christopher Barry, Jacques Bourgeois, Ian Haddock, Brandon Mack, Sal Boy Salas, Ashton P. Woods

**MOST PROMINENT NONBINARY LGBTQ ACTIVIST**

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Finalists: Verniss McFarland, Nova, Odyssey Oakengrove

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Finalists: Sunny Bryant, Joelle Espeut, Anandrea Molina, Eden Rose Torres, Dee Dee Watters

**MOST PROMINENT MALE TRANS ACTIVIST**

**Emmett Schelling**

Finalists: Dylan Forbis, Jevon Martin, Landon Richie, Ian Syder-Blake

**MOST PROMINENT NONBINARY TRANS ACTIVIST**

**Verniss McFarland**

Finalists: Nova, Payshunz Nagashima, Charlie Richie

**MOST PROMINENT YOUTH LGBTQ ACTIVIST**

**Landon Richie**

Finalists: Sunny Bryant, Razi Montalto, Britt Perez

**MOST VALUABLE INTERSEX ADVOCATE/EDUCATOR**

**Koomah**

Finalist: Mo Cortez

**MOST VALUABLE FEMALE VOLUNTEER**

**Januari Fox**

Finalists: Augie Cahee, Dawn Elizardo, Jani Lopez, Kymerlie McGuire, Heather J. Taylor, Tammi Wallace

**MOST VALUABLE MALE VOLUNTEER**

**Don Gill**

Finalists: Jacques Bourgeois, Adonis Darling, Sebastian Gutierrez, Div Kumar, Patrick McLvain, Shawn Michaels, Jim Taylor, Jovon Alfon B. Tyler

**MOST VALUABLE NONBINARY COMMUNITY VOLUNTEER**

**Kevin Nguyen**

Finalists: Xitlalli Alvarez, Hexa Dulce, Nova, Odyssey Oakengrove →



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#### MOST VALUABLE FEMALE TRANS COMMUNITY VOLUNTEER

**Atlantis Narcisse**

Finalists: Joelle Bayaa-Uzuri, Gia Pacheco, Joelle Salatersky,  
Eden Rose Torres, Catina Rose Valentine

#### MOST VALUABLE MALE TRANS COMMUNITY VOLUNTEER

**George Zemanek**

Finalists: Sebastian Gutierrez, Petey Makopoulos-Sentfleber,  
Ian Syder-Blake, Daron Yanes

## REAL ESTATE

#### BEST FEMALE REAL ESTATE AGENT

**Jessica Wahlquist**

Finalists: Karen Derr, Paul Gomberg, Poonam Kapoor,  
Debbie Levine, Hunny Phillips

#### BEST MALE REAL ESTATE AGENT

**Brooks Ballard**

Finalists: David Batagower, Scott Brown,  
George Burch, Mark Chupik, Bryan Cotton,  
Jeremy Fain, Nicholas Bryan Guidry,  
Timothy Hampson, Thomas Phillips,  
Dan Pleason, Dan Ritchel, Joe Ross, Andy Weber

#### BEST GALVESTON REAL ESTATE AGENT

**Tom Schwenk**

Finalists: David Bowers, VJ Tramonte, Robert Zahn

#### BEST REAL ESTATE WEBSITE

**HAR.com**

Finalists: Boulevard Realty, Compass Real Estate Houston,  
Nan and Company Real Estate/Christie's International  
Real Estate, Texas American Realty

#### BEST MORTGAGE PROFESSIONAL

**Riaz Pooran/PrimeLending**

Finalists: John Frels/American Pacific Mortgage,  
Cody Grizzoffi/NRL Mortgage, Cari Middaugh/AmCap  
Home Loans, Robert Spiegel/The Spiegel Group

#### BEST TITLE COMPANY

**Alamo Title Company (tie)**

**Chicago Title (tie)**

Finalists: Fidelity National Title, Patriot Title,  
Texas American Title

#### BEST HOME BUILDER

**Sandcastle Homes**

Finalists: Heels 2 Hammers Construction, ROC Homes,  
Lloyd Russel Homes, Sabo Custom Builders

#### BEST HOME REMODELING COMPANY

**Noble Contractor Solutions**

Finalists: J. Charles, Inc., Heels 2 Hammers Construction,  
Crystal Idika/Affordable 1 Home Services,  
Juancho Jimenez, Luria Construction,  
Venus Construction

#### FAVORITE RENTAL COMMUNITY

**Elan Memorial Park**

Finalists: CityView Lofts, Pradera Oaks →

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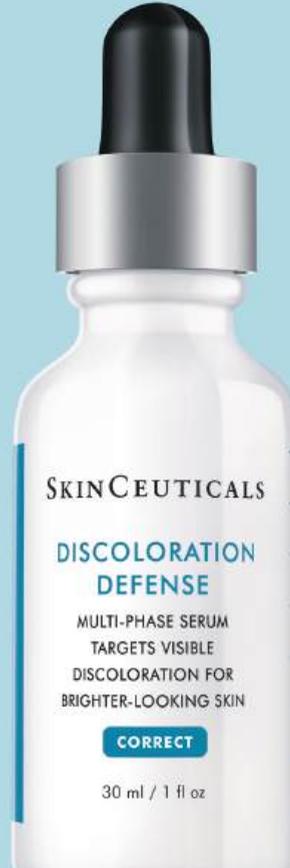
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# On a Winning Streak

Dr. Cynthia Corral expresses gratitude to her patients and family.

By MARENE GUSTIN



Perennial G&G winner Cynthia Corral has swept this category since 2016, thanks to the support she receives from her patients.

“The OUTSMART G&G award is meaningful because I believe in the importance of LGBTQ representation in dentistry, [which can] reduce barriers to dental access for the LGBTQ population and improve oral-health care,” says the 39-year-old dentist.

“As a member of the LGBTQ community, [I have an] understanding of the LGBTQ population that I serve. It has always been my charge to provide a safe, inclusive space. Everyone deserves a compassionate, patient-centered, high standard of quality care. I take pride in providing excellent dental care, and I am honored to serve the LGBTQ community. Thank you to all of the OUTSMART readers who voted for me and who have entrusted me with their oral health.”

The native Houstonian graduated *magna cum laude* from Texas State University in San Marcos with a BA in microbiology, and went on to the University of Texas School of Dentistry here in Houston.

“As a child, we never went to the dentist because my parents didn’t have dental insurance,” Corral says. “It was also difficult to find a Spanish-speaking dentist. I was inspired to go into dentistry because I realized there was a large community of underserved individuals who were not receiving proper dental care and oral-health education. There was a lack of both Hispanic and LGBTQ dental professionals.”

Corral has been an active member of the Houston Hispanic Dental Association for the last 13 years, including service as a board member and president.

In addition to volunteering to provide



PHOTOGRAPHY BY ALEX ROSA FOR OUTSMART

dental care in underserved communities throughout Texas, Mexico, and Houston, she’s a founding member of the nation’s first LGBTQ dental organization, the Houston Equality Dental Network. Corral also served on the board of the Executive & Professional Association of Houston, which is an LGBTQ philanthropic organization.

She joined the LGBTQ-friendly Bayou City Smiles practice after a friend introduced her to owner Dr. Marcus de Guzman over drinks at the old Café Adobe in 2003.

“On the day of my dental-school graduation, I’m in the car on my way to my reception and the phone rings. It’s Marc!” she recalls. “We meet up a week later, I join Bayou City Smiles, and the rest is history. Bayou City Smiles has an amazing team that genuinely cares about every patient that enters the office.”

She shares her life with Jessica Corral, her “gorgeous, smart, and loving wife.” They celebrated 20 years together earlier this year, and they have a 2-year-old daughter, Emilia, who wants to be a tooth fairy when she grows up.

Corral comes from a family of Mexican immigrants that was solely Spanish speaking. Her parents and grandparents were self-made entrepreneurs who found success in owning Mexican restaurants for many years.

“I’m the first college graduate and doctor in my family,” she says. “I owe my academic success to my parents, my sisters, and Jessica. They have always been my strongest advocates.”

“On a personal note, I lost my mom in June of this year, and I dedicate this award and recognition to her. My mother has always been my guide, my counselor, and a constant source of encouragement during all of the challenging moments in my journey. The greatest lessons and principles that I carry with me are not the ones that I learned in school, but the ones I learned from my mom at home.”

For information, visit [bayoucitysmiles.com](http://bayoucitysmiles.com)

# COMMUNITY

## BEST POLITICAL ADVOCACY GROUP

**Houston LGBTQ+ Political Caucus**  
Finalists: Equality Texas, HRC Houston, Legacy Takes Action, Victory Fund

## FAVORITE LGBTQ PHILANTHROPIC ORGANIZATION

**The Montrose Center**  
Finalists: Bunnies on the Bayou, Dalton DeHart Photographic Foundation, The Empire of the Royal Sovereign Imperial Court of the Single Star-ERSICSS, The Mahogany Project, Texas Gay Rodeo Association

## FAVORITE LOCAL LGBTQ COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION

**The Montrose Center**  
Finalists: Bunnies on the Bayou, Greater Houston LGBT Chamber of Commerce, Lambda Center, The Normal Anomaly Initiative, Out For Education

## FAVORITE LGBTQ SOCIAL GROUP

**Pride Bike Ride Houston**  
Finalists: AmistadesHTX, Bayou City Pups, EPAH, Diana Foundation, Hatch Youth, Houston Gaymers, Houston Queer Camp and Events, Out Professionals

## FAVORITE TRANS SUPPORT ORGANIZATION

**Transgender Education Network Texas (TENT)**  
Finalists: FLAS Trans Center, The Mahogany Project, Monica Roberts Resource Center, The Normal Anomaly Initiative, Organización Latina de Trans en Texas (OLTT), Save Our Sisters United, Trans Legal Aid Clinic of Texas, Transmasculine Alliance Houston

## FAVORITE PLACE TO WORSHIP

**Bering Church (UCC)**  
Finalists: Congregation Brith Shalom, Congregation Or Ami, Congregation Shma Koleinu, Kindred, Resurrection Metropolitan Community Church, St. Paul's United Methodist Church, St. Stephen's Episcopal Church, Trinity Episcopal Church, Unity Church of Houston

## FAVORITE LGBTQ SPORTS CLUB OR LEAGUE

**Montrose Softball League Association**  
Finalists: Houston Tennis Club,

Houston Women's Softball League, Lone Star Volleyball, Pride Sports Houston, Space City Rugby

## FAVORITE HIV/AIDS SUPPORT ORGANIZATION

**AIDS Foundation Houston**  
Finalists: AIDS Healthcare Foundation, Avenue 360 Health and Wellness - Midtown, Bering Omega Community Services, Legacy Community Health - Montrose Clinic, The Montrose Center, The Normal Anomaly Initiative, Positive Women's Network, PWA Holiday Charities, Ryan White Planning Council

## FAVORITE LGBTQ BENEFIT EVENT OF THE YEAR

**Bunnies on the Bayou**  
Finalists: Black Queer AF Festival, Mint Julep, Out for Good, Show Up & Out for Trans Youth (TENT), Victory Fund Brunch

## BEST HOUSTON CORPORATE LGBTQ DIVERSITY GROUP

**Chevron Corporation**  
Finalist: Accenture Houston Pride ERG, Amegy LGBTQ+ ERG, Emerson Automation Solutions, MDA Employee Group

## LOCAL BUSINESS MOST SUPPORTIVE OF THE LGBTQ COMMUNITY

**Pearl Bar (tie)**  
**BUDDY'S (tie)**  
Finalists: Dessert Gallery Bakery & Cafe, Eagle Houston, Hawthorne Capital, H-E-B

## NATIONAL BUSINESS MOST SUPPORTIVE OF THE LGBTQ COMMUNITY

**Target**  
Finalists: Bank of America, Southwest Airlines, United Airlines, Wells Fargo

## BEST COLLEGE OR UNIVERSITY

**University of Houston**  
Finalists: Houston Community College, Lone Star College, Prairie View A&M University, Rice University, Texas A&M University, University of Houston-Downtown (UHD)

## FAVORITE PROFESSIONAL SPORTS TEAM

**Houston Astros**  
Finalists: Houston Dash, Houston Dynamo, Houston Rockets, Houston SaberCats Rugby, Houston Texans

## BEST LOCAL LGBTQ NEWS SOURCE

**OutSmart magazine**  
Finalists: Montrose Star, Spectrum South →

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# Wedding Memories

Jay Clark loves to capture a couple's special moments on film.

By DAVID CLARKE

Photo by FRANK HERNANDEZ



"I take my work very seriously, and there's no room for error on my end."

That is the passion Jay Clark, who identifies as gay/queer, brings to every wedding he films and edits for

clients. Clark is this year's Gayest & Greatest winner for Best Wedding Videographer, Best Commercial Videographer, and a finalist for Best Wedding Photographer.

Clark's work begins as soon as he meets with his clients and learns what they are looking for in their wedding film. "I ask them, 'What are the most important moments to you?' [They might mention] the first look, the ceremony, or the first dance."

Clark captures the entire wedding day, of course, but he uses the clients' input to prioritize the narrative he builds for their wedding film. "As long as [I capture] those important moments, that's what they care most about."

Filming a wedding is not as simple as pointing a camera, though. It requires creative visual storytelling, knowledge of editing, and a deep understanding of each couple's personalities and desires.

"Every wedding is different. You always deal with a different venue, different couple, different personalities," Clark says. "So I just go with the flow, and see where the footage takes me."

Clark perfected his skills through a mentorship with his friend and wedding photographer Bryan Anderson. He also offered to do a few weddings for free, just to practice and build a portfolio. "Those clients loved [my work] so much they actually sent me checks in the mail," he recalls.

From those humble beginnings, Clark's



**BEST WEDDING VIDEOGRAPHER**

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business began to grow through word-of-mouth referrals. "My clients trust me and my vision," Clark says. "They love my work and editing style, and they love how I tell stories."

"One thing I learned about weddings is that you can have fun with it. Sometimes I'll take risks and maybe go in a different direction with the editing style."

The exacting editing process is where Clark gets to shine and set himself apart from his peers. "The way I approach it is to draw the viewers' attention within the first five to ten seconds," he explains. To pull this off, he'll start with a "wow" moment that may showcase a particularly emotional scene, a collection of his favorite photos from the day, or dazzling aerial shots of the wedding location.

"From there, I go about telling the story."

Yet, according to Clark, the secret ingredient in a quality wedding film is the music selection. "It's kind of a joke within the wedding filmmaker community," he says. "We spend 99 percent of the time looking for music, and 1 per-

cent of the time editing. The music really sets the tone for the whole film."

Sometimes clients will request a specific song that doesn't always work well with the editing. "I like for my songs to have high points, low points, some melodies, and some parts where it's just instrumental," he says. This allows him to play with adding in audio clips of the vows or speeches from the wedding day.

Although Clark has filmed hundreds of weddings in the last eight years, he hasn't yet had the opportunity to work with a same-sex couple—something he hopes to remedy soon. "I don't see [a same-sex wedding] being too much different from any other wedding," he says. "It comes down to just talking to the couple, seeing what's important to them, and learning what their needs are."



For information, visit [jayclarkfilms.com](http://jayclarkfilms.com).



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# The Money Man

## Meet the Montrose Center's Kennedy "Kent" Loftin.

By MARENE GUSTIN



Kennedy "Kent" Loftin, 41, is the Montrose Center's chief development officer—the money man who spearheaded the Center's \$27 million Law Harrington Senior Living Center. The 112-unit Third Ward apartment complex, which opened in 2021, is the second-largest LGBTQ-affirming senior-living center in the nation.

These days, the Montrose Center's Youth Rapid Rehousing program, which provides case management and rental assistance for LGBTQ youth ages 18–24, is Loftin's passion project. "For every \$2,500 we raise, we can take a youth off the streets," Loftin says.

He finds special meaning in that work since he's experienced housing insecurity himself, which caused him to delay his own coming out. "I knew my family was not going to be supportive, so I waited until I had a car and graduated college before I came out."

Born in the Texas Medical Center and raised in Houston, Loftin graduated from the University of St. Thomas with a bachelor's degree in international studies and nonprofit development. It was there that he worked with Best Buddies, an international nonprofit dedicated to ending the social, physical, and economic isolation of the 200 million people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. After graduating, he got a job at the organization's Miami headquarters.

"As the director of programs and special events for Best Buddies, I learned how to throw celebrity events for fundraising," Loftin says. "And Miami was a great place to be for a gay man fleeing Texas."

Then in 2006, at the age of 23, he returned home to Houston to serve as executive director for Best Buddies Texas. For the next three years, he was responsible for the development and implementation of their Texas state plan, overseeing day-to-day operations in all of the offices statewide, securing funding for programs and special projects, overseeing



programs to ensure program consistency and success, managing local advisory boards and associated committees, and supervising Texas staff.

In 2011, he became chief development officer at Interfaith Ministries of Greater Houston, where he led a \$15 million capital campaign for their new Interfaith Conference Center and the Meals on Wheels building that now serves over 4,000 seniors daily. Despite his success, he still felt the need to be closeted while at the faith-based nonprofit. Luckily, in 2015, the Montrose Center came calling to offer him his dream job.

As an executive at one of the largest LGBTQ resource centers in the country, he has launched two major crisis-relief programs in response to Hurricane Harvey in 2017 and the COVID pandemic in 2020. Over \$2.3 million was raised to help the LGBTQ community recover from Harvey, and \$1.5 million was raised to provide direct financial assistance to vulnerable members of the LGBTQ community affected by the pandemic.

Loftin is also a founding member of Mayor Turner's LGBTQ Advisory Board, has served on several boards, and is a sought-after development educator and advisor who lectures at both the University of Houston and at Rice University's Glasscock School Center for Philanthropy and Nonprofit Leadership.

But Loftin isn't resting on his laurels, and he still has some very important work to do. "The queer community doesn't have a philanthropy history," he explains. "The way to build that is through endowments. The Montrose Center has to have a campaign for every emergency that arises, like the Hurricane Harvey relief, because we don't have a large endowment like some other major nonprofits that we can tap

into. The Jewish community has an amazing philanthropy structure, and we need to emulate that.

"We need to build up our endowment, and that takes a knowledge of planned giving and finances. We have a lot of wealthy gay donors in this city with no kids who want to leave their money somewhere. And we want them to leave it to the Center."

Loftin is excited about the challenge of building a major endowment for the Montrose Center to create a more secure future for the nonprofit.

In the meantime, he enjoys traveling with his partner, restaurateur Charlie Huynh. They spent their first anniversary in Bali, and back at home they enjoy spending time with their adopted Corgi, Taro.

Loftin is also a member of the American Coaster Enthusiasts, and is hoping to get his 100th ticket on a roller coaster soon. There are a surprising number of LGBTQ roller-coaster enthusiasts in the organization. "There's just something about roller coasters," Loftin says. "My grandmother took us to theme parks as kids. Growing up, I thought I was the only gay guy in the world, but those theme parks were the best part of my childhood."

But his real thrill in life has turned out to be his community fundraising work. "I love my job. The whole reason I do this work is to inspire people."

For more information, visit [montrosecenter.org](http://montrosecenter.org)

**BEST LOCAL LGBTQ ONLINE RESOURCE**

**JD Doyle Archives**

Finalists: Greater Houston LGBT Chamber of Commerce, Lambda Center, The Montrose Center, OutSmart, The Ryan White Planning Council Blue Book

**BEST NATIONAL LGBTQ NEWS SOURCE**

**Advocate magazine**

Finalist: Instinct magazine

**BEST NATIONAL LGBTQ ONLINE RESOURCE**

**JD Doyle Archives**

Finalists: Lambda Center, OutProfessionals.org, TransAdvocate.com, The Trevor Project

**FAVORITE NATIONAL LGBTQ ORGANIZATION**

**Human Rights Campaign**

Finalists: Lambda Legal, LGBTQ Victory Fund, Metropolitan Community Churches, National Gay & Lesbian Chamber of Commerce, Out Professionals, Pride Portraits

**DINING OUT**

**BEST NEW RESTAURANT**

**Southern Yankee Crafthouse**

Finalists: Acadian Coast, Figo Sugo, 93' Til

**BEST FOOD TRUCK**

**Eagle Eats**

Finalists: BunSlut, Fries & Grind, Houston Sauce Pit, Taqueria Adrian, Yoyo's Hotdog Food Cart

**BEST 24-HOUR RESTAURANT**

**Katz's**

Finalists: Chapultepec Lupita, House of Pies, Spanish Flowers Mexican Restaurant, Voodoo Doughnut, Whataburger

**BEST BAKERY**

**Dessert Gallery**

Finalists: Common Bond Bistro & Bakery, Leona's Bakeshop, Sinfull Bakery, Sweets by Tony, Three Brothers Bakery

**BEST BARBECUE**

**The Pit Room**

Finalists: Brookstreet BBQ - Montrose, Demeris Bar-B-Q, Gattin's BBQ, Killen's Barbecue, Pinkerton's Barbecue, Truth BBQ

**BEST BREAKFAST**

**Baby Barnaby's**

Finalists: The Breakfast Klub, Harry's, Snooze an A.M. Eatery, The Toasted Yolk, Urban Eats, Yale Street Grill

**BEST BRUNCH**

**Riva's Italian Restaurant**

Finalists: Boheme, Gloria's Latin Cuisine, Hamburger Mary's, Harold's Restaurant, Bar & Rooftop Terrace, Hugo's, ReBar, Southern Yankee Crafthouse, Urban Eats

**BEST LUNCH SPOT**

**Barnaby's Cafe**

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**Katz's**  
Finalists: Brown Bag Deli, Jason's Deli, Kenny & Ziggy's New York Delicatessen, Spec's Wines, Spirits & Finer Foods, Urban Eats

**BEST DESSERTS**

**Dessert Gallery**  
Finalists: Common Bond Bistro & Bakery, The Chocolate Bar, Leona's Bakeshop, Michael's Cookie Jar, Sinfull Bakery, SweetCup, Sweets by Tony

**BEST HAMBURGER**

**Barnaby's Cafe**  
Finalists: The Burger Joint, Hamburger Mary's, Lankford's Grocery & Market, Someburger, Southern Yankee Craffthouse

**BEST HOT DOGS**

**Good Dog Houston**  
Finalists: Barnaby's Cafe, Minute Maid Park, What A Taco, Yoyo's Hotdog Food Cart

**BEST DUMPLINGS**

**Dumpling Dudez**  
Finalists: Auntie Chang's Dumpling House, Bao Shi Yi, Pho 518, Trendy Dumpling, Wanna Bao

**BEST PIZZA**

**Star Pizza**  
Finalists: Bambolino's, Bollo Woodfired Pizza, BUDDY'S, Luna Pizzeria, Meek's Vegan Pizza, Pink's Pizza, Pizaro's Pizza Napoletana

**BEST SEAFOOD**

**Acme Oyster House**  
Finalists: Acadian Coast, Brennan's of Houston, Le Colonial, Eugene's Gulf Coast Cuisine, Goode Company Seafood, Manny's Mexican Grill & Seafood, Pappadeaux Seafood Kitchen

**BEST STEAK HOUSE**

**B&B Butchers & Restaurant**  
Finalists: Fleming's Prime Steakhouse & Wine Bar, Pappas Bros. Steakhouse, Perry's Steakhouse & Grille, Saltgrass Steak House, Steak 48

**BEST STEAK NIGHT AT A BAR**

**BUDDY'S**  
Finalists: Around the Corner, Free Grillin', Pearl Bar

**BEST SUSHI**

**Uchi**  
Finalists: Kata Robata, MF Sushi, Oishii, Osaka, Sushi King

**BEST BRITISH**

**Red Lion British Pub**  
Finalists: McGonigel's Mucky Duck, The Richmond Arms Pub, Rudyard's

**BEST CAJUN**

**BB's Tex-Orleans**  
Finalists: Bayou City Seafood & Pasta, Brennan's of Houston, Pappadeaux Seafood Kitchen, Ragin' Cajun, Treebeards

**BEST CENTRAL/SOUTH AMERICAN**

**Gloria's Latin Cuisine**  
Finalists: Andes Cafe, Churrascos, Latin Bites, Morfi Argentino, Mi Pueblito

**BEST CHINESE**

**Café Ginger**  
Finalists: Ambassador, Auntie Chang's Dumpling House, Cooking Girl, Heights Asian Cafe, Mala Sichuan Bistro, The Rice Box

**BEST CUBAN**

**El Rey Taqueria**  
Finalists: Cafe Piquet, Flor de Cuba, El Meson

**BEST GREEK**

**Niko Niko's**  
Finalists: Anonymous Cafe, Chatter's Cafe & Bistro, Helen Greek Food & Wine, Mediterraneo, Phoenicia Specialty Foods

**BEST INDIAN**

**Tarka Indian Kitchen**  
Finalists: Govinda's Vegetarian Cuisine, Himalaya Restaurant, Khyber, Kiran's, Musaafer, Pondicheri

**BEST ITALIAN**

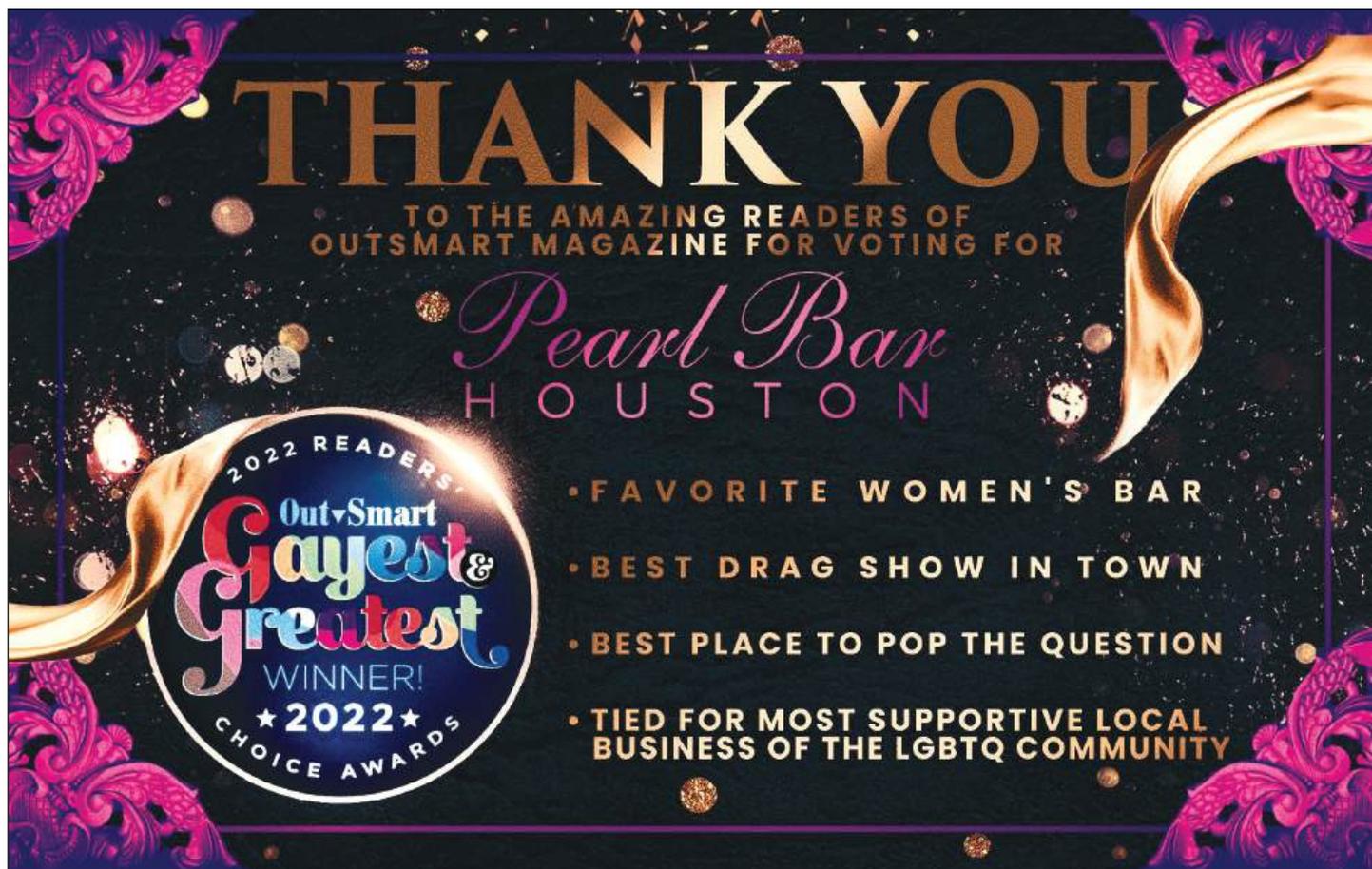
**Rivas (tie)**  
**Giacomo's Cibo e Vino (tie)**  
Finalists: Carrabba's, Cavatore Italian Restaurant, Figo Sugo, Postino - Montrose, Sorrento Ristorante, The Spaghetti Western

**BEST JAPANESE**

**Osaka**  
Finalists: Gyu-Kaku Japanese BBQ, Kata Robata, Mikoto, Nippon, Soma Sushi

**BEST MEXICAN**

**Tacos Doña Lena**  
Finalists: Candente, La Hacienda Restaurant, Hugo's, Original Ninfa's on Navigation, El Tiempo Cantina →





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# A Queer Radio Legacy

Bryan Hlavinka engages with the LGBTQ community as the host of 'Queer Voices.'

By LILLIAN HOANG



Bryan Hlavinka was recognized by OUTSMART readers with a Gayest & Greatest radio-host award for his work in uniting Houston's LGBTQ community. And *Queer Voices*, the radio show he executive produces, won this year's G&G Favorite Local LGBTQ Podcast award.

"To be recognized shows that people are listening," Hlavinka says. "In a radio show, you don't know who's listening in at any given time, so this shows we're making a difference in the community."

Hlavinka has delivered weekly news about the local LGBTQ community and events to listeners on *Queer Voices* for over a decade, and he became the show's executive producer in 2019.

Originally from Brazoria County, Hlavinka, 48, has lived in Houston since 1997. After many people in his life died due to complications from AIDS, he became involved as an activist in local groups and boards. He's currently on the boards of Legacy Community Health and Texas Pride Impact Funds, organizations dedicated to serving and enriching the lives of queer Texans.

Due to his heavy involvement in local LGBTQ community events, *Queer Voices* first reached out to him in 2008 and asked him to come on the show to promote a Bayou City Boys Club event. He was quickly asked to stay on, and has been a part of the production team ever since.

Queer music historian JD Doyle met Hlavinka when he joined *Queer Voices*. Doyle describes Hlavinka as a quick study and a

reliable colleague. "His talent has only grown since those early days, as he couples it with a desire to be involved in many parts of the community."

Hlavinka stayed on *Queer Voices* because of his love for gay radio in Houston.

"Our local voices are important. They provide a sense of community and touch listeners," Doyle explains. "For some listeners, they receive a first connection with the gay world through the safety of radio."

Hlavinka agrees, and wants to continue that legacy.

"*Queer Voices* has been around since the 1970s, and it's how activists have come together, and how our community has found information, guidance, and direction over the years. History is being lost, and I'd like to change that," he notes.

Every Friday at noon, Hlavinka brings community radio to the next generation by interviewing locals who discuss different organizations and passions—all in an effort to connect listeners to the Houston LGBTQ community. He recently spoke with Annise Parker, Houston's first openly gay mayor and the president and CEO of Victory Fund, a national organization committed to electing openly LGBTQ candidates.

He has an upcoming interview with an HIV vaccine-study participant, and he hopes to capture the experiences of many other queer Houstonians this year.

Initially, the *Queer Voices* broadcast could only reach the metro Houston area spanning from The Woodlands to Galveston. But under Hlavinka's leadership, *Queer Voices* started a podcast and now reaches a global audience, with returning listeners from France, Germany, and even Japan.

He hopes his winning the OUTSMART Favorite Male Community Radio Personality award (and *Queer Voices* winning the Favorite Local Podcast award) will underscore the legacy of community radio in Houston.

"There's been a program for almost 50 years, and it's lived through HIV and COVID and has helped us come together as a community. We hope to continue forever," he concludes.

Listen to *Queer Voices* every Friday at noon on KPFT 90.1 FM, or via the show's podcast.



For information, visit [queervoices.org](http://queervoices.org).

**BEST MIDDLE EASTERN/  
MEDITERRANEAN**

**Aladdin Mediterranean Cuisine**  
Finalists: Fadi's, Halal Guys, Hamsa,  
Mary'z Mediterranean Cuisine,  
Phoenicia Specialty Foods

**BEST THAI**

**Street Food Thai Market**  
Finalists: Khun Kay, Kin Dee,  
Nidda Thai Cuisine, Street to Kitchen,  
Thai Village

**BEST VIETNAMESE**

**Mai's**  
Finalists: Hughie's, Huynh, Jenni's  
Noodle House, Kim Son, Pho 518

**BEST RESTAURANT FOR  
OUTDOOR DINING**

**Postino Montrose**  
Finalists: Baby Barnaby's, Candente,  
Giacomo's Cibo e Vino,  
Harold's Restaurant, Bar & Rooftop  
Terrace, Southern Yankee Crafthouse

**BEST VEGETARIAN/VEGAN**

**Hobbit Cafe**  
Finalists: green seed vegan, Govinda's  
Vegetarian Cuisine, Korny Vibes,  
Shiv Sagar, Sinfull Bakery, Verdine

**BEST RESTAURANT FOR AFFORDABLE EATS**

**Barnaby's Cafe**  
Finalists: Gloria's Latin Cuisine, Oishii,  
Raising Cane's Chicken Fingers,  
Tacos Doña Lena, Taqueria Laredo

**BEST PLACE FOR A ROMANTIC DATE**

**Bludorn**  
Finalists: B&B Butchers & Restaurant,  
BCN Taste & Tradition, Brennan's of Houston,  
Cavatore Italian Restaurant

**BEST RESTAURANT FOR ELEGANT DINING**

**Brennan's of Houston**  
Finalists: B&B Butchers & Restaurant,  
Eddie V's Prime Seafood, March, Perry's  
Steakhouse & Grille, Ruth's Chris Steak House

**BEST RESTAURANT FOR HAPPY HOUR FOOD**

**Urban Eats**  
Finalists: Aka Sushi House, Eunice,  
Federal American Grill, La Griglia,  
Moxies Houston, Oishii, Sushi King

**BEST LOCAL LGBTQ CHEF**

**NaTosha Barber**  
Finalists: David Alcorta, Joey Cantu, Dylan  
Carnes, Christopher Loera, Greg Montelero

**BEST COOKING CLASS**

**Dumpling Dudez**  
Finalists: 210 Fusion Cuisine,  
Sylvia's Enchilada Kitchen

**FAVORITE LOCAL LGBTQ-OWNED  
RESTAURANT**

**Barnaby's Cafe (tie)**  
**Tacos Doña Lena (tie)**  
Finalists: Hamburger Mary's, Harold's  
Restaurant, Bar & Rooftop Terrace, Pho  
518, Urban Eats

**FRIENDLIEST RESTAURANT STAFF**

**Barnaby's Cafe**  
Finalists: Figo Sugo, Southern Yankee  
Crafthouse, Tacos Doña Lena, Urban Eats

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**Postino Montrose**  
Finalists: a'Bouzy, Boheme, 13 celsius,  
Light Years, MAX's Wine Dive

**FAVORITE PLACE FOR DRINKS  
ON A FIRST DATE**

**JR's Bar & Grill**  
Finalists: BUDDY'S, Eagle Houston,  
Michael's Outpost, Pearl Bar

**FAVORITE FEMALE BARTENDER**

**Sarah McCoy**  
Finalists: Raci Farris, Vivian Little,  
Gia Marie Martinez, Kristina Prats,  
Reyna Rodriguez

**FAVORITE MALE BARTENDER**

**Charles Garibay**  
Finalists: Brandon Akridge, Daniel Banda,  
Julio Briceño, Michael Engelke, Aaron Latour,  
Bryan Wade

**FAVORITE NONBINARY BARTENDER**

**Uly Money**  
Finalist: Crystal Murley

**BEST COCKTAIL**

**Michael's Outpost**  
Finalists: Anvil Bar, Eagle Houston,  
JR's Bar & Grill, Pearl Bar,  
Southern Yankee Crafthouse

**BEST MARGARITA**

**El Tiempo Cantina**  
Finalists: Buddy's, Eagle Houston,  
Gloria's Latin Cuisine, La Tapatia Mexican Cafe

**BEST MOCKTAILS**

**BUDDY'S**  
Finalists: Crocker Bar, Eagle Houston,  
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**Eureka Heights Brew Co. (tie)**  
Finalists: Buffalo Bayou Brewing Co.,  
Frost Town Brewing, Saint Arnold Brewing  
Company, Southern Yankee Beer Company

**FAVORITE LOCAL CRAFT BEER,  
CIDER, OR SELTZER**

**Eureka Heights Brew Co.**  
Finalists: Cidercade Houston,  
Frost Town Brewing, Houston Cider Company,  
Local Group Brewing, Southern Yankee  
Beer Company

**FAVORITE NATIONAL BRAND OF BEER,  
CIDER, OR SELTZER**

**Modelo (tie)**  
**Bud Light (tie)**  
Finalists: Angry Orchard, Guinness,  
Michelob Ultra, White Claw

**FAVORITE BRAND OF LIQUOR**

**FIX Vodka**  
Finalists: Deep Eddy Vodka,  
Don Cosmé Tequila,  
Dripping Springs Distilling,  
EFFEN Vodka, Tito's Handmade Vodka

**HEALTH &  
BEAUTY**

**BEST COMMUNITY HEALTH SERVICES  
PROVIDER**

**Legacy Community Health**  
Finalists: AIDS Foundation Houston, Avenue 360,  
Ronald R. Buescher, Gordon E. Crofoot,  
The Montrose Center, Wellness Bar by Legacy

**BEST MEN'S HEALTH CLINIC**

**Gordon E. Crofoot**  
Finalists: AHF Healthcare Center - Binz,  
Avenue 360 Health and Wellness - Heights,  
Ronald R. Buescher, Village Medical,  
Wellness Bar by Legacy

**BEST WOMEN'S HEALTH CLINIC**

**Planned Parenthood**  
Finalists: Avenue 360,  
Legacy Community Health

**BEST URGENT OR EMERGENCY CARE  
CENTER**

**Montrose 24 Hour ER (tie)**  
**SignatureCare (tie)**  
Finalists: Concentra Urgent Care,  
Houston Methodist Emergency Care Center,  
Next Level Urgent Care

**BEST PHARMACY**

**Legacy Community Health Pharmacy**  
Finalists: AHF Pharmacy, Avenue 360  
Health and Wellness Pharmacy - Heights,  
Avita Pharmacy - Bellaire, H-E-B Pharmacy,  
Scott Read Pharmacy, Walgreens Pharmacy  
at CrofootMD

**BEST FEMALE PHYSICIAN**

**Jeannie Banh**  
Finalists: Elizabeth Horvath, Julia Kovacs,  
Jessica Pearce, Patricia Salvato,  
M. Sandra Scurria, Natalie Vanek

**BEST MALE PHYSICIAN**

**Gordon Crofoot**  
Finalists: Ronald Buescher,  
James Carroll, Terence Chang,  
Abel Flores, Ronald Lopez-Cepero

**BEST FEMALE PHYSICIAN'S ASSISTANT  
(PA)/NURSE PRACTITIONER**

**Maggie White**  
Finalists: Michelle DeSalvo, Elizabeth Horvath,  
Kelli Krisp, Jessie Pawvelek, Mary Shepard

**BEST MALE PHYSICIAN'S ASSISTANT  
(PA)/NURSE PRACTITIONER**

**Derek Smith**  
Finalists: Daniel Arellano, John Chapman,  
Kendrick Clack, Greg Cupit, Paul Simmons

**FAVORITE FEMALE NURSE**

**Christina Wells**  
Finalists: Tamra Bradley,  
Kimberly Hase, Priscilla Presson,  
Christine R. Raby, Nina Saltzman

**FAVORITE MALE NURSE**

**Adam Sirico**  
Finalists: Ryan Balbas, Buddy Bell,  
Carlos Contreras, Robert Couchman,  
Morgan Guillory

**BEST MENTAL HEALTH PRACTICE**

**Ajana Therapy & Clinical Services**  
Finalists: The Montrose Center,  
Pinkerton Psychotherapy,  
Southwest Psychotherapy Associates

**BEST MENTAL HEALTH THERAPIST/  
PSYCHIATRIST**

**Chad Lemaire (tie)**  
**Dan Garza (tie)**  
Finalists: Michael Barber,  
Robert Scott, Daryl Shorter

**BEST FEMALE MENTAL HEALTH  
THERAPIST/PSYCHOLOGIST**

**Leah Singer**  
Finalists: Megan Mooney, Betsy Vasquez →



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# Super-Shero

Atlantis Narcisse lifts up Black trans women through her SOSU nonprofit.

By LILLIAN HOANG



Verniss McFarland, an LGBTQ activist, has heady praise for Atlantis Narcisse: “She is, and always will be, the hardest working woman in the community. She is the definition of community meeting purpose, and what happens when people operate in genuine love.”

McFarland continues, “Atlantis is the chosen mother of many queer Houstonians of all experiences, including myself. Her ability to provide unconditional love and compassion during some of the most vulnerable times of her life is an embodiment of selfless giving. She is Houston’s queer mother, a goddess, and a super-shero!”

OUTSMART readers have also noted her contributions to the local LGBTQ community by voting Narcisse, a Houston native and trans woman, as this year’s Female Trans Community Hero.

“To be acknowledged while I’m alive is important because it normalizes that we exist and that we’re out here doing great things,” Narcisse says.

She admits, “I never intended on becoming an activist. I just wanted to show people that, ‘Hey, someone is in your corner.’”

Narcisse has worked with the Montrose Center, Legacy Community Health, and the City of Houston since the early 1990s. She once organized accessible HIV/STD testing in her home, working with a local clinic to provide people with a way to find support from other HIV-positive individuals. “It opened up a conversation to normalize talking about what their needs and experiences were, without all the stigma attached,” she says.

Narcisse also organizes events like Black Trans Empowerment week with McFarland, the founder of The Mahogany Project, Inc. (TMP), a nonprofit dedicated to TQLGB+ people in Houston.



FAVORITE  
FEMALE  
TRANS  
COMMUNITY  
HERO

LEADING  
TRANS  
COMMUNITY  
FUNDRAISER

FEMALE  
TRANS  
COMMUNITY  
VOLUNTEER

She founded Save Our Sisters United, Inc. (SOSU) in 2017 and, three years later, Save Our Sons & Brothers. Both groups provide trans people with safe spaces to connect and find trans-friendly services.

“SOSU is supposed to be a place where we can share our stories, shed our shame, and see our strength,” she emphasizes. The group launched a COVID relief fund that distributed over \$200,000 to help trans people during the pandemic and Winter Storm Uri.

Narcisse is excited to launch a new project at SOSU called Affirming Lives Initiative, which will help trans people cover the costs of correcting their names and gender markers on government documents.

Although she will never stop advocating,

Narcisse feels the stress of constantly assisting people who face daily discrimination and violence. She hopes that, with this G&G award, people realize that activism is a highly challenging calling. “It would be nice if people saw the body that does the work, and not just the body of work.”

Narcisse hopes that one day soon, trans people will get to walk through the world as whole human beings. “Rather than being identified [in medical terms], as though that’s all we are, I hope people will remember that we’re human beings.”

▶ For information, visit SOSU at [sosuinc.org](http://sosuinc.org).

**BEST MALE MENTAL HEALTH THERAPIST/PSYCHOLOGIST**  
**Denis "Woodja" Flanigan**  
 Finalist: Hiram Rivera Mercado

**BEST FEMALE MENTAL HEALTH THERAPIST**  
**Jessica Eiseman**  
 Finalists: Tara Bates, Candice Holloway, Denise O'Doherty, Andrea Washington

**BEST MALE MENTAL HEALTH THERAPIST**  
**Ty David Lerman**  
 Finalists: Shane Hennesey, Robert Snellgrove, Andrew Tessmer

**BEST NONBINARY MENTAL HEALTH THERAPIST**  
**Thomas Owsley**  
 Finalists: Nakita Bowman, Noel Gonzalez, ks Stanley

**BEST MALE DENTIST**  
**Marcus De Guzman (tie)**  
**Sam Carrell (tie)**  
 Finalists: Alex Barrera, John Dioquino, Austin Faulk, Randy Mitchmore

**BEST FEMALE DENTIST**  
**Cynthia Corral**  
 Finalists: Daniella Farias, Melicia Tjoa

**FAVORITE FEMALE DENTAL HYGIENIST**  
**Hifa Taha/Montrose DDS**  
 Finalists: Chriszelda/Bayou City Smiles, Karla/Bayou City Smiles, Kate/Bayou City Smiles, Magda/Bayou City Smiles, Jennifer McCrary/Avenue 360 Health & Wellness

**FAVORITE MALE DENTAL HYGIENIST**  
**Tu Tuu/Bayou City Smiles**

**BEST FEMALE EYE DOCTOR**  
**Nancy Lo**  
 Finalists: Juliet Farmer, Rosa Kim, April Oliver/Today's Vision

**BEST MALE EYE DOCTOR**  
**Paul Lovero**  
 Finalists: Bimal Patel, Marc Sanders, Scott Sawyer, Stewart Zuckerbrod

**BEST CHIROPRACTOR**  
**Alexia McClerkin**  
 Finalists: Matt Arnold/Airrostri - Heights, Fernando Franco, NuSpine Chiropractic

**BEST FOOT DOCTOR**  
**Vanessa Barrow**  
 Finalists: Paul Gee, Gian Steinhauer/Caring Foot and Ankle Specialists

**BEST YOGA STUDIO**  
**Black Swan Yoga Houston (tie)**  
**BIG Power Yoga - Montrose (tie)**  
 Finalists: SPENGA Houston Montrose, STRETCH Studio of Houston, Tamika's Ranch

**BEST FERTILITY CLINIC/ SURROGACY SERVICES**  
**Aspire Houston Fertility Institute**  
 Finalists: CCRM Fertility of Houston, The Family Fertility Center at Texas Children's Pavilion for Women, SGF Houston - Texas Medical Center

**BEST PHYSICAL THERAPIST**  
**Roy Rivera**  
 Finalists: Jon Koborsi, Huzefa Tayabali-Wilson

**BEST FEMALE MASSAGE THERAPIST**  
**Afton Macione/Cruz Family Chiropractic**  
 Finalists: Tamia Anderson, Kim Stacy/Integrated Massage Services

**BEST MALE MASSAGE THERAPIST**  
**Ryan Fugate**  
 Finalists: Chris Tognetti/Life Time Fitness, John Aaron Villarreal, Tom Zeppelin

**BEST NONBINARY MASSAGE THERAPIST**  
**Robin Mack**

**BEST FEMALE PERSONAL TRAINER**  
**Monique Freeman**  
 Finalists: Melanie Jackson, Felicia Lee-Sexton, Kimberly Marler, Danielle Sampey

**BEST MALE PERSONAL TRAINER**  
**Christopher Lucas**  
 Finalists: Layn Chess, Oscar Gutierrez, Andrew Hayes, Eliot Perez, Gian Quiteno, John Aaron Villarreal

**BEST NONBINARY PERSONAL TRAINER**  
**Bree Turner**

**BEST GYM**  
**SPENGA Houston Montrose**  
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# A Stellar 47-Year History

Houston's LGBTQ+ Political Caucus advocates for inclusion and change.

By RYAN M. LEACH



The Caucus has once again been named OUTSMART's Best Political Advocacy Group for 2022. This should come as no surprise, as the Caucus has, for the last several

decades, led the way in holding elected officials accountable to the LGBTQ+ community and supporting queer candidates—an important task in a state like Texas.

“The Caucus originally started in 1975 as a grassroots organization dedicated to serving the LGBTQ+ community,” says Caucus President Jovon Alfon B. “LuJack” Tyler. “When no one else was advocating for us and giving us a seat at the table, we took it upon ourselves to ensure that our voices were heard and that our community was served. Throughout our history, we have never strayed from that. We have consistently shown up in political spaces and demanded that the LGBTQ+ community be given our due.”

Tyler himself had been involved with the Caucus before he was elected to lead the organization in 2020. He served as a board member (the organization's youngest ever) from 1994 to 1998, working alongside other Caucus greats like Lane Lewis, Terri Richardson, and Pat Gandy. He also carries on the legacy of his mother, former Houston mayor Annise Parker, who led the Caucus during her early years as a community activist.

“The Caucus continues to be one of the most sought-after and well-respected endorsements in Houston's political landscape. We ensure that the LGBTQ+ community not only has a voice, but that our elected officials actually listen. *That* is what allows us to continue affecting meaningful change for the LGBTQ+ community—whether that be striking down anti-trans laws in the Texas legislature or ensuring better monkeypox vaccine distribution locally,” says Tyler.



PHOTOGRAPHY BY ALEX ROSA FOR OUTSMART

Caucus President Jovon Alfon B. “LuJack” Tyler

Indeed, the Caucus has earned its reputation as a must-have endorsement for progressive candidates. Voters of all types turn to the Caucus to guide them in casting their ballots, and it is often those pro-LGBTQ votes that can make or break a campaign. In traditionally purple Houston, wins and losses are often determined by very small margins.

But more than political clout, the Caucus also provides an opportunity for community growth. Former Caucus president Fran Watson recalls how the Caucus was there for her during some tough political times.

“During my presidency in 2017, there was pain. We had just lost the HERO [referendum at the polls]. The Pulse nightclub massacre happened. I was proud to be surrounded by people who all came together during such trying times,” says Watson.

The Caucus has endured much, and continues to fight against the headwinds of an increasingly far-right Texas legislative agenda. What keeps the Caucus going is Houston's LGBTQ community that encourages everyone to take part in the movement.

An important focus for Tyler has been diversifying the Caucus leadership team. In June, the Caucus elected the first Black trans

woman, Joëlle Espeut, to the board, and in July they added more trans representation on the board with René Mendiola's election.

They have also actively recruited more women and gender-expansive individuals to serve on the wider leadership team so that the Caucus leadership better reflects the diversity of the community. But there is always room to do more.

“This may sound simple, but what we really need is more young folks,” Tyler notes. “We are blessed to have extremely seasoned Caucus members that have been active for decades. Many of them lived through critical parts of Houston's LGBTQ+ history and were around for events like Anita Bryant, Town Meeting 1, and the first Pride parade. We need younger members [that we] can pass the baton to.”

“Don't get me wrong—we do have some amazing younger members that are extremely talented in what they do and what they bring to the organization. But we need more to ensure the work and the legacy of the Caucus lives on.”



For information, visit [thecaucus.org](http://thecaucus.org).



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# Devoted to Justice

**Januari Fox is a longtime advocate for the LGBTQ community.**

By MARENE GUSTIN

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ALEX ROSA FOR OUTSMART



Januari Fox is a two-time winner of the Gayest & Greatest Most Valuable Female Volunteer award. “This just means so much to me,” says the 46-year-old community advocate. “I have the one from last year framed on my wall.”

The Dallas native is the director of policy and advocacy at Prism Health North Texas, which is based in Dallas, but she works remotely from her Houston home. Prism Health North Texas is an organization aimed at providing HIV education, research, prevention, and personalized care. Fox advocates for legislation at the state and federal level that affects those within the LGBTQ community and those diagnosed with HIV/AIDS.

But she does much more than that on her own time. “I consider my professional work and personal work to overlap, because I believe in a life of service,” Fox says. “My parents will tell you I’ve always been a busy person.”

Fox holds a BA in social science, sociology, and political science from the University of Houston-Downtown, and a master’s degree in social work from the University of Houston.

“My social work is more macro than clinical,” Fox says. “My work is aligned with my

values around social justice.” But she doesn’t stop there. “When I feel down, I volunteer,” Fox says. “It’s my civic duty. I love arts and culture, and I’m a big supporter. I have a lot of friends who are artists, and I support them. I always say the dead artists don’t need your money, so support the living ones.”

She frequently attends MATCH events to support Houston’s smaller performing-arts groups. And she’s committed to serving communities most impacted by health inequities as a grassroots policy advocate and community organizer.

She also co-chairs the Education and Advocacy Committee, along with Christyna Lewis, for the Houston LGBTQ+ Political Caucus. The Caucus is the oldest queer civil-rights organization in the South, having been founded in 1975.

“If there is an issue that people need more information about, we can help with that,” Fox says. This might involve speaking about LGBTQ equality at school-board meetings and other events.

Fox was on the board of Grace Place for three years, and still volunteers with that drop-in facility for homeless and housing-

insecure queer youth, providing them with meals, Wi-Fi access, toiletries, housing recommendations, and legal aid. She counsels the young people there on a weekly basis.

Fox is also a volunteer deputy registrar who can register voters wherever she finds them, at the drop of a hat.

Her accolades include being named one of OUTSMART’s Top Allies of 2016, sitting on Mayor Turner’s LGBTQ Advisory Board that same year, and being part of Leadership Houston’s Class 34.

“I’m a borderline introvert/extrovert,” she says. “I do so much, and then I have to go quiet. That means cooking at home and watching a movie with my kids, four cats, and one dog. My home is also my art haven.

“I try very hard to honor the LGBTQ+ world as an ally,” Fox says. “My daughter identifies as LGBTQ, which has just grown my devotion to justice for the community over the years.”

Follow Januari Fox at [facebook.com/januarileo](https://www.facebook.com/januarileo)

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# A Taste of Romance

**Bludorn** has everything you need for an intimate dinner date.

By **MARENE GUSTIN**  
 Photos by **JULIE SOEFER**



Bludorn, the winner of this year's Best Place for a Romantic Date, is the eponymous Montrose restaurant of chef Aaron Bludorn and his wife, Victoria Pappas Bludorn. Their building on Taft Street that housed the original Antone's for 40 years (and later the Pass & Provisions restaurant) is now dressed in mid-century touches with natural woods, neutral tones, and a painted mural.

The Bludorns met when he was an up-and-coming chef at Café Boulud in Manhattan, and she worked at Boulud's Dinex Group on the operations side. He is from the Pacific Northwest, and she, of course, is the Houston daughter of Pappas Restaurants co-founder Chris Pappas. It was a match made in restaurant heaven, and when they decided to open their own eatery after getting married, they came to Houston to do it.

For her, it was a homecoming, and for him, it was a chance to create an eatery in an exciting restaurant city with a creative culinary climate. With Victoria running the operation and Aaron in the kitchen, it seemed like a perfect plan.

But it turned out to be a rough start in early 2020, with an old building to renovate, the birth of a first child to prepare for, and the pandemic that changed everything. Before they were able to open that August, they had to expand their patio seating and space out the interior tables for COVID safety.

Luckily, the restaurant was an instant hit in late 2020, both for its food and the lovely space. But while the reception has been better than expected, the Bludorns haven't been resting on their laurels. The couple now has a second son,

and they are planning to open a second restaurant next month.

"It will be a seafood restaurant in Rice Village," Aaron says. "We're calling it Navy Blue. My father was a fighter pilot in the Navy and his call sign was Blue, so it's very fitting."

Their original restaurant changes its menu seasonally and also offers seafood. The dining room boasts a decadent seafood tower stacked

with oysters, lobster tail, uni, tuna, and shrimp. Salmon or blackened grouper entrées round out the seafood offerings.

Both the seafood and poultry entrées (including chicken and duck) are all sourced from local sustainable farms and the Gulf of Mexico. Chef Bludorn visits several local farmers markets and has built relationships with area farmers and ranchers.

Signature dishes at Bludorn include a dry-aged beef burger and their famous lobster pot pie with charred corn, roasted poblano crawfish, and lime crème fraîche. Specialty wines, curated by wine director Molly Austad, include everything from a French Chablis to a Napa Valley Cab.

When asked for dinner suggestions, Bludorn recommends starting with the oysters—"raw, fried, and baked. Share a pasta, maybe the popular braised short rib ravioli, and an entrée. And of course, finish with our Baked Alaska for two."

The couple's restaurant is being recognized this year by OUTSMART readers for its romantic atmosphere. While the elegant menu and soft decor are key features, Chef Bludorn notes a third critical element needed for a romantic evening. "What also makes it a romantic spot is the level of service. We make sure to listen to our guests. We take pride in our level of care, concern, and consistency."



Duck Breast



Chef Aaron and Victoria Bludorn

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**Shoshuna Akerman**  
Finalists: Lana Blake, Sylvia Perez,  
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**Hollywood Hair & Nails Salon**  
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**BEST NAIL TECHNICIAN**

**Adam Gutierrez**  
Finalists: Liz Brooks, Roxsann Lavan,  
William Medrano

**BEST TATTOO ARTIST**

**Stephanie Purnell**  
Finalists: Dan Martin, Megan Medina,  
Nadia Munoz

**BEST TATTOO PARLOR**

**The Electric Chair Tattoo & Body Piercing**  
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**Patrick McNamara**  
Finalist: Octavio Barrios

# HOUSE & HOME

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Riaz Pooran, Lacie Smith

**BEST MALE INSURANCE AGENT**

**Jacob Creadeur (tie)**  
**Lane Lewis (tie)**  
Finalists: Bryan Cotton, Jeremy Henry,  
Modern Risk Management, Patrick Torma

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Diamond Heating and Air Conditioning,  
NewPort A/C & Heating

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Finalist: MET Plumbing

**BEST ELECTRICIAN**

**Justin Chipman**  
Finalist: Justin Rubio/Rubio Electric

**BEST FLOOR COVERING COMPANY**

**Floor Coverings International**  
Finalist: Manchester Carpet

**BEST INTERIOR DESIGN COMPANY**

**Eklektik Interiors**  
Finalists: Christopher Charles Interiors,  
Emmanuel Leventis Design, Jacob Medina  
Interior Design, Jean Quila, Corbin Young

**BEST LANDSCAPING COMPANY/ LANDSCAPER**

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**Johnny Steele Design (tie)**  
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Nickal's Landscaping, Thompson+Hanson  
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Finalist: American Swimming Pool  
of Central Houston

**BEST FURNITURE STORE**

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# From the Farm Fields to the Courtroom

Attorney Luis Ruiz's humble beginnings make his journey even more impressive.

By JENNY BLOCK



When Luis Ruiz was a pre-teen, he was a farm worker who traveled throughout the East Coast picking oranges, zucchini, apples, onions, cucumbers, and the like. He witnessed just how horribly undocumented people were treated.

"It sparked a fire inside of me," says Ruiz, winner of the Best Human-Rights Attorney and a finalist for Best Immigration Attorney in the Gayest & Greatest awards.

"I decided that I wanted a seat at the table and a little bit of the power that the United States offers, so that I could help out my community."

He now has that seat after earning a bachelor's degree from the University of Houston and a law degree from the University of Houston Law Center. Ruiz is the founder of Luis Ruiz Law, where he and his team focus exclusively on immigration cases that involve family petitions, waivers, and self-petitions for crime victims.

Born in Tizapan El Alto, Jalisco, Mexico, Ruiz was brought to the US as a two-year-old and raised in the Houston area. "This is where I have chosen to establish my businesses and serve the community," he says.

As a gay immigrant himself, Ruiz says he has a unique understanding of the issues that members of the LGBTQ community face in legal proceedings. "Many of our clients are discriminated against by other attorneys, who incorrectly claim that because the couple is LGBTQ, their cases are harder to prove by the government agencies that are tasked with adjudicating the petitions we file. We see immigration officers' biases—and occasionally, blatant homophobia—come out during the adjudication process.

"As LGBTQ people, we face discrimination and bias from other people. As an LGBTQ attorney, I make sure to use my privilege to protect the rights of my clients and demand the respect that all people deserve."

Ruiz helps LGBTQ clients who have been victims of a crime to obtain lawful status through special programs for crime victims, as well as binational couples where one party is a US citizen or permanent resident and the other is a foreign citizen. "Our office helps the foreign citizen obtain legal status to be in the United States with their spouse. We have been proud to help many LGBTQ couples either be reunited or gain the peace of mind that they will not be separated," he says.

Ruiz understands why LGBTQ clients feel

more comfortable when other LGBTQ people are helping them, particularly when it comes to sensitive legal matters. "It brings peace of mind to know that the person helping you understands the unique struggles that we face as LGBTQ people, and has a shared life experience. That makes it easier to communicate openly. This is the same energy and insight we bring to all of our clients. We understand. We have been there. We can help."

Because he and his team work with a lot of crime victims, the work that they do can take a toll on their mental health. So, as a firm, they plan team-building events outside of the office. In addition, Ruiz enjoys reading, going to museums, and spending time with friends and family.

But in spite of the stress of his high-stakes profession, it's clear that Ruiz has found his calling. "I am a queer brown immigrant, and helping my people makes me happy. Protecting their rights and interests brings me satisfaction that I cannot put into words."

▶ For information, visit [luisruizlaw.com](http://luisruizlaw.com).

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# All in the Family

**Noble Contractor Solutions**  
makes dream homes a reality.

By DAVID CLARKE



Noble Contractor Solutions—founded, owned, and operated by openly gay contracting professional BJ Johnson—is committed to ensuring every client's project becomes their dream home by the time their work is done.

It's that attitude that has earned Johnson this year's Best Home Remodeling Company G&G award.

Johnson and his team attend to every detail to ensure that everything matches, is of quality, is contemporary and fresh, and is personal to the client. "When we leave a house, it should look like we were never there—except that [our client] now lives in a very current home."

While working for a builder in New York City in 2016, Johnson decided to start his own business while he was attending that year's Pride parade. "People go to New York to make their dreams come true," he says, "but I was already there—and decided to come back home to make my dream come true."

As a teenager, Johnson dreamed of being a famous movie star or model. But by 2015 when he was 34, he was a vice president of sales for a home builder, knew a lot about construction, and was loving it.

"I was born in 1981, before car seats and everything," says Johnson. "The first toy my dad gave me was a wooden hammer with a metal head on it. It was a little baby hammer—before all the rules about baby safety."

Johnson's father was a home builder who worked for his uncle, so as a teenager, Johnson worked alongside his father. With family connections to the industry, it's easy to understand why home building is so personal and meaningful to him.



BJ Johnson



Johnson now sees Nobel Contractor Solutions as a tribute to his father, who is still alive and a very active part of his life. "[This business] was just something my dad taught me as a kid, and I guess it reminds me a lot of him."

Johnson also sees himself as a disruptor in the industry. "[Contractors] don't necessarily have the best reputation," he admits. "They're kind of frowned upon, like mechanics, car salesmen, or attorneys." He combats this by being personable and using what he calls his "good gay genes" to transform his clients' most intimate and personal spaces.

"You get to go [into peoples' homes] and help them make their dreams come true," Johnson says of his work. No matter the scale of the project, he recognizes how stressful it can be for his clients—an insight he gained while touring a window manufacturing facility. "When you start taking out windows, it's like you're performing heart surgery," he explains, "and it's a lot of stress for people."

As a contractor, Johnson makes sure that his process is as enjoyable for clients as possible. "I always caution them in the beginning by saying, 'I want you to know that you love me right now, but there are some days where it's going to be difficult, and you just have to speak to me,'" he says.

Fortunately, he prioritizes listening to his clients throughout the project. "The best thing I can do is listen. That way, they're telling me what they want, what their needs are, and I can truly make sure that both their dreams and their needs are met."



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# Identifying Outside the Box

Nonbinary bartender Uly Money looks beyond identity labels.

By MARENE GUSTIN

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ALEX ROSA FOR OUTSMART



There are a lot of great bartenders in the gayborhood, but Ulysses “Uly” Money, this year’s G&G Favorite Nonbinary Bartender, stands out.

“I go by nonbinary,” the 26-year-old native Houstonian says, “because there is a lot that goes into how you identify. It’s not just sexuality. I don’t have any preferred pronouns, and I never really even came out to my parents. I asked my mom one day if I needed to come out to her, and she just said, ‘No need.’”

Money came to bartending in an unusual way. He was working as a janitor at Theatre Under The Stars, doing paint touchups and such—what he calls “keeping the place pretty.” One night he was at the North Montrose gay bar Guava Lamp and met the owner through a friend. “He was like, ‘Hey, you’re hot, do you want to work here?’” Money didn’t even know how to mix drinks, but he agreed to let the owner teach him.

Unfortunately, that was just two weeks before the pandemic closed every bar in Texas.

Guava Lamp never reopened.

When the bar scene did come back to Houston that fall, Money wound up at Michael’s Outpost. “They were complaining they were under-staffed, and when I said hire me, they did!”

Michael’s Outpost has been a staple of Houston’s queer nightlife since 1989. Originally opened by Michael Gaitz, it is now owned by his brother and sister-in-law, Charles and Denise Gaitz. Michael’s niece, Tonya Gaitz, is the bar’s business manager.

In the bar’s early days when they struggled to find talented piano players, Money was worried that he might even need to learn to play the piano and sing for the customers. That would have been an ordeal because of his social anxiety—not something you’d expect to find in a bartender.

“Bartending is actually great for me because there is a physical barrier between me and the customer,” he explains. “So I am very relaxed and able to chat with strangers, and I can even threaten to cut them off if they aren’t nice to the other customers.

“What I really like about Michael’s Outpost is that it is just very laid back. I have met so many phenomenal and interesting people here. And I dare you to try and find another good old-fashioned piano bar anywhere else!”

But bartending isn’t his ultimate goal. As a student at Houston Community College studying biology, he’s interested in doing research, becoming “a lab rat,” and getting involved with the political side of agriculture.

In the meantime, you can catch Money at Michael’s almost every night. “Come hang out at Michael’s and see me!” he says. “Come on Tuesdays for the show—it’s quirky and funny.” The bar’s resident drag queen and cast member Carmina Vavra hosts those Tuesday Laugh Track comedy showcases featuring funny drag queens, kings, and other entertainers.

 Follow Uly Money on Instagram @ulyssesmoney.

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# Fitness with a Fun Vibe

The Montrose SPENGA studio offers a unique new workout option.

By ZACH MCKENZIE

Personal trainer Christopher Lucas

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ALEX ROSA FOR OUTSMART



For some, fitness is a way of life. For others, it's simply a way to combat the effects of a sedentary lifestyle. For Christopher Lucas and his team at the Montrose

SPENGA fitness studio, fitness is an all-encompassing full-body experience that engages clients of all skill levels.

Lucas was recognized as this year's Best Male Personal Trainer by OUTSMART readers, and his Montrose SPENGA studio won the Best Houston Gym and Best Cycling Studio awards. The facility was also a finalist for Best Yoga Studio.

"SPENGA is a completely unique, unrivaled fitness concept," Lucas explains. The gym specializes in a one-hour full-body workout targeting aspects of fitness that other gyms do not typically focus on.

"There are three major components to fitness for a healthier life: cardiovascular endurance, physical strength, and the ability to move. [For the first 20 minutes] I'm going to give you engaged [spin] cardio, which is really going to open up your lungs and increase your endurance. Our spin is very specific. There's not a lot of choreography or [intricate] motions on the handlebars," Lucas notes. "It's a

resistance-based spin class, and it's really 'you versus you.'"

That spin aspect of SPENGA is unlike other studios that focus solely on that workout style. And the transitions throughout the one-hour workout keep clients from getting exhausted. "Just when you're mentally done and don't want to go on, [the 20 minutes is] over. Then we go to the strength floor. The strength routine changes every single day, and is choreographed by the [trainers] about a week ahead of time," Lucas says.

"Those two 20-minute segments together have raised your cortisol levels through the roof, which can negatively impact your ability to recover. So then we do breathing techniques to lower your cortisol to a level lower than when you walked through the door. No one has ever walked out of my gym saying they didn't like it. SPENGA gives you the full trifecta."

Lucas, a retired Marine, prides himself on employing the best instructors that the fitness world has to offer. "Finding instructors that can teach all three modalities successfully is very challenging," he says. "We really search relentlessly to find the right people. They need to have the personality and the character. It's an inclusive and welcoming studio, so the staff here is handpicked and really dialed into the

mission."

Lucas' work is his passion, and his clients are a huge part of that. "The most gratifying part is seeing members achieve their fitness goals—especially when it's really personal to them," he says. "Someone came in one time and gave me a hug with tears in their eyes and said I changed their life. I never thought I would hear that. It made me realize that this is what I want to do forever."

Houstonians can sign up for classes at multiple SPENGA locations in the Houston area, but Lucas touts his Montrose studio as "a melting pot of every color, creed, and orientation you could possibly imagine—with a cool, fun vibe."

Inclusivity is what SPENGA prides itself on at the end of the day. "The exposure [that these OUTSMART awards provide] for SPENGA—what it is, and how it can help anybody at any fitness level—will be priceless," Lucas says. "And knowing that my members believed in us and voted for us lets me know that I'm doing the right thing."

▶ For information, visit [houstonmontrose.spenga.com](http://houstonmontrose.spenga.com).

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# Tough As Nails

Adam Gutierrez clawed his way to the top as Best Nail Technician.

By SAM BYRD



Adam Gutierrez, the manicurist with some accomplished design skills, has clinched this year's Gayest & Greatest honor for Best Nail Technician. His business, Claws by Adam, is one of the most sought-after nail salons in town—and for good reason. He's incredibly detail-oriented, and produces consistently high-end work.

"It's a skill, and I put a lot of practice into my craft. I have been painting since I was a little kid. Picking up a paintbrush for me wasn't that difficult. I also educated myself when it comes to drawing characters," he says.

Anime characters, Halloween-inspired spooky nails, festive Christmas looks—he does them all. And he'll take the time to complete a masterful job that will impress even the most demanding clients.

"I have one client in mind—everything that she does is *extra*. She's always doing photo shoots, and she goes over the top for her birthdays and whatnot. Recently, she had this crazy idea that she wanted the longest nail she could have." Gutierrez ended up working all day to custom-craft five-inch nails for her.

But he also has some practical advice for people who want to start flaunting the cutest cuticles.

"First and foremost, do not yank off old nails. Take the time to soak them with acetone,

because when you yank them off they tend to tear up parts of the natural nails. Soaking is what gets them really soft instead of brittle. Otherwise, your nails will become sensitive and start hurting," he cautions.

He also suggests making regular appointments. "It's a good idea to come in regularly. My clients come in on a monthly basis to refill their nails. Keep on top of that," he says. "I advise my

clients to get a fresh start after every two sets, because after a while they start losing adhesion."

The wear and tear of normal activity makes periodic check-ins a must. "When clients go swimming or do similar activities, there's always a possibility of something getting underneath the nails—funguses and other unspeakables. Regular maintenance is one of those necessary things," he says.

As much as Gutierrez knows about the integumentary system, this finger wizard had a much less glamorous start to his career.

"I actually went to school for human resources and then ended up landing a job in the financial industry. I worked at a bank for eight years. I was on a 9-to-5 for a very long time, but I felt like it wasn't really my calling. I guess you could say I just went to work for the paycheck," he admits.

"But ever since I was a kid, I've always been fascinated by art. That's always been my thing. I've always loved to paint, draw, and explore arts and crafts. So I got the crazy idea one day to quit my bank job and start doing nails."

Now he can boast that he's even treated the hands of a few famous people along the way, like singer K. Michelle. But building up that kind of reputation was a nerve-racking climb for Gutierrez. "It was very stressful to leave my job, because I wanted to keep my income steady. To make that switch from making a regular paycheck to not knowing what my revenue stream would be was challenging. It took a while, but it was worth it!"



COURTESY

For more info, visit [salonpark.com/tenant/adam-gutierrez](https://salonpark.com/tenant/adam-gutierrez).

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**Joseph Werle/Crunch Consulting**  
Finalists: José Arteaga, An Dang, Ramon Fernandez, Gary Gritz, Brian Kapchinskie, Donald Simon

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**Kathy Hubbard**  
Finalists: Sandra Medrano, Pennie Mutschler

**BEST MALE BOOKKEEPER**

**An Dang**  
Finalists: Robert Cruz, Carlos Rodriguez Jr, Bradley Smith

**BEST FEMALE FINANCIAL PLANNER/ ADVISOR**

**Grace Ung**  
Finalists: Christyna Lewis, Angele Watson, Sandra White/Goldman Sachs

**BEST MALE FINANCIAL PLANNER/ ADVISOR**

**Richard Dickson**  
Finalists: Elias Contreras, Bryan Cotton, Michael Ryan, Shane Theriot

**BEST LGBTQ FUND MANAGER**

**Doug Smith**

**BEST BUSINESS ATTORNEY**

**Paul Franzetti (tie)**  
**Mitchell Katine (tie)**  
Finalists: Danielle Healey, Julie Maxey

**BEST FAMILY ATTORNEY**

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Finalists: Ashley DeHart, Chelsea Klumpp, Dawn Renken, Kathleen Vossler

**BEST PROBATE ATTORNEY**

**Jeff Watters**  
Finalists: Stephany Alvarez, James Fuller, Hegwood Law Group, Samuel Hodges, Deborah Lawson, Coleton W. Mayo

**BEST HUMAN-RIGHTS ATTORNEY**

**Luis Ruiz**  
Finalists: Danielle Healey, Mitchell Katine, Ian Scharfman

**BEST IMMIGRATION ATTORNEY**

**John Nechman (tie)**  
**Raed Gonzalez (tie)**  
Finalists: Luis Ruiz, Ana Maria Schwartz

**BEST PERSONAL INJURY ATTORNEY**

**Lena Laurenzo**  
Finalists: Matt Franks, Greg Nassar, Jessica Rodriguez-Wahlquist

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**BEST FEMALE VETERINARIAN**

**Danielle Rosser (tie)**  
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##### The Catastrophic Theatre

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#### BEST LOCAL EQUITY THEATER COMPANY

##### Alley Theatre

Finalists: Stages, Theatre Under The Stars (TUTS)

#### FAVORITE REGIONAL EQUITY THEATER

##### Stages

Finalists: Alley Theatre, Theatre Under The Stars (TUTS)

#### FAVORITE LOCAL FEMALE ACTOR

##### Christina Wells

Finalists: Tamarie Cooper, Mary Hooper, Susan Koozin, Aili Maeve, Amanda Marie Parker

#### FAVORITE LOCAL MALE ACTOR

##### Wesley Whitson

Finalists: Doug Atkins, Dylan Godwin, Mark Ivy, Kyle Sturdivant, Abraham Zapata

#### FAVORITE LOCAL NONBINARY ACTOR

##### Clarity Welch

Finalists: Josh Levin, Chess MacElvaine, Robert Straight, T Lavois Thiebaud

#### BEST DANCE COMPANY

##### Houston Ballet

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#### FAVORITE LOCAL DANCER

##### Rivkah French

Finalists: Belle Be Damed, Harrison Homer-Guy, Courtney Jones, Kristina Prats, jhon r. stronks

#### FAVORITE LOCAL FEMALE COMEDIAN

##### Trinity Newman

Finalists: Lesley the Comic, Emily Peacock, Dusti Rhodes

#### FAVORITE LOCAL MALE COMEDIAN

##### Ku Egenti

Finalists: Zahid Dewji, Chinedu Ogu, Grady Pruitt

#### FAVORITE LOCAL NONBINARY COMEDIAN

##### Juliann Losey

Finalist: T Lavois Thiebaud

#### FAVORITE LOCAL LGBTQ MUSICIAN

##### Jerry Atwood

Finalists: Christie Hein/Christie Alan Music, Sugar Jokio, Trent Lira, Shayna Powers, Uncle Tino

#### FAVORITE LOCAL FEMALE FINE ARTIST

##### Katharine Ligon

Finalists: Jan Golden, Rikki Mitman, Kristy Peet, Heather J. Taylor, Sherry Tseng Hill, Abiola Wabara

#### FAVORITE LOCAL MALE FINE ARTIST

##### Robin Baker

Finalists: Wood Fancher Anthony, Fabian Echavarri, Joe Haden, Bogdan Mihai, Hugo Perez

#### FAVORITE LOCAL NONBINARY FINE ARTIST

##### Crystal Murley

Finalists: Urethra Burns, Alex Ramos, Robert L. Straight

#### FAVORITE LOCAL PAINTER

##### Wood Fancher Anthony

Finalists: Robin Baker, Katharine Ligon, Edgar Medina, Patrick Palmer, Hugo Perez

#### FAVORITE LOCAL SCULPTOR

##### Joe Haden

Finalists: Patrick Medrano, Nestor Topchy, Patrick Renner, Robert L. Straight, Ben Waitena

#### FAVORITE LOCAL VISUAL ARTIST

##### Robin Baker

Finalists: Wood Fancher Anthony, Katharine Ligon, Rikki Mitman, Crystal Murley, Alex Ramos

**BEST ART CENTER**

**MATCH - Midtown Arts and Theater Center Houston**  
Finalists: Art League Houston, Moody Center for the Arts, Silver Street Studios, Winter Street Studios

**BEST ART GALLERY**

**Archway Gallery**  
Finalists: Art League Houston, Bogdan Foto Art, Hardy & Nance Studios, RobinWood Art Studio, Taft McWhorter Art, Winter Street Studios

**FAVORITE LOCAL MUSEUM**

**Museum of Fine Arts, Houston**  
Finalists: Buffalo Soldiers National Museum, Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, Houston Museum of Natural Science, Holocaust Museum Houston, Menil Collection, National Museum of Funeral History, Station Museum of Contemporary Art, 1940 Air Terminal Museum

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**BEST LIQUOR STORE**

**Spec's Wines, Spirits & Finer Foods**  
Finalist: Total Wine & More

**BEST COMMERCIAL PHOTOGRAPHER**

**Victor Contreras**  
Finalist: David Jones

**BEST COMMERCIAL VIDEOGRAPHER**

**Jay Clark**  
Finalist: Priscilla T. Graham

**BEST COPY/PRINT SHOP**

**Copy.com**  
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**BEST CREATIVE AGENCY**

**Mad Hat Maven Creative (tie)**  
**REFUGE Marketing & Consulting (tie)**  
Finalists: The Arts Advocate, Like Minds Communications

**BEST FUNERAL SERVICES**

**Bradshaw-Carter (tie)**  
**Jovon Alfon B. Tyler (tie)**  
Finalists: Houston Jewish Funerals, Geo. H. Lewis & Sons

**BEST PLACE TO BUY EYEWEAR**

**Montrose Eye Care**  
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**BEST JEWELRY STORE**

**Tenenbaum Jewelers**  
Finalists: Dubin's Fine Jewelry, Ekλεκtic Jewelry Studio, Reiner's Fine Jewelry, Silverlust Jewelry, Womxn on the Moon

**BEST LEATHER STORE**

**Sir Rat Leather**  
Finalists: Discount Video, Eagle Houston, The Montrose Forge

**BEST LOCAL CLOTHING DESIGNER**

**Anthony Ferrell**  
Finalists: Chloe Dao, Yahaira DeHill, Zozo Garcia, King Underwear, Nicholas Nguyen

**BEST WOMEN'S CLOTHING STORE**

**Lilith's Way (tie)**  
**Tootsie's (tie)**  
Finalists: Erotic Cabaret Boutique, lululemon

**BEST MEN'S CLOTHING STORE**

**King Underwear**  
Finalists: Jos. A. Bank, lululemon, Neiman Marcus, Nordstrom

**BEST LOCAL RESALE OR THRIFT STORE**

**Out of the Closet**  
Finalists: Second Blessings at Bering Church, Buffalo Exchange

**BEST ONLINE CLOTHING STORE**

**Slutmonkey.com**  
Finalists: King Underwear, Offensive But Cute

**BEST PLACE TO BUY CELLULAR PHONES**

**AT&T Store**  
Finalists: Apple, Boost Mobile, Mint, T-Mobile, Verizon

**BEST PLACE TO BUY/RENT A COSTUME**

**Erotic Cabaret Boutique**  
Finalist: CostumeWorx

**BEST PLACE TO BUY EROTIC PLAYTHINGS**

**Eagle Houston (tie)**  
**Hollywood Super Center (tie)**  
Finalists: Discount Video, Erotic Cabaret Boutique, Lilith's Way, The Montrose Forge, Sir Rat Leather Montrose

**WEDDINGS & EVENTS**

**BEST PLACE TO POP THE QUESTION**

**Pearl Bar**  
Finalists: Eagle Houston, Houston Botanic Garden, Mecom Fountain, Menil Park, POST Houston

**BEST WEDDING/EVENT PLANNER**

**Rexberry Luxury Weddings and Events**  
Finalists: A Day to Remember, Event Elementz, Mariana Lemesoff, Dewayne Hinojosa Ross, Robert Shipman

**BEST WEDDING OFFICIANT**

**Rev. Diane McGehee**  
Finalists: Dewayne Hinojosa Ross, Anton Igdalov, Johnny Peden, Tiffany Scales, Pastor Sven Verbeet

**BEST WEDDING/EVENT VENUE**

**AvantGarden**  
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**Festari for Men**

**BEST WEDDING/EVENT CAKE BAKERY**

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Finalists: Angel The Cake Chef, Jodycakes, Leona's Bakeshop, Susie's Cakes, Who Made the Cake!

**BEST WEDDING/EVENT CATERING FIRM**

**David Alcorta Catering**

Finalists: Event Elementz, 210 Fusion Cuisine, Legacy Events Catering, Mason's Catering Services, Chef Soren Pedersen

**BEST WEDDING/EVENT FLORIST**

**Robert Shipman Flowers & Events**

Finalists: Chad Cornwall, DeMartino Design Group, Minerva's Blossoms, Rexberry Luxury Weddings and Events

**BEST WEDDING/EVENT DJ**

**DarkKer Side DJs**

Finalists: Dillion Allen, B&B Entertainment, DJ Krazy Kris, DJ Ukemi

**BEST WEDDING/EVENT LIVE MUSICIAN/BAND**

**Harmony Strings**

Finalists: Tianna Hall & The Houston Jazz Band, Hayden Jones, Third Floor Strings

**BEST WEDDING/EVENT PHOTOGRAPHER**

**Kirk Surber Photography**

Finalists: Jay Clark, Sebastian Gutierrez, David Truong, Tristan Turner

**BEST WEDDING/EVENT VIDEOGRAPHER**

**Jay Clark Films**

Finalists: Brandon Fincher, Lozano Studio, Tristan Turner

**FAVORITE LGBTQ TRAVEL DESTINATION**

**Puerto Vallarta**

Finalists: Costa Rica, Key West, Palm Springs, Provincetown, San Francisco, Sitges (Spain)

**FAVORITE LGBTQ-FRIENDLY CAMPGROUNDS**

**Rainbow Ranch Campground**

Finalist: Grizzly Pines

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**Puerto Vallarta**

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**Hotel ZaZa - Museum District**

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# Louisa Muller Directs Houston Grand Opera's *The Wreckers*

Bisexual composer Dame Ethel Smyth's opera gets a rare full-scale production.

By MORGAN GAGE



Dame Ethel Smyth's 1906 opera *The Wreckers* takes the stage at Houston Grand Opera in its first-ever full scale production by a major US opera company.

Smyth, an English composer who helped popularize opera in Great Britain (and the first female composer to be made a dame), was open about her bisexuality and had notable affairs with well-known women including author Virginia Woolf and suffragette Emmeline Pankhurst.

"She was so pro-woman," Louisa Muller, director of *The Wreckers*, says. "Part of that played out in her romantic relationships, and she would have these really intense, fascinating long relationships. She talks a lot in her letters about how she felt sort of a special feeling for women, in a different way than she could ever feel for men."

Set on the Cornish coast in the late 1700s, Amanda Holden's English translation of *The Wreckers* follows Thirza (played by Sasha Cooke), whose husband, the preacher Pascoe, instructs their coastal community to pillage the ships that wreck on the nearby rocky shores. Thirza opposes her husband's instructions, and when it is revealed that someone has been warning the ships to stay clear of the coast, the community searches for the traitor in their midst.

"[It's] the story of the community itself, and the sort of groupthink, mass hysteria, and mob mentality that can happen in an insular community," Muller notes. "But then, inside of that is this really intimate story of our main protagonists, who try to [survive in a] community whose ethics and morals are so different from what she believes in."

According to Muller, Smyth's "pro-woman" perspective extends beyond her personal life and onto the stage through her compositions.

"That absolutely plays out in the way these female characters are written, and in the general theme of fighting against a patriarchal society and striking out to make your own place. That's such a big theme in *The Wreckers*,



Dame Ethel Smyth

and was absolutely a theme in her life, as well," Muller emphasizes.

Especially with this being the first full-scale production of *The Wreckers* by a major US opera company, Muller says that HGO's priority is making sure their production does justice to the piece.

"[This show is] going to be the first time the majority of the audience will have seen or heard *The Wreckers*," Muller says. "So I think we're feeling the responsibility to make sure we're doing Smyth justice and really presenting the piece at its best."

Muller describes Smyth as an outspoken woman who lived on a big scale. "When we think about what women's lives were like in the

19th century, we have some idea of the constraints of it. It's a pleasure to read about this woman who was living on a big scale and being totally herself and carving out this space for herself."

Muller believes that it's important to look back at "trailblazers" like Smyth, who helped establish opportunities for women in the arts. "As a musician, thinking back to all of the privileges and opportunities that I have now, knowing about her feels really important."

Audiences can expect to see an HGO production design rooted in the natural landscape of the Cornish coast. Muller, along with set and costume designer →

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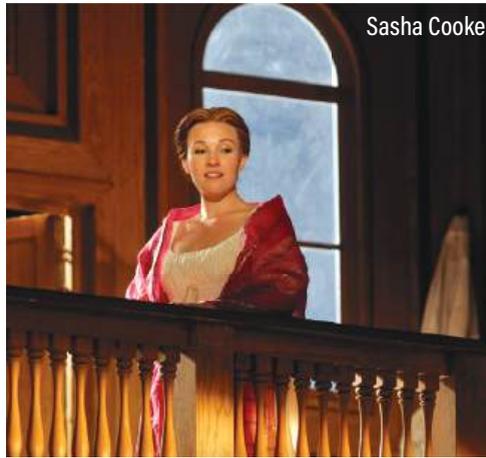
Christopher Orem, and Marcus Doshi, the production's lighting designer, explored the Cornwall countryside by looking to 19th- and early 20th-century artwork for inspiration.

"Cornwall's light is really special, and the landscape is unique," Muller says. "There's all kinds of amazing paintings that give us the real picture of daily life in these coastal communities—how they looked and what kinds of activities they were doing."

Muller brings her training both in theater and vocal performance to every production she's in. "I'm using all of my background all the time. I feel like I've found the perfect job to really use all the things that I studied," she says.

In approaching a show, she prioritizes collaboration where everyone involved in the production feels like they can take artistic risks.

"I think the real, deep conversations that you can have in a rehearsal room are my favorite thing. It's always really important to me to create a space where everyone feels like they can take risks and try things and fail and look silly," Muller explains. "I'd like a safe place to do that in rehearsal so that we can build something



Sasha Cooke



SIMON PAULY

HGO director  
Louisa Muller

that's better than what I came up with on my own, or that they came up with on their own. Collaboration, for me, is the most important and fulfilling part."

Having collaborated with HGO in the past, Muller is pleased that several of the production's cast members are "homegrown HGO singers." And she's excited to return to her Houston HGO roots, both to direct *The Wreckers* and to enjoy the city's food—particularly Tex-Mex. "It's the best food town. I've already got my list going," she admits.

"This production is sort of a homecoming for me, because HGO is where I got my start as a stage-management intern many years ago,

and I then lived in Houston for a long time," Muller says. "I'm just really looking forward to being back in a place that still feels like a home, and the pleasure of having some full-circle moments in the place that really gave me my first opportunities."

➔ For information, visit [houstongrandopera.org](http://houstongrandopera.org).

**WHAT:** *The Wreckers* presented by Houston Grand Opera

**WHEN:** October 28–November 11

**WHERE:** Wortham Theater Center, 501 Texas Ave.

**INFO:** 713.228.6737

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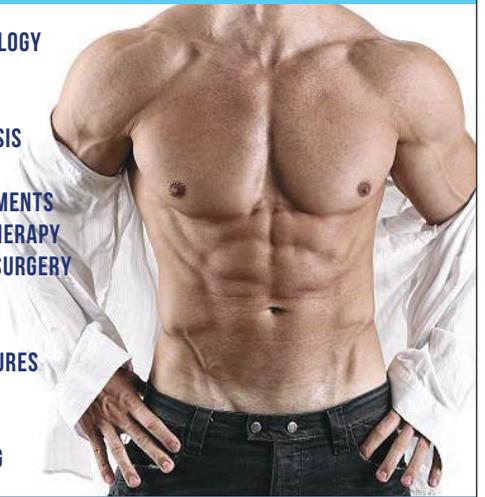
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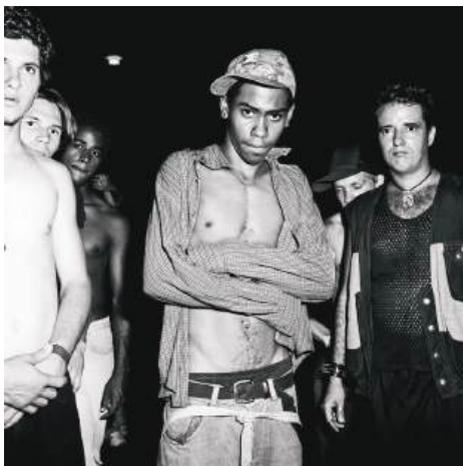
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Jonathan David Symth,  
*Untitled (After Maggie)*, 2019.



Alejandro González, *10:09 pm, 21 de abril de 2005 [April 21, 2005], Playa, Havana.*



Bruce Yonemoto, *Boy Peeling a Fruit*, 2010.

## Through an LGBTQ Lens

Meet some of the queer and queer-friendly artists featured at FotoFest Biennial 2022.

By DAVID CLARKE | Photos courtesy of FOTOFEST



The FotoFest Biennial 2022, which opened late last month, includes the work of several queer and LGBTQ-friendly artists.

This fall's central exhibit, *If I Had a Hammer*, is an exploration of how photography captures historical narratives and political ideology. It investigates the power images have in elevating or repressing the societal movements that they depict.

### Ryan Patrick Krueger (*They/Them*)

When it comes to creating visual art, Ryan Patrick Krueger wants to examine “how potent photography can be when considering invisible histories for a marginalized community that depends on visibility and representation.”

For the past decade Krueger has relied on eBay to collect their materials. “Specifically, I collect vernacular photographs prior to the Gay Liberation Movement of the 1970s to consider the dependency of photography and LGBTQ+ history during a time of invisibility for queer life,” says Krueger, who displays the images with their original eBay listings and shipping materials.

Krueger also works with high-school yearbooks published prior to the Gay Liberation Movement. “I appropriate

the grid format of school portraits by using an empty 35mm slide mount to guide through the pages, finding moments where men are situated shoulder to shoulder, and creating compositions from those discoveries,” Krueger explains.

“This process is similar to what I search for in the photographs from eBay, and results in print-making, installation, and assemblage works.”

### Jonathan David Symth (*He/Him*)

Jonathan David Symth was raised in a foster family before being adopted. He discovered he was gay at an early age. Those childhood circumstances gave him a different perspective from most of his friends. “When I found photography as a teenager, I saw it as a way for me to process some of these feelings in a positive and productive way,” Symth explains, “and it was very cathartic for me.”

At FotoFest, Smyth is displaying 20 self-portraits from his photography series *BETWEEN YOU AND ME (2019–2020)*. “This work is largely inspired by reconnecting with my birth mother after three decades apart,” Symth says. “Each portrait is titled after a particular person from my life who has made an impact on me—blood-related or not.”

Despite photography being such a visual medium, Symth's work often begins with the written word. “I am a bit of an obsessive word-keeper. I jot things down on notepads, and I use my phone to save sentences that I like the

look of,” he says. “This helps me decide what I want to say, and what type of artwork I want to make.”

### Bruce Yonemoto (*He/Him*)

Bruce Yonemoto's work is derived from his research and his travels to Vietnam. It's further informed by classic films, such as Ingmar Bergman's *Persona*. At FotoFest, people will get to see selected images from his *NorthSouthEast-West* and *Beyond South: Caravaggio* series.

In researching historical records, Yonemoto discovered there were Asian Americans who fought on both sides during the American Civil War, which inspired *NorthSouthEastWest*.

“I realized that, once again, people of various racial backgrounds had been systematically excluded from the national record, even by recent revisionist histories,” explains Yonemoto.

For this series, his models wear Civil War costumes rented from Western Costume, whose collection dates back to 1912 and includes Civil War uniforms used in D.W. Griffith's infamous film, *The Birth of a Nation*.

With *Beyond South: Caravaggio*, Yonemoto appropriates masterpieces by Michelangelo Caravaggio to critique the sexual tourism industry.

“Each photograph re-imagines an original Caravaggio portrait setting, with the original figures replaced by similarly posed Asian →

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Installation view of Ryan Patrick Krueger for FotoFest Biennial 2022, *If I Had a Hammer*.

models,” says Yonemoto. “Through Hollywood devices of costume and set, the photographs muddy readings of subject and gaze, Western art history, and late-20th-century politics, religion, representation, imperialism, and tourism.”

**Alejandro González** (*He/Him*)

Living and working in Cuba, Alejandro González considers himself to be a documentary photographer, and his work seeks to fill in journalistic or social-representation gaps. “In Cuba, the press is entirely controlled by the government, so only the official discourse is shown,” says González. “I have tried to cover those silences.”

FotoFest attendees will see 10 pieces from his series *AM-PM*, which depicts



C. Rose Smith, *Untitled no. 8, Domestic Space*, Allston, MA, 2020.

Havana’s nightlife in 2005. “To make it, I traveled for months along perhaps the most important single street in Havana: 23rd Avenue,” he explains. “I dedicated myself to taking pictures of people who were on that avenue all night and early in the morning.” He did this to show a side of Cuba that has been continually ignored by the official media.

Beyond this series, González is committed to giving representation to all of the Cuban social sectors that have been silenced, including the LGBTQ community. “I would like viewers to get to know *this* Cuba, as well, to help them dismantle certain clichés about my country and show them other aspects of its reality,” he says.

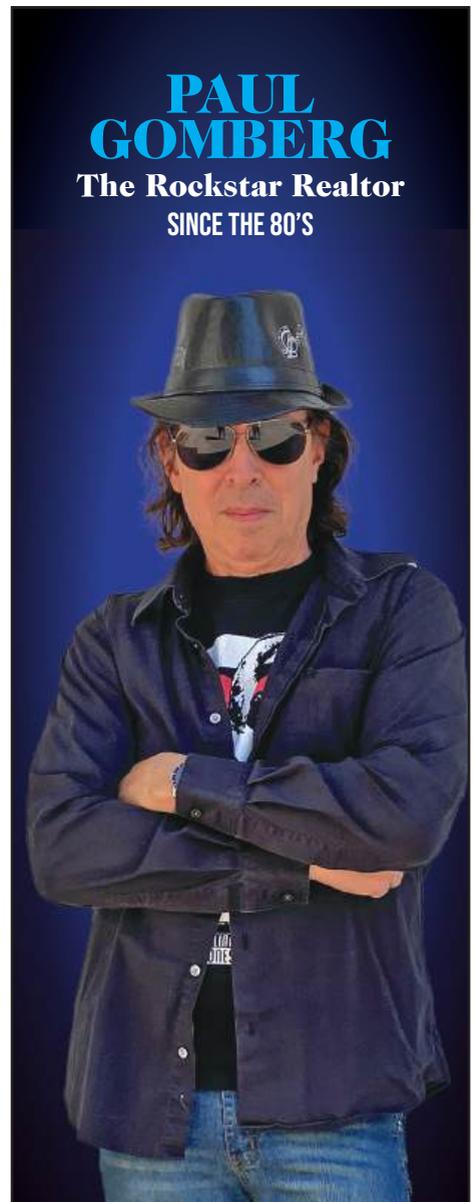
**C. Rose Smith** (*She/They*)

C. Rose Smith was born in Memphis, Tennessee, and now resides in Rochester, New York, studying at the Rochester Institute of Technology as an MFA candidate. According to Smith, their work is “embedded in the humanities and social sciences, often mapping the construction of identity and its representations to the physical orientation of a social landscape.”

“I am curious about what it means to have complete autonomy,” says Smith. “I consider the conversations and individuals that have been intentionally excluded from the canon of art and history, and make space to include this in my art.”

At FotoFest, audiences will see pieces from Smith’s thesis project titled *Scenes of Self: Objecting Patriarchy*. This project features portraits of the subject wearing a white dress shirt, highlighting the intersection of fashion, representation, and identity.

**WHAT:** *If I Had a Hammer*—  
FotoFest Biennial 2022  
**WHEN:** Through November 6  
**WHERE:** Participating spaces citywide  
**INFO:** [fotofest.org](http://fotofest.org)



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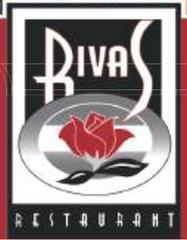
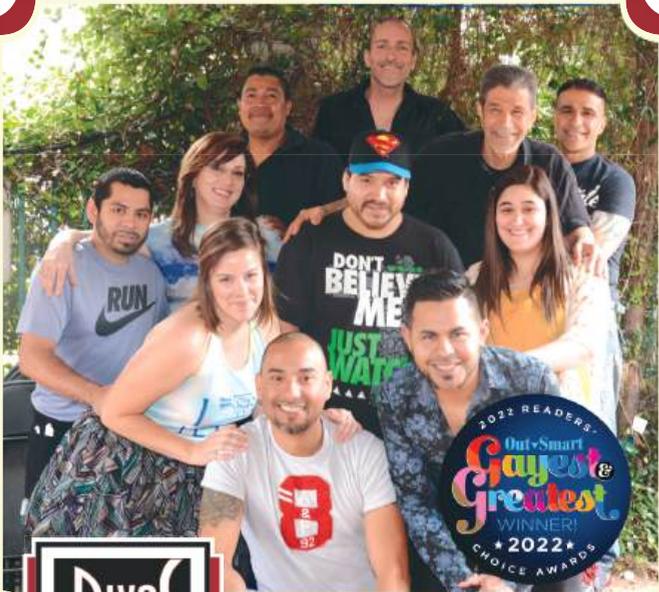
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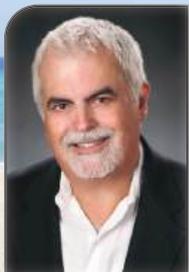
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# The Journey Continues

Queer indie group MUNA reinvents itself with a new sound.

By **BOB RUGGIERO**  
Photo by **ISAAC SCHNEIDER**



Clockwise from top:  
Band members Naomi McPherson,  
Katie Gavin, and Josette Maskin

cis men. Plus, the financial consequences of being explicitly out were [much riskier] before. But the journey continues, and my songwriting documents those changes.”

The upbeat lead single “Silk Chiffon” (which features a vocal assist from the boss, Phoebe Bridgers) has become something of a TikTok sensation, soundtracking countless videos—somewhat to the band’s chagrin.

“We find it funny that if anyone knows a song from us, it’s that one,” says Maskin. “If anything, we’re traditionally known for almost devastating music, and here is this happy, bright song!”

The members of MUNA are well aware of Houston’s reputation for having a progressive and historic LGBTQ community, but also that legislators in Austin are actively pushing laws against the community’s interests, especially with trans youth.

“We know what Texas, unfortunately, is about,” Maskin says. “Regardless of what city we’re in, we’re trying to create a safe place for queer youth to be able to express themselves without fear of legislation—or whatever the patriarchy is doing to control queer bodies.”

MUNA’s videos all qualify as mini movies, putting the band in a wide variety of circumstances. For “Silk Chiffon,” they’re sent to a “gay conversion camp” (inspired by the 1999 satirical movie *But I’m a Cheerleader*), and for the country ballad “Kind of Girl,” there are cowboys in male drag at a ranch.

“What I Want” is a club banger in a paparazzi-fueled series of scenes in limos, clubs, hotel rooms, and other places for trysts and dancing. “Anything But Me” takes a darker tone, showing bandmembers chained to high-beams and radiators in what seems like a prelude to torture—sexual and otherwise—although there is also a line-dancing segment!

“I think the stark differences in the videos matches the energy of the album, in that there’s so many different things going on. So that made us feel free to treat them all as sort of a micro universe,” McPherson says. “And ‘Silk Chiffon’ pays respect to the queer canon while placing us in there.”

And the line dancing?

“We learned it the day before [shooting] and we were stressed about it, for sure!” she laughs. “But if someone asks us to do the choreography now, we could probably do it—even though we want to get it out of our heads!”

**What:** MUNA in concert,  
with Meet Me @ the Altar opening

**When:** 8 p.m., October 10, 2022

**Where:** House of Blue, 1204 Caroline

**Info:** Visit [whereismuna.com](http://whereismuna.com)  
and [houseofblues.com/houston](http://houseofblues.com/houston).



Bands around the country were having a hard enough time during the pandemic when their ability to tour and earn income came to a sudden and screeching halt. The LA-based trio MUNA took a double hit when their label, RCA, decided to drop them after releasing an EP and two studio albums.

But the queer-identifying group—who met a decade ago at the University of Southern California—says things actually turned out for the better. They quickly landed on singer/songwriter Phoebe Bridgers’ indie label Saddest Factory and took the opportunity to reinvent themselves and their sound away from “sad pop” for their new release.

“I wanted to explore a more joyful and embodied part of myself,” says singer/keyboardist and chief songwriter Katie Gavin (she/they) of the album, which leans heavy into synth electro pop and

dance music with dashes of balladry.

“We’re a funny band because we’re classified as pop, but it’s really alternative. And we’ve learned so much over the years about producing.”

Rounding out MUNA are guitarists Naomi McPherson (they/them) and Josette Maskin (she/they). McPherson is also nonbinary. Augmented by drummer Sarab Singh and bassist Geo Botelho, they’ll play at the House of Blues in Houston on October 10.

The new album’s songs often revolve around messy, intense, and complicated romantic relationships. But this is the first time Gavin says she truly felt comfortable not using safer gender-neutral pronouns for the lovers in her songs.

“I’m one of the legion of queer people who has taken a longer time to find out what my sexuality actually is,” she admits. “We’ve been out as a queer band since we started releasing music, but it wasn’t until five years ago that I was in acceptance of being happier not dating

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## HOUSTON TRANSGENDER UNITY BANQUET

September 24, 2022

The Houston Transgender Unity Banquet celebrated the progress that transgender advocates are making. Among the speakers and honored guests were Stef M. Shuster, State Representative Ann Johnson, and Dr. María González. The event was hosted by Brandon Mack and Dylan Forbis.



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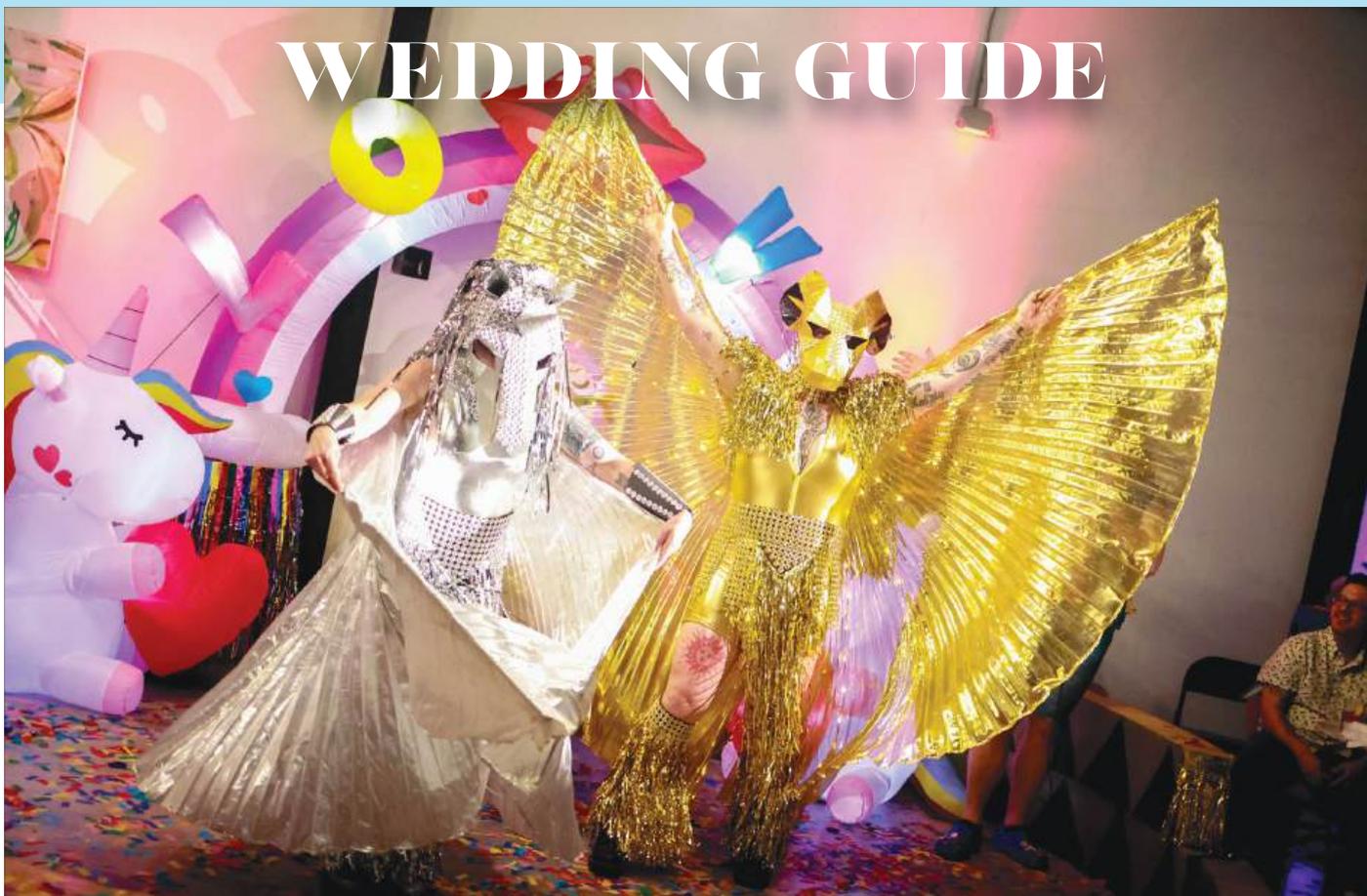


## MONTROSE CENTER RISING LEADERS

September 20, 2022

The Montrose Center held its second meeting of **Rising Leaders**, the newest LGBTQ and ally young professionals group in Houston. The group empowers LGBTQ people and their allies to develop into strong, confident, and positive members of the community capable of making a significant, positive impact.

# WEDDING GUIDE



Veronica Triplett (l) and Trey Johnson

## LOVE IS A CIRCUS

Veronica Triplett and Trey Johnson's carnival wedding even had a fire-eating officiant.

By **JENNY BLOCK** | Photos by **GIA QUILAP**



After first eloping in Las Vegas at the Little Chapel of the West on May 10, 2021, Houstonians Veronica Triplett, 40, and Trey Johnson, 47, were wed in what

they call “a great big queer circus-themed costume-party wedding” on May 7, 2022.

“It was a conglomeration of our interests, and wanting to support and hire all of our creative friends [to provide] the venue, photography, cake, and flowers,” Veronica says.

Massage-therapist Veronica is the owner of Core Body Lab, and hairstylist Trey is the owner of Tr3y Blades in the Heights.

The two first met in 2014 through a mutual friend who wanted to set them up. But they didn't actually meet until Veronica went to Trey to get her hair cut after several friends had referred her.

“We ended up having a wacky conversa-

tion about ‘space church,’ and after that first meeting we instantly wanted to be friends,” Veronica says. “We set up a hangout to teach ourselves how to throw knives, and our friendship grew from there.”

Veronica knew she wanted to marry Trey the moment she realized Trey would be fun to grow old with—a life of joy, creativity, laughter, playfulness, adventure, and love all rolled up into one dynamic package.

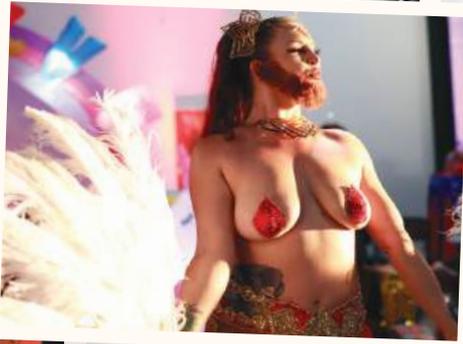
“We are going to awkward-dance in the kitchen making breakfast and race our mobility scooters through grocery stores and make crazy art and adventure our way to the grave together.”

For Trey, it took a little longer. “We became friends first (unlike the typical lesbian U-Haul dating) after a few years of being together and forging a stable and healthy relationship,” Trey says. “I couldn't imagine Veronica not in my

life, and I was ready to commit. There are so many amazing things about her. She will find humor in any situation. So even if things are challenging, you know you will laugh about it later.”

In 2020, the pair did a lot of hiking in the Rockies. On one trip, they each independently decided to surprise the other with a proposal. As they descended from a hike early one day due to bad weather, they passed a sign that read Dream Lake Overlook that Trey thought was “a sign” for sure. So Trey stopped to set up a camera at the overlook while secretly pulling an engagement ring out of a bag. While they were posing, Trey proposed.

The following day, Veronica surprised Trey by proposing after a very arduous hike to Chasm Lake (elevation 11,823 feet). Naturally, Trey said yes.



Their ceremony was held in an actual circus ring with their fire-eating officiant, Y.E. Torres. “She started the ceremony with a fire dancing/eating performance,” Veronica recalls. Jenny Dahlgren, an Olympic athlete in hammer throw, dressed as a giant sun-flower and was their flower girl. Trey’s son was their ring bearer. “We made him dress up as a bear—a ‘ring bear!’”

Things only got more interesting from there as they walked down the aisle to music that sounded like “the beginning of a duel in a spaghetti western.” Twelve confetti cannons exploded when they kissed. Their cake, of course, was a unicorn pegasus funfetti cake with two enormous glitter Pegasus figures that the couple made themselves as the backdrop. Their guests dressed for the evening in costume.

The ceremony was followed by a circus performance. “We had two aerialists who did silks and cube performances; a bearded burlesque performer; a mullet-wearing drag-king emcee in an all-denim outfit—complete

with denim fringe, a drawn-on six-pack, and tear-away pants; a hula-hooping contortionist; Gal Fiery doing a Guy Fiery drag performance with hot dogs and sparklers; and a fire-fan performance,” Veronica recalls. Jugglers, hoopers, and stilt walkers also wandered throughout the venue. They described the entire celebration as The Moment. “Seeing all of our friends dressed in costumes having so much fun, watching my dad tickled with wonder at the circus performance, both of us tearing up while expressing our vows, laughing and dancing the night away and ending perfectly.”

And, Veronica adds, “When Shelly Arnold, dressed as our taxidermied raccoon bride lamp (that’s a whole other story) got up for our toast and just hissed loudly into the microphone” was a moment not to be missed.

The couple agrees it was a perfect night. “The only thing I regret,” Veronica adds, “was not being able to get a mechanical bull!”

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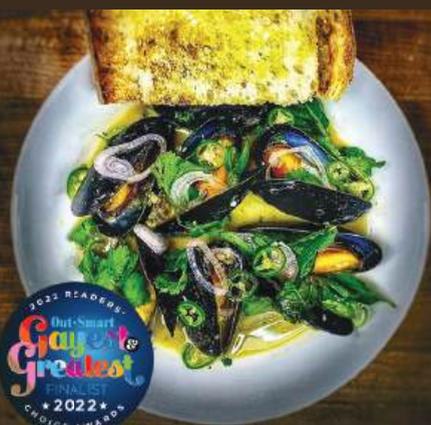


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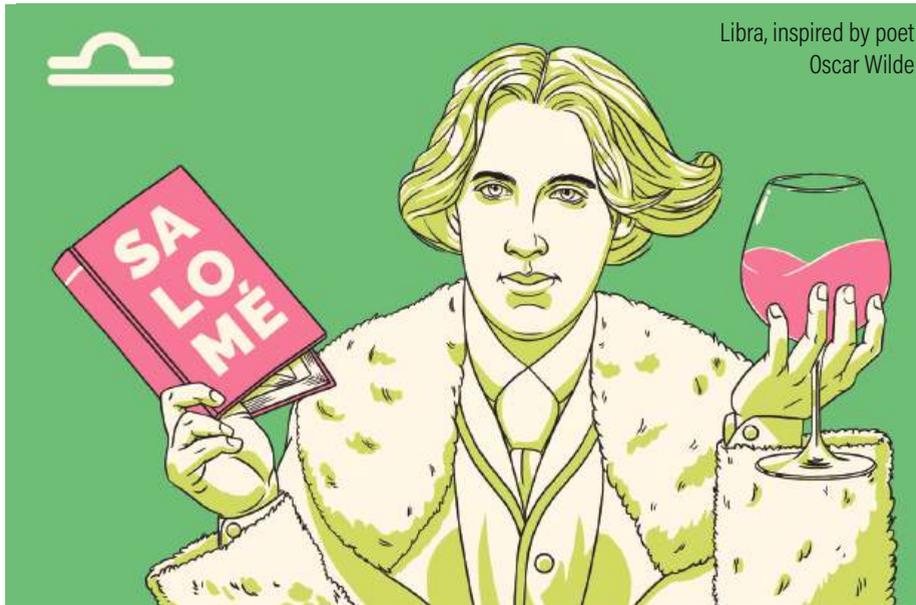
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By LILLY RODDY

# A Busy October

Things are coming to a head during Libra season.



This is going to be a busy, active, and eventful October. Multiple planets are making their presence felt, especially from the 8th through the 15th, and that could be very disruptive. Both Saturn and Pluto go direct this month. Mercury goes direct by the 7th, and Mars goes retrograde on the 30th. And to top it off, there is a solar eclipse on the 25th! A lot of issues are coming to a head as the country's chart is being activated by Mars, planet of self-protection. That can mean a greater chance of violent conflicts with other countries. But don't let your concerns make you feel paralyzed or powerless—we will have options and choices for adapting to changing situations.

## ARIES (Mar. 21–Apr. 19)

Relationships are the primary focus as the month begins. You will need to put some energy into your partnerships to solidify those connections. You are speaking more directly, and you'll want to know that your efforts aren't being wasted. You are continuing to explore alternative career paths as you try to work on passion projects rather than always doing what others expect of you. With your ruler, Mars, going retrograde, you will want more time to yourself for introspection. This is the time for making plans, not for acting on impulses. This energy level will continue to be strong through the middle of February 2023. Focus on completing ongoing projects.

## TAURUS (Apr. 20–May 20)

This year, you have been working on promoting your career while also focusing on your passion. Both of those goals could come to fruition in late October! As the month begins, you are working on improving your health and work routines. Your co-workers may need your diplomatic intervention to help things run smoother. Finances, investments, and marketing your skills are going to be priorities for the next couple of months. You are starting to find that your current job is too limiting. Partnerships become the primary focus in late October. With the solar eclipse occurring in your partnership area, you will be redefining your

relationship boundaries. You are still working on balancing career and relationship obligations while still taking time for yourself!

## GEMINI (May 21–June 21)

Your sign is definitely the most active one this month. Mercury, your ruler, is retrograde, and Mars (the planet of activity, adventure, and self-protection) is making an extended stay in your sign. You are more focused on making decisions that put you first. There could be conflicts or problems at work that have you rethinking your plans. This will be very strong in the first two weeks of the month. You will absolutely need some time and space for yourself, since you may be trying to get too much done all at once. This would be an excellent month to focus on improving your health and vitality. By the end of the month, you are working on establishing a more balanced outlook on life.

## CANCER (June 22–July 22)

As the month begins, creating a more comfortable home and family life is a priority as you seek more time to connect with your family of origin to relive old memories. As the month progresses, finding a better exercise and health regimen is a priority. The need to create better conditions for yourself will be strong through March 2023 as you explore your spiritual side and your purpose in life. In the

latter part of the month, you are more creative. You are looking for outlets where you can express your best self. This is a time to recharge and let some ideas incubate before you act on them.

## LEO (July 23–Aug. 22)

You are putting energy into making your routines run more smoothly. You have more to say, and you are getting your point across without ruffling too many feathers. As we progress through the month, your spotlight shifts to your home life. You have been dealing with how to adapt to the aging process. You are paying more attention to your boundaries. If your expectations don't align with the people you are interacting with, they may not be in your life much longer. You haven't done well with jobs that are too restrictive, so keep looking for something that connects to your passions and expresses your individuality. That will be very strong at the end of the month with the solar eclipse on the 25th. Changes are brewing!

## VIRGO (Aug. 23–Sept. 22)

This month (and through March 2023) there is a lot of activity in your career sector. You will be looking at new ways to do what you do! You may feel limited

by your current position, or management's lack of concern for employees. The middle of the month is when this energy will be at its peak. Your partners may need more from you during this time, so find a way to satisfy them as well as yourself! You are looking at ways to improve your sense of security and eliminate debt from your life. In the latter half of the month, you are more direct in your conversations. This could be a better time for taking a class and looking for alternative solutions, perhaps on social media.

**LIBRA (Sept. 23–Oct. 23)**

Happy Birthday to the Librans! This is your personal yearly cycle when you view the past and move forward into the future. Relationship energies are still positive, but this is the time to review them in order to ensure better communication and a sense of shared goals. By the middle of the month, you are paying more attention to your finances and utilizing your talents. This is a very good month to write, take classes, and step away from the routine expectations. In late October, you start to pay more attention to your health and exercise routines. There is plenty to keep you busy this month.

**SCORPIO (Oct. 24–Nov. 21)**

The time before your birthday is always a time to rest, retreat, and take some time for yourself. You need more time for self-care and meditation. You have been working on healthy boundaries so

that family expectations are kept in check. This will be emphasized with the solar eclipse this month. In your personal relationships, you are needing more closeness and intimacy. With your career, you have been working on breaking away from routine demands and finding work you enjoy. This energy only gets stronger at the end of the month, when you'll feel more in control and ready to deal with your fellow humans.

**SAGITTARIUS (Nov.22–Dec.21)**

Relationships are currently the big theme for you through the end of March 2023 (thanks to Mars, planet of impulsiveness and one's sense of safety). If you are in a difficult partnership, those problems come to the surface so they can be dealt with immediately! You are more likely to express your feelings without much of a filter. Issues with family may arise at this time—indicating major shifts in the family that will require you to decide what to do. By the end of the month, you are ready for some rest and retreat.

**CAPRICORN (Dec. 22–Jan. 19)**

Your focus this month is on your career, your work environment, co-workers' teamwork (or lack thereof), and getting rid of job stress. It is difficult for you to ask for help, but your friends are more than willing to give you a hand. Business and community support groups can help. You are interested in improving your work conditions, updating your home office, and possibly buying new electronics. In late October you will be making things more manageable by improving your boundaries. With the solar eclipse on the 25th, you will want to be more of your own person!

**AQUARIUS (Jan. 20–Feb. 18)**

You are more open to new ideas and expanding your knowledge base this month. You are having strong creative urges that stimulate you to show more of yourself. If you have children, they could make you proud this month. You will want to do things that bring more joy and fun into your life. Career and long-term plans are still very active with the solar eclipse occurring in your career and home sectors. You may want to do some remodeling—both at home and in your career. You are looking beyond your paycheck for something that activates your passion. There could be a power shift within your family as family members age and the younger adults step up to take over family rituals.

**PISCES (Feb. 19–Mar. 20)**

Gemini and Pisces are the most active signs this month. You may be feeling unappreciated by family, even though you have always stepped in when there are problems. You are likely to be more direct and even angry with family members. This same dynamic is also occurring at work, and you may even feel your partner needing more attention. By the end of the month, you will definitely be working on your boundaries and making decisions about your future, including career and current relationship partners. You are moving into a more decisive time when you will be the main focus. It will take time for you to address the issues and set limits to ensure your safety. You'll have until January to get things in place.

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



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# Dynamite Drag Illusionist

Barry Mii Dandy is the pocket-sized performer with energy to spare.

By SAM BYRD



Barry Mii Dandy might be the new kid on the block, but this dynamo packs a punch in his pint-sized body. As the winner of the Best New Drag King award

and a finalist for Best Drag King, he has certainly made an indelible mark as the little drag king that could.”

But don't be fooled by his size. Big things come in small packages, and Dandy is delivering the goods in spades.

## Pronouns?

He/him in drag, and she/her out of drag. But I will answer to anything.

## Inner avatar?

A small, man-shaped Mexican jumping bean.

## Home town?

Baytown—I'm a small-town kid.

## Drag birthday?

June 23, 2021

## What got you interested in drag?

I grew up wanting to be a performer of some kind, whether it was my dream of being in a band or being a backup dancer. I also really love fashion, so drag was a great way to combine my two passions.

## Describe your drag persona.

Endearing, sexy, silly, timid, very energetic, and a little dumb. Barry does his best, but he's a failed backup dancer who decided one day that he wanted to shine on his own. Though he has a hard time speaking, he lets all his worries go once he hears his name and hits the stage. He's a man of many styles—so much so that he has a wig for any given fashion. When you boil him down, he's just a shy pretty-boy who just wants to make people smile.

## How do you pack all that energy into a tiny body?

Honestly, I have no idea! I think I just love to give every performance my all.

## What's your ultimate goal as a performer?

My goal is to spread joy and positivity, one



dance move at a time! I want to show that as drag kings, we might be tiny but we are mighty. I ultimately want to show that drag kings have the passion and the drive to be just as entertaining as the queens.

## What do you do in your downtime?

I hang with friends. I like crafting, online window-shopping, and coming up with outfit ideas—both in and out of drag.

## Any advice for up-and-coming performers?

Have fun! Live in your fantasy, find what makes you unique, and build your drag persona off of it. Drag is an art form, not a competition. We are part of a community of misfits that comes together to celebrate our queerness through the art of drag. Also, make a mood board! It'll save you so much time, and make finding your aesthetic so much easier.

## What are your passions in life?

Dancing. I'm in no way a trained dancer, but letting my body move to a beat is truly my happy place.

## How would you describe Houston's drag scene for a visitor?

There is definitely a lot of glitz and glamour, so much diversity, and so many performance styles. We still have some growing to do for the smaller subcultures of drag, but we are definitely moving in the right direction. Houston drag has a lot of heart and passion.

## What do you want the world to know about the LGBTQ community?

We are all just people who want to live our lives like everyone else. We want respect, love, and compassion. We want our stories to be heard. No matter what the world throws at us, we prevail. The world can never silence our pride.

## Where can fans see you perform?

Catch me Wednesdays at Hamburger Mary's for Mary's Kids. I'm their very first drag king on cast! And if I'm not there, you can usually find me at Pearl Bar.



Follow Barry Mii Dandy on Facebook and Instagram @Barry\_Mii\_dandy.



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*“It’s an honor to be able to serve the community I love so much. As an LGBTQ+ person of color, I understand the challenges our communities face. As an Avita Pharmacist, my medication consults are much more effective once I have gained that rapport. Being able to live and work in my authentic truth is liberating, and I believe it helps me care for patients more effectively.”*

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