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December 10 - 22, 2020 • Issue 27.25



The

Remarkable People

Our list of the 20 most remarkable people of
2020 in Central Florida and Tampa Bay

Issue

DAYTONA BEACH • ORLANDO • TAMPA • ST. PETERSBURG • CLEARWATER • SARASOTA

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ON THE COVER



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We name the 20 most remarkable people of 2020 in Central Florida and Tampa Bay.

CENTRAL FLORIDA COVER – COURTESY VAL DEMINGS; TAMPA BAY COVER PHOTO BY DYLAN TODD.

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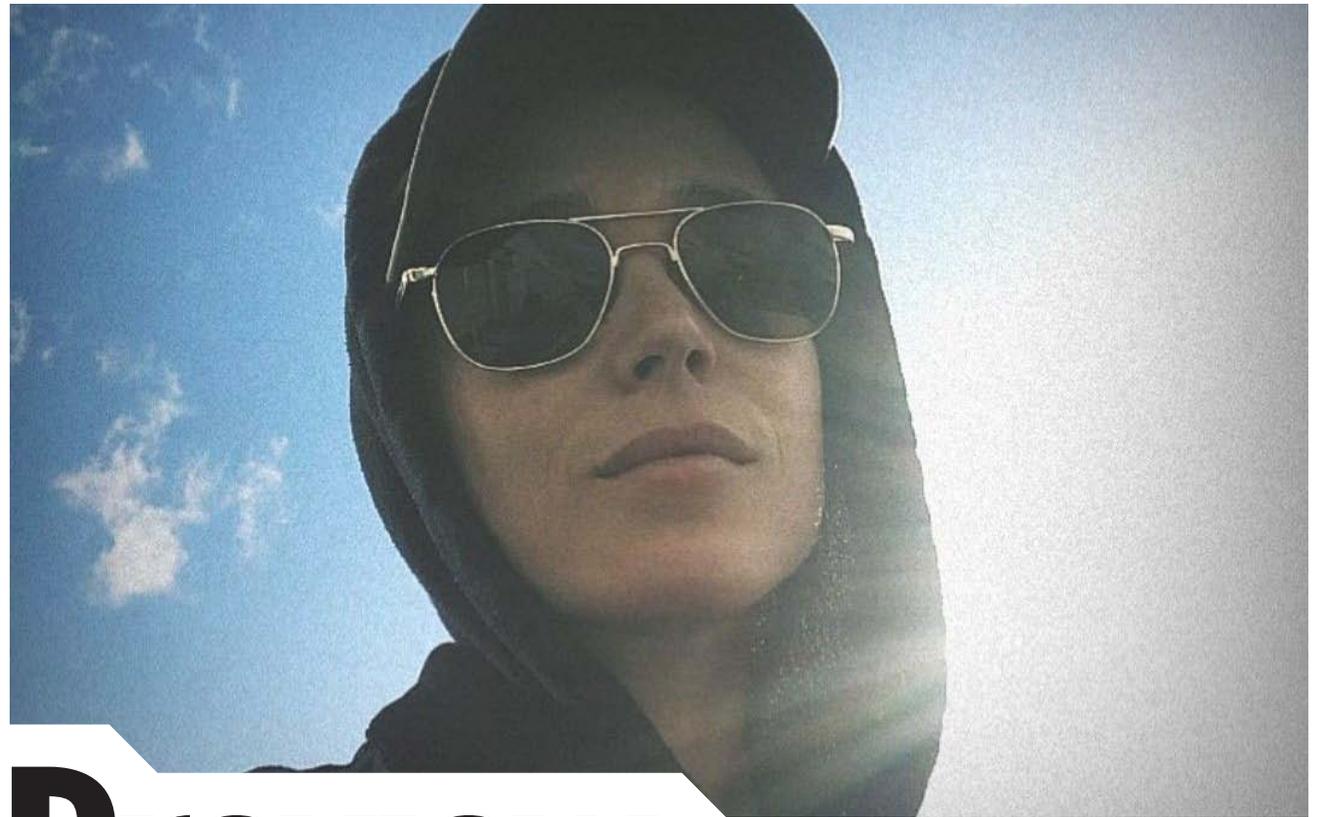
Read It Online!

In addition to a Web site with daily LGBTQ updates, a digital version of each issue of the publication is made available on WatermarkOnline.com



Her advocacy for the LGBTQ community and her work specifically on behalf of Pulse survivors makes no member more deserving of this recognition than Congresswoman Val Demings.”

– U.S. REP. MIKE QUIGLEY (IL-5), WRITING ABOUT U.S. REP. VAL DEMINGS IN HER MOST REMARKABLE PEOPLE OF 2020 PROFILE



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TAMPA BAY BUREAU CHIEF'S DESK

LIKE MOST THINGS IN OUR NEW normal, the end of 2020 has been unique. While October, November and December have long been my favorite months of the year, this one in particular tried its best to change that.

It was difficult not to let it at times, like during Halloween. The global pandemic rightfully kept responsible, in-person celebrations at bay this year – easily the best part, candy aside – and it stung a bit. I love a costume, but wearing one at home on a Zoom call didn't pack the same punch.

Like a lot of folks in the LGBTQ community, I've always loved Halloween. It gives so many of us the opportunity to outwardly reflect whomever or whatever we want to be, praised by a world that often shuns us for doing exactly that.

Thankfully whatever loss I was feeling quickly subsided after Joe Biden's victory in November's presidential election. It allowed my husband and I to celebrate our

four-year wedding anniversary knowing the country had taken its first steps in a long-overdue course correction.

In electing not only the most pro-LGBTQ presidential ticket in U.S. history but the nation's first female vice president in Kamala Harris, we finally had a much-needed win. It gave us plenty to be grateful for on Thanksgiving, which out of necessity also looked different this year.

Instead of visiting family early in the day and ending the evening in a turkey-induced coma with friends, my husband and I bucked tradition to enjoy dinner for two. Of course I use "dinner for two" loosely, since we arguably made a feast for about 20.

Our Thanksgiving centerpiece was about 12 more pounds of turkey than we actually needed, a testament to the American dream. In a credit to Harris, it also tasted incredible – since in our attempts to Build Bake Better we followed her brine-and-roast recipe that went viral before the holiday. Thank you, Madam Vice President.

We also whipped up a number of side dishes and desserts, the real stars of Thanksgiving. My husband and I spent hours in the kitchen together, finishing a wide variety of our favorites to keep us fed into early December.

It was a bit of normalcy in a year that's been anything but kind to the status quo, but even more enjoyable than the meal was the making of it. It reminded me how lucky we are to have our health, our home and our happiness, a feeling that was only amplified by virtually connecting with family and friends afterwards.

That contentment carried into my December birthday, where in lieu of in-person celebrations loved ones shared their well wishes virtually and Amazon delivered their gifts. Not everyone has that opportunity, something that's becoming clearer every day.

Moving into 2021, I'm working not to take that for granted – especially after Florida hit its grim milestone of one million COVID-19 cases Dec. 1. The pandemic isn't over just because we're over it.

Even with all of its challenges, 2020 has remained a remarkable year. As a community we've found new ways to stay connected with one another through tragedy and triumph.

That's why in this issue we present the 20 Most Remarkable People of 2020 – 10 in Tampa Bay and 10 others in Central Florida – many of whom I've been fortunate enough to cover in the pages of Watermark this year. Each individual has demonstrated their commitment to making a

difference, detailed in profiles written by fellow changemakers in their own lives.

In Tampa Bay, we begin with Rep. Michele Rayner, who earlier this year became the first Black, openly LGBTQ woman elected to the Florida Legislature. Next up is Larry Biddle of the Plus Project, which distributed nearly \$55,000 in grants to worthy LGBTQ nonprofits.

Innovative entertainment takes center stage in our list, just as it did throughout 2020. Artists John Gascot, Chad Mize and Cam Parker each found ways to help others through their work, as did fan favorite drag performer Daphne Ferraro and Kayden Rodriguez, co-founder of the inaugural Tampa Bay Transgender

“Even with all of its challenges, 2020 has remained a remarkable year.”

Film Festival.

In a year that largely kept us apart, Chris Jones and Lorelei Matisse helped our community safely come together via Come OUT St. Pete. Each person's impact is detailed along with that of Karla Bello, who after her private mistreatment by Pinellas County officials publicly demanded change.

That fight for a better future continues in our news coverage. In Tampa Bay, the cities of St. Petersburg and Tampa each receive 100% in the Human Rights Campaign's municipal equality index as Balance Tampa Bay raises funds for those in need. In Central Florida, the city of Orlando launches an HIV community survey.

Watermark strives to bring you a variety of stories, your stories. Please stay safe, stay informed and enjoy this latest issue. ▼

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TATIANA QUIROGA is the Director of Family Equity and Diversity for Family

Equality. She is a proud mother, wife and LGBTQ advocate in Central Florida. **Page 17**



GREG STEM lives in Gulfport, Fla., and has worked as a freelance

writer for several local publications. He is a founding member of St. Pete Pride and active politically in Tampa Bay. **Page 19**

SABRINA AMBRA, NATHAN BRUEMMER, SCOTTIE CAMPBELL, MIGUEL FULLER, DIVINE GRACE, HOLLY KAPHERR ALEJOS, JASON LECLERC, MELODY MAIA MONET, JERICK MEDIAVILLA, GREG STEM, DR. STEVE YACOVELLI, MICHAEL WANZIE

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EDITOR'S DESK

DECEMBER HAS ALWAYS BEEN MY favorite time of the year. Even with the end of the school year and my birthday both happening in June, this month was the one I looked forward to most when I was growing up and that love has only grown in me as I grew.

As a big guy, my internal temperature runs fairly hot so a cooler month is always preferable to me rather than a sweltering summer month. I also love all things Christmas. I know it is sacrilegious as a gay man to say that I don't really care about Halloween, but aside from the scary movies and the candy, the spooky season just isn't my cup of tea.

As I started working here, this month became my favorite of the year for another reason — our annual list of Central Florida and Tampa Bay's Most Remarkable People of the Year.

This yearly list is our way of recognizing those in our local

community who have shown themselves to go above and beyond in the name of equality, have made a historical contribution to the movement or have been unsung heroes in the fight for LGBTQ people. In this latest issue, we have named our 20 Most Remarkable People of 2020 — 10 in Central Florida and 10 in Tampa Bay — who we believe have shown these qualities during what has been the most trying and difficult of years.

We have activists, artists and volunteers among our remarkable 20. Those who stood out in a year dominated by a pandemic, calls for racial equality and a presidential election that had the largest voter turnout in U.S. history.

In selecting who to feature on the covers of our remarkable issue, we went with two inspiring and passionate voices in Florida in 2020 — U.S Rep. Val Demings on our Central Florida cover and state Rep. Michele Rayner on our Tampa Bay cover.

Demings began the year as a standout among the seven impeachment managers who argued the case against President Donald Trump during his trial in the Senate. She showed the country and the world what we here in Central Florida have known for years. She takes her job seriously and she comes to work prepared. Along with her impressive showing at the impeachment hearings, Demings also stood up as an LGBTQ ally and activist, introducing a bill in the House to remove the ban on blood donations from gay and bisexual men.

Rayner made history in Tampa Bay during the 2020 election season when she became the first Black, openly LGBTQ woman elected to the Florida Legislature. Prior to running for political office, Rayner served Tampa Bay as a civil rights attorney and an advocate for social change.

The state of Florida is about to see what Tampa Bay has gotten to see already. Rayner is someone who will stand with and fight for all Floridians to feel heard, safe and to have an equal seat at the table.

Demings and Rayner are joined by 18 other amazing people who have shown in 2020 how truly remarkable they are.

Individuals like The Center Orlando's Joel Morales and One Orlando Alliance's Felipe Sousa-Lazaballet in Central Florida and the Plus Project's Larry Biddle and Come OUT St. Pete's Chris Jones and Lorelei Matisse in Tampa Bay, who showed working to help nonprofits was even more important during a pandemic.

Artists and performers — like Orlando's MrMs Adrien, Tampa's

Cam Parker and St. Petersburg's Daphne Ferraro, John Gascot and Chad Mize — who used their talents to help us feel connected in a year where so much was detached.

Activists who continued the important work needed to be done in the community. Individuals like Eryn Harris, who organized Flagler County's first Pride March; Daniel Downer, who through his organization Bros in Convo supported efforts helping both the transgender community and Black Lives Matter; Bobby Hermida, who helped organize a "Mask the People" team which

2020 was a very difficult year, but selecting these 20 remarkable people from it was the easiest decision for us to make.

made more than 3,000 masks for people in Orlando; Kayden Rodriguez, who co-founded the inaugural Tampa Bay Transgender Film Festival; and Karla Bello, who called for change in Pinellas County after law enforcement mistreated her because she is transgender.

LGBTQ business owners like Haos on Church's Blue Star, Gecko CPA Firm's Leah James and State of Gratitude's Chris Bilyk who showed not only their skills in business but their passion for this community.

2020 was a hard year, but selecting these remarkable people from it was the easiest decision for us to make. Congratulations to all of our remarkable people and thank you for your tireless work in a truly remarkable year. ▼

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THE CENTER ORLANDO SELECTED AS PART OF FDA BLOOD STUDY

Jeremy Williams

ORLANDO | The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is funding a study to look into its own policy which currently bans men who have sex with men (MSM) from donating blood. The policy was established in the 1980's during the height of the AIDS pandemic.

The pilot study — called Assessing Donor Variability And New Concepts in Eligibility (ADVANCE) — will help the FDA determine if a donor history questionnaire based on individual risk would be as effective as time-based deferral in reducing the risk of HIV in the blood supply. Current policy states that MSM can donate only after a three-month period has passed since last having sex with another man.

The study will be conducted by Vitalant and OneBlood, the two largest community-based blood centers in the U.S., and the American Red Cross and will be done in partnership with LGBTQ community centers in the country.

"The findings of this study will help determine the next steps that would be needed to modify the donor history questionnaire," says Susan Forbes, senior vice president of corporate communications & public relations for OneBlood. "If the scientific evidence supports the use of the additional questions it could mean gay and bisexual men who present to donate would be assessed based upon their own individual risk for HIV infection and not according to when their last sexual contact with another man occurred."

The study, which is expected to take about a year to complete, will be conducted at eight locations in the U.S., with the LGBT+ Center Orlando being one of them.

"The blood centers reached out to us personally to see if we would like to work with them on the study," says Dr. George Wallace, The Center Orlando's executive director. "We are helping coordinate outreach to the LGBTQ+ community to create awareness about the study and potential participants can be identified. The policies that discriminate against gay and bisexual men are outdated and stigmatizing and I hope that The Center Orlando can play even a small role in getting these changed."

To be eligible to participate in the ADVANCE study you must be a gay or bisexual man between the ages of 18-30, interested in donating blood and have had sex with at least one man in the three months before joining the study.

"Potential participants will complete a short survey to assess if they meet the study inclusion criteria. If the potential participants are qualified, staff conducting the study will enroll the participants into the study and obtain informed consent," Forbes says. ▼

The study will begin enrolling participants soon at ADVANCEstudy.org.



MEMORY QUILT:

Community members unravel one of the Central Florida AIDS quilts that will be displayed during Quilt Tour 2020. (SCREENSHOT FROM CFHPC'S FACEBOOK)

Health Assessment

City of Orlando launches HIV Community Assessment Survey

Jeremy Williams

ORLANDO | The City of Orlando is working with local health organizations to better understand the needs of those living with HIV in Central Florida.

The HIV Community Assessment Survey was launched online Dec. 1 — World AIDS Day — and looks to help create programs and educational materials that will reflect the needs of Central Florida's HIV community.

Questions on the anonymous survey range from inquiring about the participant's knowledge on Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) and non-occupational Post Exposure Prophylaxis (nPEP) to trust of health care professionals and knowing your own HIV status.

In an effort to promote the assessment survey, as well as a way to remember and honor those who have passed away due to HIV/AIDS, a dozen organizations across Central Florida, led by the Central Florida HIV Planning Council (CFHPC) and the Orlando United Assistance Center (OUAC), have come together to create the Quilt Tour 2020.

Central Florida's Quilt Tour 2020 will take locally-created quilts which represent individuals who have passed from HIV/AIDS and display them in a safe and socially-distanced manner at each of the participating organizations.

"We know the importance of the quilt as a symbol of love and respect," Gabriella Rodriguez, executive director of QLatinX and junior co-chair of CFHPC, said in a statement. "It was crucial for us to find a way to share them with the community, we couldn't let 2020 take this away from us."

Rodriguez, who is also a case manager for OUAC and works with the communities affected by the Pulse tragedy, organized the Quilt Tour 2020 as a way to bring the community together from a distance.

The quilts will be on display in a manner so that they are visible from the street and may be observed safely from a distance Dec. 4-31 at 12 agencies — both HIV health care related and non-HIV health care related. The inclusion of non-HIV specific organizations was done purposely, CFHPC stated in a press release, as it shows HIV does not

happen in a vacuum; especially in Orlando which consistently ranks in the top five cities in the U.S. for new HIV cases.

"It is important to involve all of our community in this effort, not just those working in HIV care," Rodriguez said.

Participating organizations displaying the quilts are Hope & Help (4122 Metric Dr.) and Harmony Healthcare (1400 Orlando Ave., #205) in Winter Park; the Orange County Department of Health (6101 Lake Ellenor Dr.), the LGBT+ Center Orlando (946 N. Mills Ave.), OIC/AHF (1707 N. Mills Ave.), Miracle of Love (741 W. Colonial Dr.), Stafford House (711 Seminole Ave.), Aspire Health (100 Columbia St.), OUAC (507 E. Michigan St. in Orlando) and Alianza (11602 Lake Underhill Rd., Ste 106) in Orlando; and Peer Support Space (880 M.L.K. Jr. Blvd.) and the LGBT+ Center Kissimmee (17 W. Monument Ave.) in Kissimmee.

OUAC recently had its services incorporated into the existing services of The Center Orlando.

The CFHPC is a community planning body that advises on the allocation of federal funds for Ryan White Parts A & B and provides HIV prevention planning. CFHPC serves Orange, Osceola, Seminole, Lake and Brevard Counties. ▼

To participate in the City of Orlando's HIV Community Assessment Survey, go to Orlando.gov/HIV-Survey.



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ST. PETE, TAMPA RECEIVE 100% IN HRC'S MUNICIPAL EQUALITY INDEX

Ryan Williams-Jent

TAMPA BAY | The Human Rights Campaign (HRC) released the results of its ninth annual Municipal Equality Index (MEI) Dec. 3, in which the cities of St. Petersburg and Tampa received perfect scores.

The MEI is the only nationwide assessment of LGBTQ equality, scoring how inclusive municipalities are for those who live and work in the cities rated. Of the 506 scored in 2020, a record-breaking 94 earned perfect scores for their nondiscrimination laws, practices, services and public positions on equality.

"The results of this year's MEI show definitive evidence that our local leaders across the nation are standing up for equality – even as they faced headwinds from state governments or the Trump-Pence administration," HRC President Alphonso David said in a statement.

"There is no question that the Trump administration made every effort to attack laws aimed to protect LGBTQ people, and our cities have responded with inclusivity and innovative public policy," he continued. "Although there is newfound optimism sweeping the country with the incoming Biden-Harris administration, there is still work to be done and ground to make up."

The 2020 MEI featured two new issue briefs for policymakers to review. The first detailed the importance of addressing systemic racism through municipal action. The second detailed the Supreme Court's landmark ruling on workplace equality this year, which confirmed LGBTQ workers are protected by federal civil rights law. Despite such progress, HRC noted that "it is imperative that local governments continue enacting comprehensive nondiscrimination protections."

"Adopting the measures outlined in the MEI will not only help cultivate more united and safe communities," David explained, "but it will foster economic growth by signaling to residents, visitors and outside investors that their region is welcoming to all."

Of the 18 Florida cities HRC evaluated, six including St. Petersburg and Tampa received perfect scores. This year marks the seventh consecutive 100% for St. Petersburg.

"Getting to a perfect score several years ago was quite celebratory for us in that it was the first illustration of the 'new day' in St. Pete," St. Petersburg Mayor Rick Kriseman says. "Keeping that score, even as the criteria has evolved, has taken much focus and commitment, not just because we want to earn the score, but because we always want to do right by our community. It is my hope that a perfect score will always be St. Pete's goal."

Tampa Mayor Jane Castor also celebrated Tampa's 100%. "Tampa is proud to be an inclusive city where we celebrate our diversity every day," she shared. "Our LGBTQ community is part of Tampa's colorful fabric, and we are honored to see our HRC score rise in reflection to the progress we have made in the past year to further justice and equity." ♡

To view the HRC's full report and each city's scorecard, visit HRC.org/MEI.



GIVING BACK: Balance Tampa Bay board members and volunteers at the 10th annual Party 4 Presents Dec. 5. PHOTO COURTESY BALANCE TAMPA BAY

'Tis the Season

Balance Tampa Bay unwraps 10th annual Party 4 Presents

Ryan Williams-Jent

S.T. PETERSBURG | Balance Tampa Bay (BTB) held its 10th annual Party 4 Presents Dec. 5 at the Empath Partners in Care (EPIC) St. Pete campus, a socially-distanced holiday toy drive benefiting local charities.

BTB was founded in 2011 to promote LGBTQ-inclusive fellowship, fun and philanthropy throughout Tampa Bay. It has traditionally done so through service events and socials like Party 4 Presents.

This year's beneficiaries include Empath Health, which offers a wide array of services for those facing illnesses throughout Tampa Bay and which EPIC is a member, as well as Champions for Children and the Tampa Bay Party Project. The former focuses on preventing child abuse and neglect while the latter works to ensure every child feels loved and valued.

BTB President Jason Fields says the beneficiaries were chosen because of the unique populations they serve, both during the holidays and throughout the year. "We have a

rapproach with each of these charities and have experience working with them to efficiently distribute toys," he explains. "We are excited to work with them again."

The event was sponsored by Raymond James and mirrored EPIC's socially-distanced, drive-in fundraisers launched earlier this year. Fields estimates that 35 cars filled the locale's spacious parking lot, with more than 100 people – all of whom adhered to COVID-19 safety precautions – dropping off hundreds of toys and cash donations across the four hours.

Audiences also enjoyed live entertainment and a screening of the cult classic comedy "Santa Claus Conquers the Martians" from their vehicles. In addition to donated toys, more than \$3,000 has also been raised for the charities via Facebook, with donations welcome until Dec. 12.

"It was a real challenge because of COVID but we moved forward," Fields reflects. "The fellowship overall was the real highlight – we had performances and decorations, all of the volunteers had lights on and people were dropping off presents. It was fun and light."

"It really just made my heart happy," BTB Special Events Coordinator Gabe Alves-Tomko adds. "We had to be super creative. The experience overall was incredible; people were wearing masks while maintaining social distance, understanding the times that we are all living in."

More than 800 toys have been received as of Dec. 7, with more expected in the coming weeks. BTB's Amazon Wish List will accept items until Dec. 12 to ensure gifts arrive before Christmas.

"We've had donations coming from Amazon not just from people who live in Florida but from people who live in other states, in Georgia and farther up North," Alves-Tomko says. "It's really amazing to see the community coming together for such a good cause."

BTB's work will continue even after the holiday season. Alves-Tomko stresses that "we have many other opportunities to impact the community. If people want to get involved, Balance is the perfect place to do it."

"That's our whole mission," Fields adds. "We are constantly looking for volunteers and for outreach into the community. Please contact us!" ♡

For more information about Balance Tampa Bay, including donation or volunteer opportunities, email Admin@BalanceTampaBay.org or visit BalanceTampaBay.org. Learn more about Empath Health, Champions for Children and the Tampa Bay Party Project at EmpathHealth.org, CFCTB.org and TampaBayPartyProject.org.

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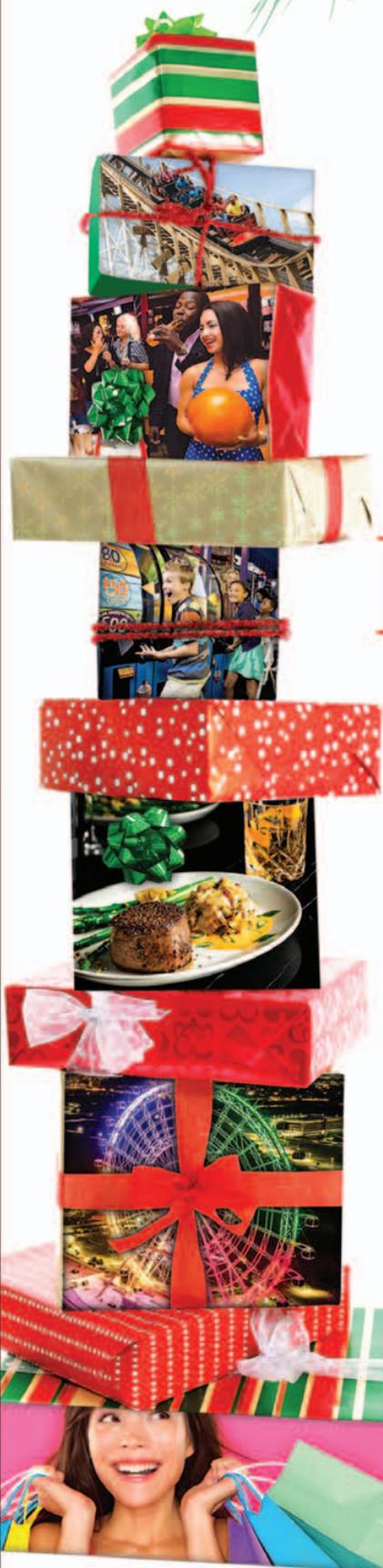




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TWO LESBIAN WOMEN OF COLOR NAMED TO KEY ROLES IN BIDEN WHITE HOUSE COMMUNICATION STAFF

Chris Johnson of The Washington Blade, Courtesy of the National LGBT Media Association

The Biden transition team announced Nov. 29 two lesbian women of color — Karine Jean-Pierre and Pili Tobar — were selected to serve as key members for the new administration's White House communications staff, which will for the first-time ever be all-female.

Jean-Pierre served as senior adviser to President-elect Joe Biden and chief of staff to Vice President-elect Kamala Harris during the 2020 presidential campaign. Previously, Jean-Pierre was chief public affairs officer for MoveOn.org and an NBC and MSNBC Political Analyst.

During the Obama administration, Jean-Pierre was regional political director for the White House Office of Political Affairs during the Obama administration and served in various roles in the 2008 and 2012 Obama presidential campaign. Born in Martinique and raised in New York, Jean-Pierre is a graduate of Columbia University.

Tobar, on the other hand, was communications director for coalitions for the Biden campaign. Previously, Tobar was deputy director for America's Voice, where she advocated on behalf of immigrants.

Additionally, Tobar has also worked as the Hispanic media director for Senate Minority Leader Charles Schumer; national director of Hispanic Media and Western regional press secretary for the Democratic National Committee; communications director for Congressman Ruben Gallego; and communications director for the Latino Victory

Project. Originally from Florida and raised in Guatemala, Tobar is a graduate of the University of Miami and now lives in D.C. with her wife and daughter.

The Biden transition team announced the news about Jean-Pierre and Tobar in the same statement announcing Jennifer Psaki, who had previously served during the Obama administration as State Department spokesperson, would be White House press secretary in the new administration.

Jean-Pierre and Tobar aren't the first openly gay people to work in a White House communications staff. In the Trump White House, Judd Deere has been serving as White House deputy press secretary. During the Obama years, Eric Schulz was also White House deputy press secretary and was the first openly gay person to conduct an on-camera news conference from the White House briefing room. ♡

2017 BAN ON LOCAL LGBTQ ORDINANCES ENDS IN NORTH CAROLINA

Wire Report

RALEIGH, N.C. | A 3 1/2-year ban on new local ordinances aimed at protecting LGBTQ rights in North Carolina expired Dec. 1, prompting gay rights groups to urge the passage of such measures now.

Democratic Gov. Roy Cooper agreed to the moratorium in March 2017 in exchange for GOP lawmakers agreeing to do away with several portions of a "bathroom bill" that Republicans had approved a year earlier.

A key disputed section of House Bill 2 directed transgender people to use public bathrooms matching their biological sex instead of the gender they identify with. It drew national condemnation

and prompted several large corporations and sports teams to relocate events to other states or reconsider expanding in North Carolina.

As the moratorium ended, leaders of Equality North Carolina and the Campaign for Southern Equality urged North Carolina residents Dec. 1 to contact leaders of cities and urge them to expand anti-discrimination laws for the LGBTQ community. The moratorium had barred new local ordinances related to private employment, hotels and restaurants.

"We can finally begin writing a new chapter for LGBTQ North Carolinians, one where no one is left vulnerable to discrimination based on who they are or who they love," Allison Scott, policy director

for the Campaign for Southern Equality, said in a news release.

Beau Mills, executive director of the North Carolina Metro Mayors Coalition, said before the ban ended that he wasn't aware of any city planning to pass new ordinances right away. "I am aware that cities, some municipalities, are certainly looking at it," Mills told The News & Observer of Raleigh.

Although the legislature that convenes in January will still be controlled by Republicans, the party lacks a veto-proof majority and will have limited options to cancel any local ordinances that might be passed. Cooper was reelected in November. The GOP has shown little interest in passing statewide protections for the LGBTQ community. ♡

REIMAGINED SMART RIDE RAISES MORE THAN \$660K

Ryan Williams-Jent

Organizers of the 17th annual SMART Ride have announced that this year's reimagined fundraiser has raised more than \$660,000 for HIV/AIDS organizations in Florida.

The SMART Ride is the nation's second largest AIDS bicycle ride and the only one of its size to donate the entirety of funds raised to service organizations. Beneficiaries have received more than \$11.8 million since 2003.

The ride has traditionally welcomed hundreds of cyclists to complete a 165-mile trek from Miami to Key West. It was restructured this year in response to COVID-19, encouraging participants to log 165 miles, minutes or other measurable metric for physical activities of their choice Nov. 20-22.

"It was amazing to see people reimagine their 165," SMART Ride Founder Glen Weinzimer says. "We had people riding in San Diego, walking in NYC, riding in Atlanta, cleaning beaches for 165 minutes in Fort Lauderdale, doing 16.5 miles of stand-up paddle boarding and even volunteering for 16.5 hours, all to raise awareness and funds to combat HIV in our own backyard."

Initial totals showed more than \$635,000 had been raised by this year's nearly 700 registered participants. SMART Ride 17's beneficiaries include AIDS Help in Monroe County, Broward House in Wilton Manors, Compass Community Center in Palm Beach County, Metro Inclusive Health in Tampa Bay, Miracle of Love in Central Florida and Pridelines in Miami-Dade County.

The total was first revealed via social media Nov. 22. "In a year of so much fear, disappointment, loneliness, uncertainty, sickness and economic despair, you shined as you always do," Weinzimer shared. "Hurricanes have tried to stop us, bitter cold weather has tried to derail us, but this was our biggest challenge ever and you came through."

This year's fundraising total has climbed to \$660,000 in the weeks since and donations will continue to be collected through December. "We're especially grateful for CAN Community Health. Without their title sponsorship, this year would have been impossible to produce," Weinzimer says.

"In the midst of a pandemic, it was heartwarming to see people raise so much money," he continues. "Especially when there is a fear on many to ask in this most unusual of times with so many caught in an economic crisis. We have seen that those who have the means have been more generous than usual and willing to help."

A reimagined check distribution for this year's beneficiaries is currently scheduled for January. ♡

For more information about this year's reimagined SMART Ride or to donate additional funds, visit TheSMARTRide.org.

IMPORTANT FACTS FOR BIKTARVY®

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

(bik-TAR-vee)

MOST IMPORTANT INFORMATION ABOUT BIKTARVY

BIKTARVY may cause serious side effects, including:

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

ABOUT BIKTARVY

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

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

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

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

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Tell your healthcare provider if you:

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

Tell your healthcare provider about all the medicines you take:

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

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

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

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HOW TO TAKE BIKTARVY

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GET MORE INFORMATION

- ▶ This is only a brief summary of important information about BIKTARVY. Talk to your healthcare provider or pharmacist to learn more.
- ▶ Go to BIKTARVY.com or call 1-800-GILEAD-5
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See Chad's story at [BIKTARVY.com](https://www.biktarvy.com).

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



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Tatiana Quiroga

PARENTAL GUIDANCE

Self-care in a COVID year

WELL 2020, YOU'VE been memorable! Almost nine months into quarantine, my family and I are still washing our hands compulsively, wearing masks, social distancing, working remotely and distance learning. It doesn't feel like much has changed, nor have we had much progress. Instead, the COVID numbers are rising, the president is still refusing to concede and racism and white supremacy are still very much alive.

My family and I have slipped into a routine. Our daily grind of schoolwork, Zoom meetings, conference calls and juggling time and workspace. I've fallen victim to sweatpants, sports bras and comfy T-shirts as my customary work attire. However, in our new normal, we have found solace in simpler things like card games, long walks, bike rides and we even went camping a few weeks ago. Well, we stayed in a rustic cabin, but in my book, it still counts.

While a lot feels like it hasn't changed in quarantine, I daydream about returning to our pre-quarantine, pre-COVID lives and it feels foreign and strange. I don't feel the same. During this time, I recognize that I've changed. Out of survival and keeping my sanity, I've been forced to purposely seek out self-care. A term that I never paid much attention to or thought much about. It felt like something

I would get to eventually when I have some free time. Self-care wasn't trendy or popular before 2020. As a society, it wasn't a priority. My parents, teachers and professors never taught me about self-care. Even when earning my Master's in Mental Health Counseling, we never completed course work on "self-care."

For some, self-care is viewed as selfish and greedy; to put yourself first and to meet your needs before others. For me, it's been critical to my soul, to my spirit and to my mental health. I've learned to purposely seek out activities that bring me joy, make me smile, fill my heart and give me a sense of purpose.

To distract me from the headlines, a handful of Zoom funerals and our four walls, I dove headfirst into volunteer work, my happy place. I'm on the Board of Directors for Zebra Coalition and Come Out With Pride. Since most nonprofits were greatly impacted by COVID, I knew that there was a lot of work to be done.

At Come Out With Pride, we were determined not to cancel Pride and press on. And, we did just that! On the morning of Pride In The Streets, our vehicle procession throughout Orlando, I headed to the launch area to help execute the event. By mid-morning, the parking lot was packed with various cars, trucks and vans. People dressed in their best and brightest Pride attire, while still wearing masks, of course. Pride flags flying so proudly. Music bouncing. The air was buzzing. Pausing to take a deep breath, I stepped back for a moment to let it all sink in. I was brought to tears and overwhelmed by emotions. After months of quarantine, I was reminded that I wasn't alone. I have a community and it's beautiful, bold and diverse. This sliver in time became a self-care moment that I cherish and hold onto when time seems to drag.

On other days, I write gratitude lists, spelling out all the things in my life that I'm thankful for. Depending on my mood, the moon, how my children are behaving or what's for dinner, my lists could be full of small, simple things or riddled with complexities and existential

allowing myself to get lost in a good book. Enjoying the smell of my favorite candle. Feeling a runner's high when challenging myself to run one more mile. Falling in love with the grace and elegance of a full moon and basking in her bliss. Sitting on my back porch,

of a year has given me the magnificent gifts of self-care and gratitude. This year has taught me to focus on the things I have versus the things I don't. When times are rough, my spirit is low and my motivation is lacking, I remember I am not alone and that I need

After months of quarantine, I was reminded that I wasn't alone. I have a community and it's beautiful, bold and diverse.

examples. It varies. I admit, at times, I have to dig deep.

My family and I have experienced various forms of loss during this time but I always find something to be grateful for and appreciate. In the name of self-care, I've learned to pause in moments and seek out ways to live in these seconds of time. Family dance parties in our kitchen. Letting go and

savoring a cool breeze and watching the palm trees sway. These moments in time can't be repeated, but are easily forgotten or taken for granted. I'm so eagerly trying to capture and keep them in my pocket to cherish later.

As we barrel towards the end of the year, I reflect on 2020 and I must acknowledge that this hellacious, dumpster fire

to be kind to myself, focus on gratitude and seek out and live in those moments that spark my soul, ignite my passion, make me smile and bring me joy! In those moments, I've built hope that 2021 will be better! ♥♥

Tatiana Quiroga is the Director of Family Equity and Diversity for Family Equality. She is a proud mother, wife and LGBTQ advocate in Central Florida.



Blake Little: Photographs from the

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Photograph by: Blake Little, *Hollywood Style Cowboys, Sun Valley, California, 1991* (detail)

readers of this publication and my column specifically. I hope it might bring a smile to your face.

Happiest of holidays to each of you – and now, with apologies to Clement Clarke Moore, author of “A Visit from St. Nicholas” – I present “A Visit from St. Biden,” my holiday parody.

“Twas the night before elections went all through the house, with a pandemic raging it’s been a real roust.

All the vaccines were hung by the chimney with care, in hopes that immunity soon would be there. The children were nestled with no virus dreads, while visions of home schooling danced in their heads.

And ma in her mask covering her face with no gaps, had just settled our brains without MAGA hats; When out on the lawn there arose such a clatter, I sprang from my bed to see what was the matter.

Yep, it was Donald - he couldn’t be fatter. Away from the window for he wanted cash, tore open the shutters and I hit me some hash.

The moon on the face of his porn star in tow, gave a lustre of midday to hush money below. When what to my wondering eyes did appear, but Donald himself and Rudy, oh dear.

With a crazy Republican so lively and quick, I knew in a moment he must be a prick. More rapid than eagles his conspiracies came, and he whistled, and shouted, and called them by name.

“Now, Fraud! Now, Recounts! Now Socialist Vixens! It’s Fake News on Maddow, on CNN and Wolf Blitzen! To the top of the ballots, to the top we must crawl! Now count away, throw away, discredit them all!”

With warming climates the wild hurricanes fly, Joe rejoins us to Paris, stops polluting the sky. So up to the White House

the Democrats flew, with the sleigh full of empathy and Kamala too!

And then a concession, I barely heard on the roof. With prancing and pawing and a forced little hoof. As I drew in my head, puffing weed all around, down the chimney a smiling St. Biden

tied up like a bow, and the mask on his face was as white as the snow.

The stump of a pot pipe he’s not quite there yet, but keep up the pressure it’ll be legal you bet. He had a broad face and some aviator glasses, he’s charming to all, to lads

And pointing a finger to those that he chose, now there’s a real leader and the country it rose. He sprang to his limo, gave his team a loud whistle, with all sorts of ideas that make conservatives bristle.

But I heard him exclaim, ere he drove out of sight—

I don’t know about you, but 2020 has given me about as much serious and heavy stuff as I can handle.

came with a bound.

He was dressed presidential, from his head to his foot, crushing Trump and his cronies with ashes and soot. A bundle of health care he had flung on his back, with all sorts of goodies in his progressive pack.

His eyes – how they twinkled! His dimples, how merry! His record popular votes – what a beautiful cherry! His electoral win

and to lasses.

He was in shape and lively, a right jolly old elf, made me glad that I voted, in spite of myself. A wink of his eye and a twist of his head, soon gave me to know I had nothing to dread.

He spoke not a word, but went straight to his work; stopped the virus from spreading, then stopped a real jerk.

“Happy Biden to all, and to all a good night!” ▼

“A Visit from St. Nicholas” was originally published in 1823. Greg Stemm is a 37 year resident of Pinellas County. He is a founder of St Pete Pride and currently sits on the board of the LGBTQ Resource Center of the Gulfport Public Library. Greg is an outspoken activist on many issues including HIV/AIDS education.



Greg Stemm

POSITIVE LIVING

A Visit from St. Biden

LET’S FACE IT, 2020 HAS been an absolute dumpster fire. Living with the pandemic, going through the election and social unrest from facing our nation’s systemic racism has put us all on edge.

Fear seems to have ruled the day. So when I sat down to write my final column of the year, my first inclination was to go dark and heavy. Dec. 1 was World AIDS Day and I thought about reflecting more about my own journey as I prepare to enter my 28th year as a long-term survivor.

As the New Year approaches I also weighed sharing some resolutions, which I always break about Jan. 2, or pondering what we might hope will be better in 2021. Because queers joined many others in voting this year, we have ousted the absolute worst president in American history and I considered writing about the relief we feel and the excitement we hope about what lies ahead.

Since Watermark is featuring Remarkable People in this issue, I even thought about some pretty remarkable people in my life that I could write about, but at this unprecedented holiday season that all seemed too serious and melancholy. I don’t know about you, but 2020 has given me about as much serious and heavy stuff as I can handle.

As the old song goes, “We need a little Christmas right this very minute.” So I’ve crafted my tongue-in-cheek holiday card to all the faithful

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talking points



“ We will pursue bold solutions and increase our collaboration with affected communities around the globe ... We will redouble our efforts to tackle health inequities that impact communities of color, LGBTQ+ people and other marginalized groups, including women and children. ”

—PRESIDENT-ELECT JOE BIDEN, IN A WORLD AIDS DAY STATEMENT DEC. 1

OUT MAGAZINE NAMES LIZZO, MONAE, MADDOW TO ITS OUT100 LIST

AWARD-WINNING SINGERS LIZZO AND JANELLE MONAE, APPLE CEO TIM COOK AND MSNBC'S RACHEL MADDOW have made Out magazine's 2020 Out100 list. Pride Media announced Nov. 19 that its annual list honoring the 100 most influential LGBTQ+ people of the year includes 99-year-old trans WWII U.S. Navy fighter pilot Robina Asti, comedian Wanda Sykes, fashion icon Andre Leon Tall, the creators of "Queer Eye," Black Lives Matter Toronto co-founder Janaya Khan and actors Jameela Jamil, Wilson Cruz, Keke Palmer, Jeremy Pope and Joe Mantello. Honorees were celebrated at the first 2020 Out100 Virtual Honoree Induction Ceremony Nov. 21. Others who made this year's list include Donald Trump's niece, the psychologist and author Mary Trump, former baseball player Billy Bean, teen rapper Kidd Kenn and actors Lili Reinhardt, Cheyenne Jackson, Jonathan Bennett and Dashaun Wesley. ▼



WRESTLER PAT PATTERSON DEAD AT 79

PAT PATTERSON, THE WWE LEGEND who called himself the "first gay superstar," passed away Dec. 2 at the age of 79. Patterson's wrestling career began in 1958 in his native Canada before making his WWE debut in 1978, where a year later he became the company's first Intercontinental Champion. After retiring as a wrestler in 1984, Patterson continued working for WWE behind the scenes and is credited for creating the popular Royal Rumble match. Patterson publicly came out in 2014 during an episode of the WWE reality series "Legends House." Two years later, Patterson chronicled his journey in his memoir, "Accepted: How the First Gay Superstar Changed WWE." ▼



ELLIOT PAGE COMES OUT AS TRANSGENDER

ELLIOT PAGE, WHOSE BREAKTHROUGH ROLE IN "JUNO" landed him an Oscar nomination in 2007, has revealed he is transgender. Page currently stars on Netflix's hit series "The Umbrella Academy," which was recently renewed for a third season. He shared his truth via social media Dec. 1. "I want to share with you that I am trans, my pronouns are he/they and my name is Elliot," he wrote. Page also asked for patience, calling his joy real but fragile, discussing reports that at least 40 trans or gender non-conforming people have been violently killed in 2020. The star promised to continue using his platform to speak out for LGBTQ rights. ▼



BRANDI CARLILE MEMOIR COMING IN APRIL

GRAMMY WINNER BRANDI CARLILE HAS A MEMOIR COMING IN APRIL. Her publisher calls the book an "evocative and piercingly honest" journey through the life that has shaped her "very raw art." Crown announced Nov. 19 that Carlile's book is called "Broken Horses," and that Carlile herself will read the audio edition. The 39-year-old singer-songwriter-instrumentalist is known for such songs as "The Story" and "The Joke" and for her album "By the Way, I Forgive You." According to Crown, Carlile will write about her "dysfunctional but loving family," her years of "sleepless tours" and her collaborations with everyone from Elton John to Tanya Tucker. ▼

AS OF DEC. 1,
40 TRANSGENDER
OR
GENDER
NON-CONFORMING
PEOPLE HAVE BEEN
VIOLENTLY
KILLED
IN THE U.S.,
THE
MAJORITY OF WHICH WERE
BLACK AND LATINX
TRANS WOMEN,
AND
IS THE HIGHEST
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The

Remarkable People

Issue

Our list of the 10 most remarkable people of 2020 in Central Florida

U.S. REP. VAL DEMINGS

By U.S. Rep. Mike Quigley

THESE PAST FOUR YEARS HAVE BEEN ESPECIALLY STRESSFUL FOR LGBTQ AMERICANS, forced to face prejudice and discrimination from the very top of our federal government. From health care to trans military service to so-called “religious freedom” efforts, the Trump Administration launched an all-out assault on the civil rights of the LGBTQ community. Yet through it all, our commitment to justice has only deepened. And that resolve is shared by no ally more than my friend, Rep. Val Demings.

The attack on Pulse was a watershed moment, not only for the LGBTQ community, but for all Americans.

As a former police chief and the representative whose district includes Pulse, the Congresswoman has championed gun reform efforts. She has led the push to make the site of the Pulse massacre a national memorial. She has fought for the passage of The Equality Act to create the first federal LGBTQ+ nondiscrimination law in U.S. history. And she has taken up the cause of overturning the discriminatory ban on blood donations from gay and bisexual men.

As members of the House Intelligence Committee, Val and I have spent many long hours together these past few years, and I saw up close during those taxing, challenging months that she’s a tireless fighter. She brings that same tenacity to

all her work on behalf of Central Florida. And she’s a good friend. It’s why I was so incredibly proud to join Congresswoman Demings in introducing the Science in Blood Donation Act of 2020, which would enact a strictly evidence based blood donation policy and put an end to the discriminatory ban once and for all.

Her advocacy for the LGBTQ community makes no member more deserving of this recognition than Congresswoman Val Demings. While there may no longer be the direct threat of homophobia and transphobia coming from the next White House, as an ally and an advocate, I know that she will never back down from a fight and will continue to advocate for equality for all until every American, no matter who they love or how they identify, can live openly without fear. ♡

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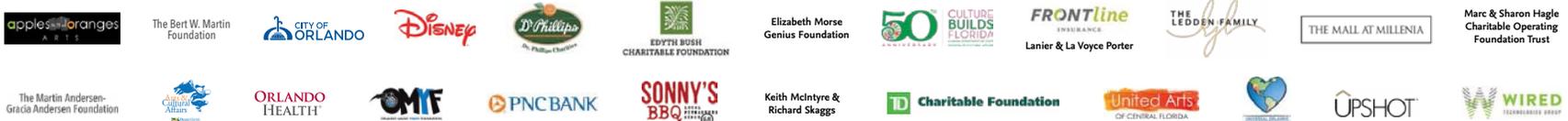
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ANNUAL PARTNERS



FELIPE SOUSA-LAZABALLET, INCOMING BOARD CHAIR, ONE ORLANDO ALLIANCE

By Robin Maynard-Harris, former Board Chair,
One Orlando Alliance

FELIPE MATOS LAZABALLET IS A pioneer in the intersectionality of immigrant/LGBTQ rights with an incredible journey in his fight for equity and you'd be hard pressed to ever meet another like this remarkable human! All of Felipe's life he's been crushing barriers placed before him as a gay immigrant soaking in the knowledge of those who came before him and advocating for those who will come after through a treacherous but victorious trail of dreams.

I've had the privilege of knowing Felipe as a friend and colleague for several years now and yet in every conversation we have, more layers of his journey are uncovered and continue revealing how remarkable he truly is. This full circle story begins in 2001, as a young middle schooler who couldn't speak a word of English, who hugged his mother, sister and other loved ones goodbye, leaving his poor neighborhood in Brazil and boarding a flight to America for a better life in hopes and dream of becoming a teacher. To the plane full of other passengers, he was an excited boy coming to visit Orlando, the reality was that he was a scared boy coming on a tourist visa to stay with his sister for as long as possible. As

he traveled alone arriving at the immigration desk in Miami he remembered the important advice his mother gave him: "Just remember to say you're going to Disney World"; except when Felipe arrived they tried to question him in English and when that didn't work, Spanish, and when that didn't work because he only spoke Portuguese he remembered his mother's advice and blurted out "Mickey Mouse!" and they smiled and let him through. Those two words and a pathway of advocacy would lead Felipe from Miami to Washington D.C. to New York City and finally to his home here in Orlando, where "Mickey Mouse" lives.

Except by the time Felipe arrived to his new home here, this was a different Orlando. One now known, in recent times, not for Mickey Mouse but for one of the worst mass shootings in U.S. history that affected hundreds of LGBTQ+ folks, mostly people of color and from all walks of life. It was a different Orlando and one that needed Felipe in it. One of the remarkable aspects of Felipe that I have had the joy of experiencing as I have gotten to know him more and more is his energy. You don't leave a conversation with Felipe without feeling better than you did going in and it most often ends with the words "Big Hugs"



except you can really feel it. It's like he can hug you with his words. Even in 2020 through Zoom, his passion and empathy is palpable.

When the opportunity opened for a position with the City of Orlando as Manager of Collaborative Partnerships, focusing on the long term recovery from the Pulse tragedy he knew this was where he was meant to be and in January 2017 he took the role and moved here to help continue the healing in our community. Fast forward three years and Felipe is now the Inclusion, Diversity and Equity Senior Specialist for the Office of Multicultural Affairs for the City of Orlando. In this capacity he proposes policy recommendations, programs, advocates for best practices on LGBTQ issues, immigrant and refugee affairs, as well as outreach in the Muslim, Brazilian Arab American communities to encourage greater participation in city services.

Felipe joined the board of the One Orlando Alliance in January of 2018 and his work ethic, lived experience and insight have added incredible value to our community-based grassroots, nonprofit. If you have spent more than five minutes with this remarkable human, then you are learning the difference between equality and equity because of Felipe's passion, it becomes a part of your every day thinking.

I have had the pleasure of learning from and working along side Felipe to create real change in the LGBTQ+ community and beyond, with the knowledge that there is much more work to be done. Felipe has made such an impact that when I knew it was time for a new Board Chair for the organization I have loved serving these past four years, he was the successor that we all knew would take the Alliance to the next level.

It is you Felipe, that is the remarkable teacher you aspired to be nearly 20 years ago as you deplaned and fearfully blurted out "Mickey Mouse." It is you who embody the word solidarity. It is you that makes Orlando feel like a place to belong and thrive to so many. It is you, who defines remarkable. We love you. Big Hugs always. ♥♥

ERYN HARRIS, FLAGLER COUNTY PRIDE MARCH ORGANIZER

By Randall Bertrand, LGBTQ activist

AFTER GRADUATION, MOST seniors look forward to a fun-filled summer, but not Eryn Harris. In June 2020, just weeks after accepting her diploma and amid the nationwide shutdown due to COVID-19, Eryn setup the first ever Flagler County LGBTQ+ Pride March.

Just 10 days prior to the four-year mark of the Pulse attack, Eryn (17 at the time) began an aggressive social media campaign to promote the event and gather resources. She coordinated with the local nonprofit "Find Your Peace by Pieces" to help advertise to a broader audience and communicate the message of peace in our community through love and acceptance.

After Eryn planned the march route, she coordinated efforts with the Flagler Beach Police Department and the Flagler County Sherriff's Office to ensure a safe and peaceful event even in the socially conservative bastion of Flagler County. Measures were enacted by the Sherriff's Office to monitor social media and prepare for any counterprotests that might have flared up.

Eryn delegated tasks to members of the local LGBTQ+ support group, planning for a local DJ to have a sound system available in Flagler Beach's Veterans Park where the destination of the support march was set to happen. Eryn made sure the local news media was aware of the event to provide coverage of the march. Even the Flagler Beach Fire Department was onsite, hoisting an enormous rainbow flag some 90 feet into the air at the park.

On the day of the event, the local health department came out to provide free coronavirus testing for anyone that wished to participate. Many local political candidates who support the preservation and expansion of LGBTQ+ protections were onsite talking to members of the community and there were even Flagler County election officials present to help people register to vote.

In total, the event was attended by several hundred people all decked out in their favorite pride attire. It was an amazingly successful event and a fitting tribute to the people who lost their lives in the Pulse nightclub shooting just four years prior. Eryn's efforts showed that hate will never triumph so long as there is love. Eryn has shown that even during a pandemic, with little time to plan and organize, an event described by some as "life-changing" can occur. The power to promote change is possible for one person, and Eryn exemplifies the best in what we should be.

In addition to Eryn's planning of the first Flagler County LGBTQ+ Pride March, Eryn used her position as the head of the media club at Flagler-Palm Coast High School to build support for the local effort to add gender Identity protections to the Flagler County School District's nondiscrimination policy. She used her contacts throughout the school to bring students and parents to local school board meetings where they could voice their support for the inclusive language being requested.

Eryn also provides youth insight to the local LGBTQ+ support group known as the LGBTQ+ Community of Flagler County where she helps plan events for local LGBTQ+ teens and adults to gather and share joy and fellowship in an area that can seem quite resistant to the LGBTQ+ community.

Eryn is currently attending Flagler College as a freshman majoring in media and film studies, allowing her to continue her efforts in lifting the local LGBTQ+ community. It's no surprise that she already sees a second annual Flagler County LGBTQ+ Pride March in the future. ♥♥

CHRIS BILYK, FOUNDER, STATE OF GRATITUDE

By Andres Acosta Ardila, Coordinator,
Contigo Fund

GRATITUDE IS OFTEN DESCRIBED as a state of mind and I'm honored to talk about the man that has taken this state of mind and created a movement around it.

Chris Bilyk is a Colombian American and this is what bonded us together at first. When I first met Chris we went to get coffee after I picked him up at his parents' house in Celebration. The home was beautiful and the neighborhood looked like the kind of picturesque setting one imagines when they think of the "wholesome American suburb." This is where Chris and I had our first conversation. We flirted back and forth and shared stories of our high school days here in Orlando. What ultimately caught my attention was when he nonchalantly shared his story of addiction and recovery. In a suburban setting where problems are swept under luxurious rugs and the word addiction is whispered with fear and shame, this man proudly owned who he was, where he came from and where he was going.

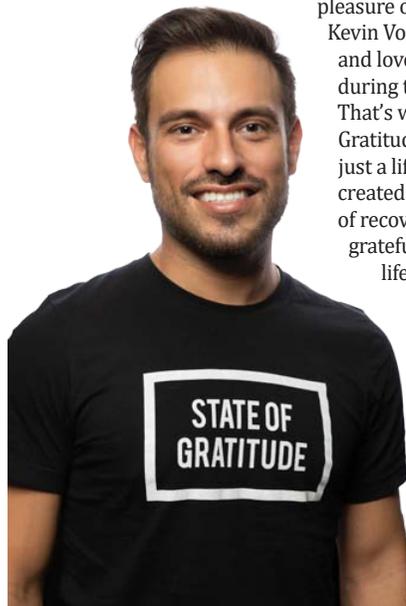
I'm no stranger to the story of addiction seeing as how my own recovery plays such a big part in the work I do now. What made Chris really stand out to me was the confidence and, well, gratitude with which he shared with me his journey. Chris looks at the past that led him to this moment in life and instead of holding the pity party that I held for myself for years Chris was willing to tackle it, own it and used that to shape his future for himself and others.

When he shared the idea behind State of Gratitude — the lifestyle brand he had founded of cool, comfortable clothing and accessories — I saw immediately how the experiences of his past shaped his view of what State of Gratitude should be. Chris takes the grant model of empowerment and uses it to make sure that other individuals that struggle with addiction like he and I do are able to get the help necessary to rebuild their lives and fight for a better future.

Chris is a brilliant businessman and knows how to use his charm to further his goals. I'm grateful to know him and to have been able to hear from him the process of launching State of Gratitude at the beginning of the pandemic, to provide support in the grant-making process and better yet to see him succeed and give out his first grant, which he gave to an individual here in Orlando. I've since had the

pleasure of speaking to this man, Kevin Voelts, and the gratitude and love he displays for life even during this hard time is amazing. That's what makes State of Gratitude a movement and not just a lifestyle brand. Chris has created an online community of recovering addicts who are grateful for the changes in their life and are grateful for their past and current struggles because, much like Chris, that is what makes them the amazing people they are today.

So who is Chris Bilyk? He is the creator of a movement that reminds all of us to be grateful and celebrate every moment that we fight for! ▼



BLUE STAR, OWNER, HAOS ON CHURCH

By Rob Ward, Central Florida entertainer

I'LL NEVER FORGET THE NIGHT, MANY YEARS AGO, when I was a newly out-of-the-closet gay boy, and my then boyfriend dragged me out of the house to Southern Nights (before it was Revolution, before it was Southern Nights).

There was a drag show on the dance floor and the final entertainer of the night was a biological woman named Baby Blue. The minute she hit the stage, I was floored. Baby Blue was diminutive in stature, but giant in stage presence. She performed an exciting and sexy lip-synch to Nine Inch Nails' "Closer" — complete with dripping candle wax — then took the microphone and spent the next five minutes entertaining the crowd in her thick Georgia accent. I'd never seen a performer with such confidence and total control over the rowdy bar crowd. I was impressed and perhaps a bit obsessed.

Today, I can't believe Baby Blue — now known as Blue Star — has become one of my closest friends. Her fans know that Blue is a trained dancer, an incredible performer, a shrewd businesswoman and a community leader, but the lucky few who get to be a part of her personal world know that she's so much more than that.

She's a champion for homegrown artists, a relentless creator and a genuinely caring human being who is always ready to lend a hand, give a hug and maybe even bake up a warm plate of delicious southern biscuits to friends in need. Blue has a laugh that is infectious and a mischievous

smile that instantly lights up any room she's in. No matter how busy Blue is, she has a talent for making everyone she talks to feel like they are the most important person in the room every time.

I'm so thankful that I went to Southern Nights all those years ago, and met the unforgettable (Baby) Blue Star and in truth, all these years later, I'm still impressed (and yes, still a bit obsessed). ▼



LEAH JAMES, BUSINESS OWNER, GECKO CPA FIRM

By Carlos Carbonell, Business owner, Echo Interaction Group

LEAH JAMES IS PURE ZEN. A BEHIND-THE-SCENES, professional, calming center of the community since the early days of local LGBTQ activism and nonprofit work. From those foundational years until now, she has given of herself.

From being part of the founding committee of Come Out With Pride, the board of the then named Metropolitan Business Association, now The Pride Chamber, to currently as the One Orlando Alliance board treasurer. She has even lent her expertise to government entities like the City

of Orlando's Audit Board, where she became chairperson.

Her personal journey has also taken her to become a yogi leader through much training and work on her practice. Her compassionate and caring work doesn't end with nonprofits. As the owner of an accounting practice, she infuses her client service with empathy. As a client of hers, I can attest to this. Her advice and guidance goes beyond that of a business accountant and has been more of a friend/mentor who has seen me through the ups and downs of business and the economy for over a decade. Especially during these times, I — and I'm sure many others — would have been worse off navigating the heavy impact the pandemic has had with business owners.

The community is so thankful for Leah and her remarkable, intuitive insight. ▼



JOÉL MORALES, DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONS, LGBT+ CENTER ORLANDO

By Dr. George Wallace, Executive Director, LGBT+ Center Orlando

JOÉL JUNIOR MORALES IS AN outspoken, Puerto Rican, queer advocate. And he is remarkable. We both relocated to Orlando from Massachusetts, me in 2002 and him in 2011, and I have had the privilege of working with him since 2019 when he returned to The Center in his current role as director of operations.

Often the executive director of a nonprofit gets most of the credit for good things happening within the organization. I learned early in my career to surround myself with the best and that is exactly what I did when I hired Joél. So many of The Center's recent accolades were because of his hard work and dedication to our community.

Prior to 2020, Joél has accomplished so much. From being a co-founder of QLatinx to being regional chapter coordinator of Crime Survivors for Safety & Justice, he has always been a catalyst for change. He advocated for the passage of House Bill 7125, which was signed into law in late 2019. The new policy improves the probation system, gets Floridian's back to work and removes barriers to victim's compensation.

Joél and I had a mantra going into this year. "2020 is the year of The Center." We probably said it about a million times to each other. While COVID-19 may have sidetracked many of our plans, Joél was able to pivot and refocus his energy on what the community needs. He was instrumental in the creation of the LGBTQ+ Relief Fund, a collaboration of several LGBTQ organizations. He worked tirelessly to make sure that the most marginalized citizens' needs were being met during the pandemic. I witnessed him navigate a broken system to

make sure that The Center's new initiatives to bridge gaps in food security were happening. And he was instrumental in ensuring that The Center would be the future home of the Orlando United Assistance Center, where he worked immediately following the Pulse tragedy. Not backing away from a challenge, he began consulting this year with the Office for Victims of Crime Training and Technical

Assistance Center, bringing his expertise to organizations across the county.

Through the pandemic and closures, Joél never slowed down. As I write this on Thanksgiving weekend, I am thankful that Joél is part of The Center family. Orlando is lucky to have such a remarkable person working for their benefit. So, as 2020 ends, it was indeed the year of The Center and the year of Joél Junior Morales. Here's to 2021. ♡



MR. MS ADRIAN, CENTRAL FLORIDA ENTERTAINER

By Divine Grace, Central Florida entertainer

HELLO, DOLLS!

So here's the deal: Today (It's November when I wrote this), I had a walkthrough of a new venue with our "Golden Gals Live!" cast and got to spend a little time with a little boy I call "Ma." Mr. Ms Adrian.

S/He drove me home afterwards and, while we were listening to showtunes, I thought of how many squeals we have shared over the last year because of Broadway, Bette Midler and big butts. I lean over and tell Mr. Ms Adrian, "I wish we had shared space when I was your age, because almost nobody around me 'got' it, and I really needed it."

Then I came home and found an email from my editor asking me to write this praise and I didn't hesitate.

I am at least 20 years older than the child that plays my mother. (That's how incredible I look! It feels good, but I must really attribute much of my unreal fabulosity to all of the youthfulness I have sucked out of this person. But even then ... I look really good.)

I Love Mr. Ms Adrian with all of my heart. And let me tell you: At not one point have I ever heard a negative word about this gal. Ever. Period.

Adding additional shame to my own behavior is that I have also never heard a negative word come out of that gal's mouth either. She's a damn saint.

I wish I could BE this gal.

Adrian Padron was introduced to me with TVLand Live's "Golden Gals: Live!" two weeks after I got out of a 6-week stint in a hospital, and THE DAY AFTER I buried my mother. Here is this child who's supposed to play my mother while I'm all but convalescing and wiping the dirt I buried my mother with still fresh.

For any of you familiar with "The Golden Girls," you already know that Sophia Petrillo and Dorothy Patrello-Zbornak are basically a sister act. So if one of the actors doesn't work, the whole joke falls flat. Doug Ba'aser says to me, "Trust me! Adrian's got this!"

And boy did she ever. Holy CRAP did she EVER!

An accomplished Lady Gaga impersonator with a flair for high theatrics (just my style) she just kept growing. She kept getting better and better. And then better. Her Dr. Frank N. Furter is now an annual favorite. Her Gaga remains legendary. And her Sophia is sublime.

But the cherry on this little Cuban cake is what a magnificent human being

I find him to be. It's astonishing at which the ease of kindness exudes from this person.

What a guy! Seriously, y'all. WHAT A GUY! He just wants everybody to be loved, cared for and entertained.

It has been my honor to basically write a fan letter to a friend who earned every fucking letter.

I love you, Ma! ♡



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BOBBY HERMIDA, VOLUNTEER/CO-ORGANIZER, MASK THE PEOPLE

By Yasmin Flasterstein, Co-founder/ Executive Director, Peer Support Space

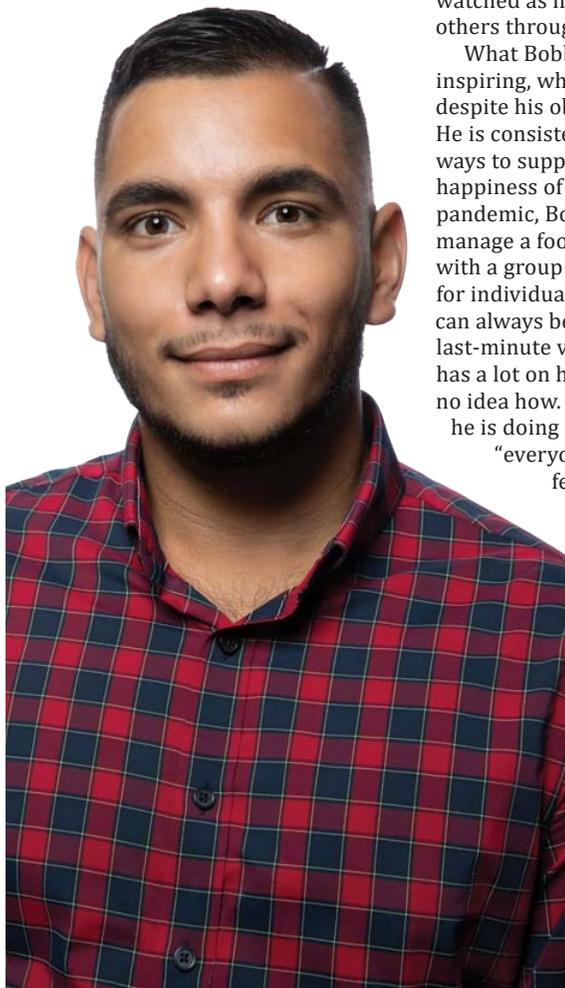
BOBBY HERMIDA IS ONE OF THE MOST compassionate, resilient and kind people I know. He smiles and interacts with anyone that walks by in a way that most just don't care to. He does it because he doesn't want anyone else to hurt the way he has.

Bobby is the everyday type of hero that everyone needs to know about. He deeply deserves this recognition and it is my honor to tell you about someone I am so blessed to have as one of my best friends. It is exemplified through Bobby that the daily interactions we have, with strangers or loved ones, are the most impactful. I have witnessed, over and over again, Bobby striking conversations with strangers that end with him sharing his contact information and continually checking in on them. He has a gift of using humor and authenticity to make hard

conversations feel approachable. He deeply cares about and loves those he has never met.

Bobby is passionate about many causes and has volunteered repeatedly for mental health, HIV and LGBTQ+ organizations. I am personally most inspired by how he advocates for recovery. After many years of tribulation, a trauma sent Bobby to an understandable breaking point. I watched my friend go down a dark path, and then I watched him get out of it. Bobby has been sober two years now. That takes a lot and I respect him strongly for it. Since then, I have watched as he repeatedly supports others through their recovery.

What Bobby has overcome is inspiring, what he has accomplished despite his obstacles is impressive. He is consistently finding creative ways to support the wellbeing and happiness of others. During the pandemic, Bobby helped organize and manage a food drive. He also worked with a group that created 3,400 masks for individuals needing them. Bobby can always be counted on for any last-minute volunteer need, he already has a lot on his plate so I really have no idea how. When I asked him why he is doing all of this he replied with "everyone deserves access to feeling and being safe and secure." Bobby Hermida is undoubtedly one of the most remarkable people in Central Florida. ♥



DANIEL DOWNER, FOUNDER, BROS IN CONVO

By Nicole Elinoff, Prevention Manager, NASTAD

AN ADVOCATE, ACCOMPLICE, FRIEND, confidant, proud member of the Ina Garten fan club and the ultimate co-collaborator/co-conspirator, Daniel J. Downer is truly remarkable.

Daniel and I started to really get to know each other in 2016, after a National Gay Men's HIV/AIDS Awareness Day event. From then, the co-conspirator/collaborator/ best friendship took off. It has been an incredible privilege and honor to witness Daniel's professional growth and bear witness to the impact he and his work have made, and continue to make, on the Central Florida community.

In 2017, Daniel was selected to participate in the Human Rights Campaign's HIV 360 Fellowship, a capacity building program for young leaders. As a part of his participation, Daniel received a micro-grant and started The Bros in Convo Initiative. The organization was founded in response to the rising number of new HIV cases among Black and Brown gay, bisexual and queer/same gender loving (GBQ/SGL) men ages 18-35 with a vision to build community among young Black GBQ/SGL while addressing the health inequities they experience. At the time, Central Florida didn't have a space or an organization like Bros in Convo, a space built by and for Black and Brown GBQ/SGL men. Three years later and the community that Bros in Convo has helped build and cultivate is beautiful and vibrant. Daniel's work has not only made waves locally, but nationally as well, moving the needle on the national dialogue around: health equity, community engagement and the importance of lifting and centering the voices of community stakeholders.

2020 has been quite a whirlwind, but one of the consistent comforts has been Daniel and his leadership. Daniel leads intentionally and centers the community in everything he does, qualities that greatly assisted in his response to everything 2020 has thrown our community's way (including his Census work and Get Out the Vote activities).

When the pandemic first started, Daniel and The Bros in Convo Initiative helped organize Central Florida's LGBTQ+ Relief Fund, a fund meant to

assist Orlando area LGBTQ+ community members who are most in need as a result of the COVID-19 crisis.

Daniel also played a significant role in the launch of Contigo Fund's ALL Black Lives Fund, an initiative that dedicates funding to frontline LGBTQ+ organizing groups and efforts that are Black LGBTQ+ led in Central Florida to build on the movement for Black lives — particularly those led by and for Black transgender, gender nonconforming and gender nonbinary community and sex workers.

Both funds have helped LGBTQ+ community members tremendously and have elevated the dialogue on the importance of mutual aid and the critical need of funding for Black LGBTQ+ led movements in Central Florida (and beyond). Not only making an impact now, but for years to come.

In one of his most famous quotes, Bayard Rustin said, "we need, in every community, a group of angelic troublemakers." The Central Florida community is lucky to have Daniel J. Downer as one of ours. ♥



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The

Remarkable People

Issue

Our list of the 10 most remarkable
people of 2020 in Tampa Bay



STATE REP. MICHELE RAYNER

By Maya Brown, Campaign Strategist

PINELLAS COUNTY BORN AND RAISED, MICHELE RAYNER has taken on some of the most pressing civil rights cases as an attorney, stood with bereaved families and friends during difficult personal moments and boldly celebrated friends' joyous accomplishments. Her infectious spirit of joy and love is coupled with an unequivocally bold voice that centers inclusion and equity.

Being the first Black woman to be openly queer and elected to any office in Florida, especially during a tumultuous year like 2020 is indicative of the trust so many in our community have in Representative Rayner and the progressive representation we desperately need in government.

Her advocacy matches in words and deeds.

The representative often remarks that "how you run is how you lead," and we learned this to be true from the spokesperson herself. A month after filing to run for the Florida House of Representatives, the state shut down to try and mitigate the alarming

number of COVID-19 cases and deaths. While her team scrambled to adjust to campaigning in our "new normal," her bold voice declared from her spirit of compassion, we were suspending our campaign to serve those most in need: passing out masks and food and as a hub of information and resources across Hillsborough, Pinellas, Sarasota and Manatee counties.

After her historic win in a decided four-way contest that garnered national attention, she continued to show up as she always has to stump for important down-ballot races. She also opened up for then Vice President Joe Biden during a Tampa rally to make the case against bigotry and hatred, helping elect a president that will help our nation build back better by supporting local leaders with shared values.

Floridians have lived through a global pandemic disproportionately impacting Black people with lackluster state leadership that favored corporations and partisanship over livelihood, as well as a nationwide reckoning with racism and abuse of excessive (and too frequently) deadly force by law enforcement this year. These simultaneous realities begged the question for many of "where do we go from here?" Now, folks are demanding that change cannot wait and are looking for leaders with proven experience to shepherd our communities, state and nation through difficult, but necessary conversations to catalyze systemic change.

Representative Rayner's professional and personal experience has uniquely prepared her to be a zealous advocate for the residents of House District 70 and the people of the great State of Florida. Her relentless pursuit of justice and fairness are needed now more than ever to ensure equitable access to quality of life needs like intersectional accessibility to affordable healthcare, education, and many others. A known consensus builder, Representative Rayner will prioritize people over partisanship, profits and politics to get stuff done. ♡

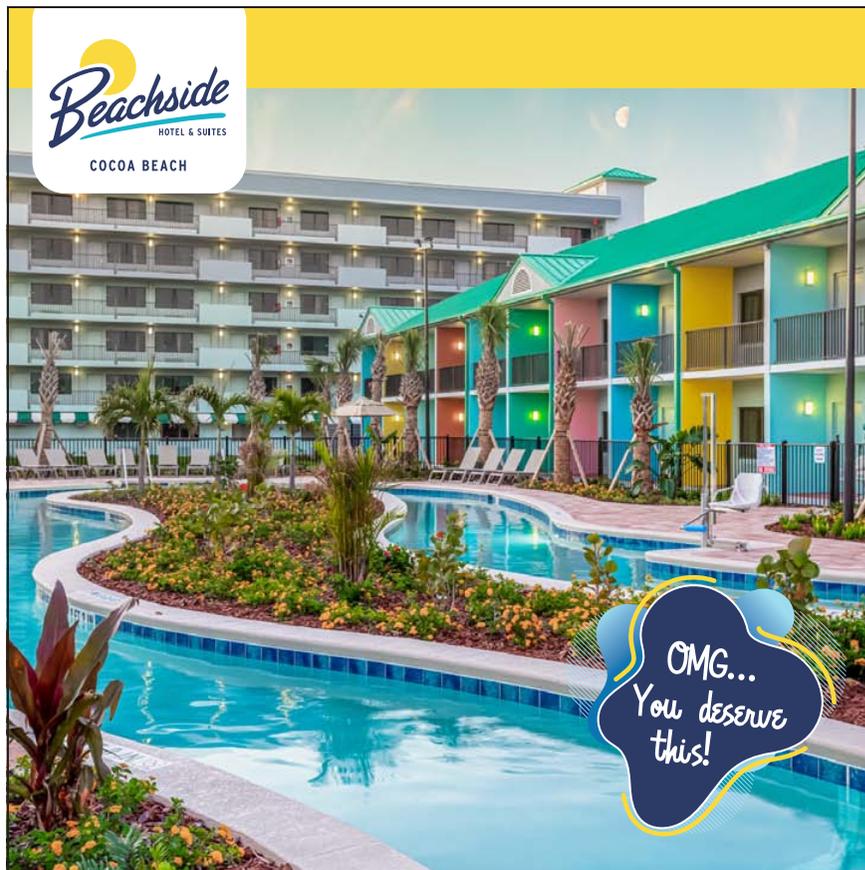


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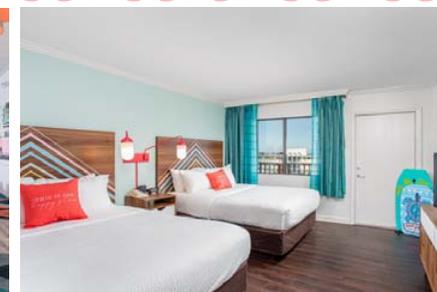
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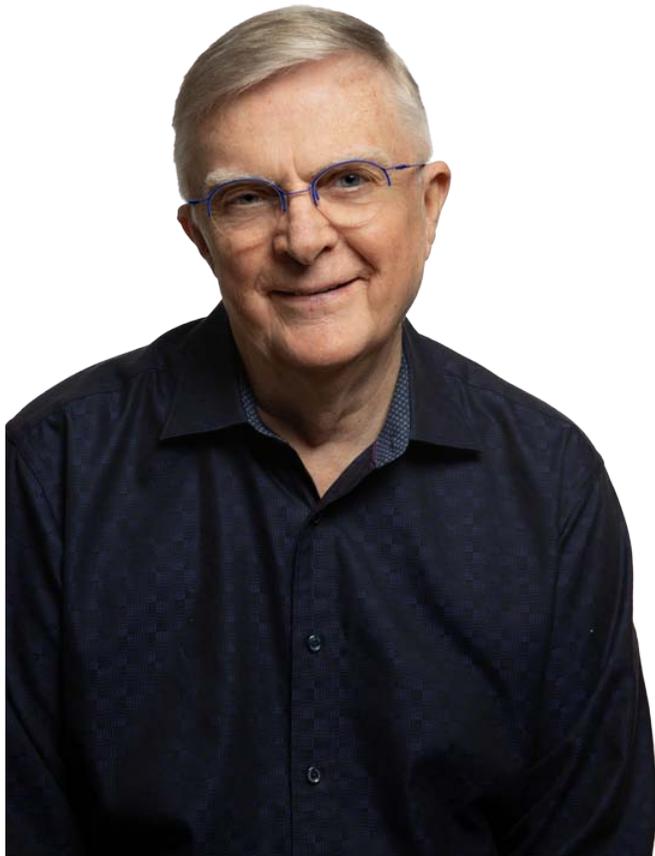
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LARRY BIDDLE, BOARD CHAIR, THE PLUS PROJECT

By Jennifer Yeagley,
Vice Chair, The Plus Project

I MET LARRY IN 2015, SHORTLY after I moved to Tampa Bay from San Francisco. At the time, he was serving as a consultant for Family Resources' LGBTQ Youth Homeless Project initiative, with a particular emphasis on establishing an emergency shelter system for transgender youth. I was running a social justice organization that worked directly with LGBTQ teens, and we connected on the shared goal to help LGBTQ teens experience safety, stability and self-actualization.

I continued to cross paths with Larry, and his wonderful husband David, through various community events and initiatives, as well as our mutual involvement with Equality Florida. In 2016, Larry partnered with a local foundation and a

research firm to gather data on our community's need for and potential interest in establishing a foundation to support organizations serving the LGBTQ community. His background in having established the Delaware Valley Legacy Fund poised him

well to launch a similar fund in Tampa Bay, and as the research demonstrated clear need, his network and enthusiasm generated the founding Board for the Plus Project+.

Critical to its early success was the partnership Larry forged with the Community Foundation of Tampa Bay (CFTB), which is the fiscal sponsor and grant support partner for the Plus Project+. The credibility of the CFTB coupled with the community's trust for Larry, and the colleagues and friends he assembled to lead the Board, assured donors that funds would be well managed and put to good use.

At Larry's helm, over a period of two years, the Plus Project raised enough in community support to allow the organization to launch its first grant application process in early 2020 and make its first grants to six deserving organizations last summer.

More than \$54,000 in inaugural grants were awarded to local organizations Community Tampa Bay, Metro Inclusive Health, Equality Florida, Youth Improvement Services, AIDS Service Association of Pinellas and League of Women Voters of Florida, all to support serving LGBTQ youth in school and community settings, LGBTQ elders, and community education and awareness to promote voter registration among LGBTQ individuals.

To be able to provide funding support to meet critical needs during a global pandemic, a tense and high-stakes election year, and amid the ongoing struggle for LGBTQ communities to be heard, seen and supported in all aspects of community life, is an honor Larry, and his colleagues on the Board, felt deeply.

In addition to Larry being known for his decades-long work within and in support of the St. Petersburg and broader Tampa Bay community, he is also known for his kind spirit, joyful sense of humor and endless energy.

It is humbling to call Larry a colleague, mentor and friend. ♡

KAYDEN RODRIGUEZ, CO-FOUNDER, TAMPA BAY TRANSGENDER FILM FESTIVAL

By Nancy Desmond, Founder, PFLAG Tampa

I T'S TRULY A PLEASURE TO SEE Kayden honored as one of Watermark's Remarkable People. Kayden (they/them or he/him) is a 26-year-old transmasculine individual who resides in Tampa.

He is currently pursuing a Masters of Social Work while working full time at The Spring of Tampa Bay, Hillsborough County's certified domestic violence center, as a prevention team advocate. He facilitates the LGBTQ+ Roundtable, which focuses on advocacy, support and education of LGBTQ+ domestic violence relationships. As an attendee of this group, I am incredibly impressed by his organizational abilities and his sensitivity when it comes to leading members from diverse groups to shed light on a topic that severely affects the LGBTQ+ community, but gets very little attention.

His LGBTQ+ Violence Education Series merged diverse communities via Zoom presentations, all within the context of the impact of domestic violence. He pulled from his own Roundtable volunteers to give the presentations, which gave them a raw honesty as they related their own real-life experiences. He has a way of encouraging volunteers to evaluate and showcase their strengths for the greater good. This is a hands-on group, due to Kayden's leadership.

Kayden also serves on the Board of Directors for the Tampa International Gay and Lesbian Film Festival (TIGLFF). As his focus has been to improve TIGLFF's programming and outreach for both the transgender and young adult communities, he co-founded the Tampa Bay Transgender Film Festival, in partnership with St Pete Pride, and in honor of the Transgender Day of Remembrance. I know that he is very proud of this effort.

Kayden is a consistent attendee at PFLAG Tampa, where his own story has been an invaluable help to others, always with a gentle nudge to encourage volunteerism. His own advocacy began when he was a student at University of Tampa and took on a leadership role with UTampa Pride. He founded Tampa Bay Collegiate Pride, since absorbed into Metro Inclusive Health's 18-25 social nights.

Kayden is a powerhouse up-and-comer who is making Tampa proud. He says he plans to stay in Tampa Bay and serve the local LGBTQ+ community for years to come.

If you are looking for support in an abusive relationship, or want to know how to join The LGBTQ+ Roundtable at the Spring, please email Prevention@TheSpring.org. You can help your community, learn a bit about domestic violence and see Kayden in action for yourself! ♡



PHOTO COURTESY KRystal JAYDE PHOTOGRAPHY



CHAD MIZE, OWNER, MIZE GALLERY

By Andrea Pawlisz, Tampa Bay artist

CHAD MIZE IS EXCEPTIONAL IN any year. As a longtime friend, colleague and employee of his, I have seen all facets of this exceptional human being.

2020 started as a normal year, smashing attendance records at the January and February openings of MIZE Gallery. Then came COVID, and as all progressive thinkers do, Chad worked outside the box.

He live streamed openings on multiple social media platforms each month for buyers and browsers to look 24/7. He designed all of the promotional materials for each of his shows and promoted it further with an online gallery for each exhibit.

Art sales increased, allowing local and national artists represented to earn money, even during this tough time. There have been 26 exhibits in 2020, one without commission, promoting 287 artists. Chad does not always participate in the shows, but does have merchandise available in the gallery, as it consistently sells. Among them are various art pieces, enamel pins, mini murals, masks, T-shirts, and more. He works by commission for private individuals and businesses and has completed more than a dozen murals in 2020, like at Cycle Brewing, The Saint and Bodega to name a few. He is on the Shine Mural Festival team and participated in Gasparilla, Carmada, Rock the Vote and held the only area Pride show in 2020 with "Don't Ask, Do Tell."

He also designed a shirt for the Straz Center, put his Mr. Sun logo on an area bus and organized the program to cover electrical boxes throughout St. Petersburg with art by local artists, including his own.

MIZE Gallery is my gallery and my art is shown there with enthusiasm. His partner Dan opened Uptown Eats next door and his colleague Reneata Griffin opened Neat Neat Neat on the other side, completing the trifecta of gifts, art and food.

Chad always works harder than anyone I have ever met. He is an egoless leader and gives back, making himself available to all.

He is true to his motto: Make Time. Chad loves St. Pete and has made it the art town that it is today. I am proud to call him my friend. ♡

DAPHNE FERRARO, SHOW DIRECTOR, ENIGMA

By Jarrod Ketzler, Friend

DAPHNE HAS ALWAYS BEEN AN extremely nurturing and giving person. I've been blessed by her presence and friendship for over half my life. It is exciting that she never stops surprising me and the people she encounters – and so it was no surprise when she went above and beyond for her community this year.

There are certain words that come to mind when you first think of her. For example, I would describe her as tall, creative, hilarious, beautiful, heartwarming and witty.

While all those things are important and make her who she is, I am here to talk about another word that comes to mind: selflessness. This is exactly what Daphne has been the poster child for since the pandemic began in March 2020.

I believe the COVID shutdown was announced on a Tuesday, and by Friday of that week, Daphne went live for the first time



bringing "Daphne and Friends: A Socially Distant Drag Show" right into the homes and hearts of many people.

Over the next 31 weeks, she provided income and entertainment for numerous people around the country during what will surely be remembered as one of the craziest and scariest times in history. Her number one reason was to provide income for her sisters, fellow drag entertainers who were unable to work, and to provide some normalcy for the uncertain future.

It is safe to say that she helped achieve that for people.

Over the course of the show's 31 streaming weeks, she ended up raising more than \$15,000 to send to the entertainers. Daphne also reached countless souls who were lonely or just needed "a night out."

She showed an amazing amount of support for her community while never making nor taking one single dollar for herself. Little known fact, there were weeks that were light on tips and Daphne was adding her personal money to make sure everyone made a decent amount.

Her worry for her community was a thing of beauty. She quickly jumped to action to do whatever she could to help those in need. Whether that was a need for money for bills or being cooped up at home and needing some laughter and entertainment, she was there.

Daphne often goes above and beyond what is expected of her. I could not be prouder that this person is my best friend. I could go on all day, but I'm only allowed to talk about 2020!

Thank you, Daphne Ferraro, for being a source of good in this world and making it a more beautiful place! ♡

CAM PARKER, TAMPA BAY ARTIST

By Jasmin Walters, Tampa Bay artist

I ABSOLUTELY LOVE CAM PARKER, who made me want to enjoy life simply from a photograph. I first saw his contagious smile in one sitting in the swimming pool with the martini glass in his hand, water splashing everywhere. It felt like a party and I wanted to find out who he was. To my surprise he was an amazing artist right here in Tampa.

I met him about two months later, while he was doing a live painting at an event put on by a local production company Dos Cocos Locos. I immediately purchased tickets to attend saw him at this huge canvas painting, where I completely fangirled!

He spun toward me, said “Hey, babes” and it was like we were old friends. His energy surpassed what I felt when I first saw him in a photo. He was so real, so grounded and warm. I am so grateful to know a creative like him – welcoming and supportive, courageous and encouraging. Just full of love.

His art literally makes me burst into song. His creations create feelings, excitement and draw you in. He makes you want to celebrate with him, feel his vibrations and to include you in a world of his own design. Which is the most inspirational aspect of our friendship; he always makes me feel included.

To me, Cam is not just an artist who creates and sells art. He brings the energy! He’s an artist who has the capability to emote joy, love and messages from his soul into whatever he’s working on.

That was true even with everything that has happened this year. Cam shows continued support to what he believes and his community.

Using his platform to consciously express how we all feel or have felt at one point, he’s helped evolve hardened hearts and feelings

of sadness or inequality into something positive.

I had the pleasure of volunteering for the Black Lives Matter/ LGBTQ Pride street mural that was hosted by the

Tampa Bay LGBT Chamber and Tampa Downtown this year, where Cam was the Creative Director. We were an all ages group from different backgrounds but we were all drawing and painting together.

All of us were welcome and motivated by this project that signified unity, just one of the reasons I call Cam my soul charger.

Cam, I appreciate you for being just who you were created to be: freaking fabulous!

You are so humble and vibrant with the smoothest balance. You are the spark of the city! I can’t wait to dance in front of another mural or watch you paint another truck!

Cam is a blessing I’m grateful I didn’t miss. ♡



CHRIS JONES AND LORALEI MATISSE, 2020 CO-CHAIRS, COME OUT ST PETE

By Brian Longstreth, former Board Member,
Come Out St Pete

COME OUT ST PETE (COSP) IS finishing a busy and challenging year. Under the leadership of co-chairs Chris Jones and Lorelei Matisse, the organization was able to not only move forward with their traditional events, adjusting them for COVID-19, but to also add new ones.

On May 22, COSP organized a Harvey Milk Day proclamation from the City of St. Petersburg which was presented virtually. On June 27th, the organization worked with the Carter G. Woodson African American Museum and Project No Labels to create a virtual vigil for Black Lives Matter on Shore Drive adjacent to Vinoy Park. It was an emotionally-draining event to honor the lives of transgender people who had lost their lives to violence and for George Floyd among others.

In the months leading up to October’s events, COSP and Woodfield Fine Art Gallery hosted a virtual art show and selected this year’s commemorative art piece. Lorelei also led the changes to the annual Miss COSP contest at Enigma, turning it in to an all-inclusive Come As You Are virtual event, adding a full Royal Court with Drag King, Nonbinary and Transgender categories.

On National Coming Out Day, socially-distanced volunteers unfurled COSP’s 375-foot rainbow flag. Chris then took the lead on changes to the traditional parade and festival, creating the first Come OUT Cruise Around. It showcased rainbow-adorned vehicles cruising through downtown St. Pete, the Grand Central District and Gulfport.

The festival moved off the sidewalks and into several businesses in the Grand Central area including long time favorites and new businesses. Chris was able to forge new partnerships with the St. Pete Opera Company and Spitfire Theater, while Lorelei worked closely with Equality Florida and the Carter G. Woodson African American Museum on Get Out The Vote campaigns.

COSP also gave back to the community in many forms, including supporting the JuneTeenth celebration at the Carter G. Woodson museum, the Progressive Pride Mural intersection at 25th & Central Avenue in the Grand Central District of St Pete, and new board member John Gascot’s Diversity in Arts project for youth.

The board of COSP felt it was critical to be visible and OUT, even in the middle of a health crisis. Chris and Lorelei showed remarkable drive and courage to pull off these safe events in these challenging times. ♡

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KARLA BELLO, TAMPA BAY ACTIVIST

By Rook Ringer, Civil Rights Attorney

WHEN A FRIEND SENT ME A MESSAGE THAT A transgender woman was being held in a men's jail, I thought it was a mistake. As far as I had ever seen, Pinellas County, especially the St. Petersburg area, was a very LGBTQ-friendly place to be.

The entire story seemed suspect to me. Why would the police go to a person's house to arrest them for failure to appear for court on two red-light camera violations? I've known people who have had far worse pending charges and the police really didn't seem to care unless they happened to cross paths with them. Then I found out that she was being held on bail of only \$513.

I arranged to meet her the next day. Even though I'm a lawyer, I wasn't yet *her* lawyer, so I had to meet her on civilian terms, electronically. I spoke to Karla for quite some time, who at that point had been there for about 11 days. She was as defeated and depressed as any person could be.

Often, people (including the Pinellas County Sheriff's Office's attorney) make light of it being "only" 11 days, as if *anyone* should spend that amount of time in jail for her extremely minor offenses. Much less the fact that she had been thrown to the wolves in the men's jail, where as a transgender woman she was in severe danger, both from other inmates and from the severe withdrawal complications that she faced from their refusal to allow her any access to her medications.

However, think about how you would feel after 11 days of the kind of treatment she faced, where the guards openly mocked her health concerns and refused to even show the tiniest shred of common decency and refer to her as "her." It would not take very long to make even most hardened people suicidal.

Many people would be utterly destroyed by this kind of treatment, and Karla has by no means been left unscathed. After helping to get her out of jail, she became not just my client, but a friend. I've seen her grow this year as she's sought accountability from that frightened and defeated victim of the Pinellas County Sheriff's Department to a fierce advocate for transgender rights.

Her strength reminds us that while we cannot undo the damage done to us, we can grab onto that hurt and turn it into something beautiful and powerful. The greatest heroes are not those who have never been knocked down or defeated, but those who wiped the blood from their lips and refused to let it be the end of their fight. That's Karla, and she should inspire you as much as she inspires me. ♡



JOHN GASCOT, FOUNDER, DIVERSITY ARTS

By Ron Diana, Husband

JOHN AND I MOVED TO ST. PETE SIX YEARS AGO TO START A new life, where he hit the ground running and quickly took to the arts community. In no time he made a place for himself among the area's most well-known artists.

As a curator he creates opportunities for artists and makers to show and sell their work. He is a leader in the arts community, always striving to promote diversity and challenge social injustice through his paintings. His commitment to community goes beyond the arts. He was the Equality Florida Silent Auction Chair for four years, with last year raising \$30,000. Recently he joined the Board of Directors for Come OUT St. Pete where his goal is to expand its arts and youth programming.

John founded his nonprofit Diversity Arts in 2016, where he continues making a difference. He feels passionate about empowering disenfranchised youth and groups with self-esteem so that they are equipped to deal with such situations should they arise. Diversity Arts aims to support underserved youth and communities by providing safe environments, guidance and materials for creative self-discovery, expression and sociocultural interaction.

2020 and COVID barely slowed John's artistic and community-focused efforts. This year he was the recipient of an Individual Artist Grant from the St. Petersburg Arts Alliance and an Emerging Artist

Grant from Creative Pinellas. He also executed two public art projects and is set to start a new one in December.

His "Diversity in Democracy" mural, located at 565 Central Ave. in St. Pete, was commissioned by the League of Women Voters. Its purpose is to encourage the LGBTQ community to vote and be an active participant in our Democratic system. John wanted to take the idea a step further and celebrate diversity beyond our own community including a rainbow of gender identities, ethnicities and ages. In addition, he created a spot for St. Pete residents and visitors to insert themselves and become a part of the mural, a nod to inclusion and representation.

John already has his eyes set on 2021. Fundraising efforts are in the planning stage to help expand Diversity Arts' programming to reach and impact more underserved youth and groups. He has been selected to create a mural and large canvas for the Toronto Blue Jays Spring training center – and as always, he will continue to challenge sociocultural issues with his art. ♡



CONGRATULATIONS

Abbie Rolf and **Ellis Aldridge** announced their engagement Dec. 1.

Punky's Bar and Grill celebrates its fifth anniversary Dec. 15.

SMART Ride 17 participants raised more than \$660,000 for HIV/AIDS organizations in Florida, including Metro Inclusive Health in Tampa Bay. Read more on p. 13.

CONDOLENCES

Community helping hand

Terra Winthrop died Nov. 27. She will be missed.

POSTPONEMENTS

Tampa Pride, originally scheduled to return after a 2020 hiatus March 27, 2021, has been postponed until May 22, 2021. Read more at WatermarkOnline.com.

Voss Events has rescheduled its holiday-themed "Drive 'N Drag Saves Christmas" until Feb. 23-24, 2021. Read more at WatermarkOnline.com.

LOCAL BIRTHDAYS

Tampa Bay actor **Spencer Meyers**, Largo pharmacist **Eric Hutton**, Tampa Bay entertainer **Veronica Vixen** aka **Vincent Bailey-Santamarina**, Tampa Bay dancer **Fernando Chonqui** (Dec. 10); Tampa Bay Bulldog softballer **Les Croy**, Christian minister **Chancey Martinez Colon** (Dec. 11); Philanthropist **Ed Lally**, Former state representative **Jennifer Webb**, Sarasota realtor **Jim Jablonski**, St. Pete Twirler **Jose Luis Perez** (Dec. 12); Enigma security staple **Gregory Collins** (Dec. 13); Bradenton MAC makeup artist **Joey Killmeyer** (Dec. 14); Former Tampa MCC Pastor **Rev. Phyllis Hunt**, St. Petersburg outdoor lover **Dan Barrett**, Clearwater softball stud **Gregory Toth** (Dec. 15); Tampa Bay lawyer **David Schauer**, Pastor at St. Andrews UCC Sarasota **Paul Werner**, Acclaimed author **Rob Sanders** (Dec. 16); Executive Chef of Sarasota's Sage SRQ **Christopher Covelli**, truck driver **Bobby Coffey-Loy** (Dec. 17); St. Petersburg sculptor **Mark Aeling**, Spectrum News anchor **Trevor Ellerbroek-Pettiford**, Honey Pot owner **Stephen Moss** (Dec. 18); IBEX puppetmaster **Heather Henson**, Beauty & the Burg host **Cindy Stovall** (Dec. 19); St. Petersburg caterer **Steve Gallo**, Watermark Art Director **Dylan Todd**, Florist to the stars **Jacob McCall**, Woodfield Fine Art owner **Jim Woodfield**, Project No Labels' **Rosita Carazo**, St. Petersburg loan officer **Steven Robertson** (Dec. 20); Tampa Bay entertainer **Kathryn Nevets**, Tampa Bay realtor **Gabe Alves-Tomko** (Dec. 21); Academic tutor **Cynthia Wurner** (Dec. 22).



1 COMMUNITY CAUSE: Arthur Boyle organizes an outreach Dec. 8 with Project Pride to fill 100 bags for the homeless in Sarasota. PHOTO COURTESY PROJECT PRIDE SRQ

2 HOLLY-DAZE: Holly O'Connor becomes a human Christmas tree Dec. 7 on the Miguel & Holly Show. PHOTO COURTESY M&H SHOW

3 ELF-HELP: Tampa Mayor Jane Castor enlists Christmas Town elves from Busch Gardens to decorate City Hall Dec. 4. PHOTO COURTESY JANE CASTOR

4 RACE TO SAFE: (L-R) Deputy Mayor Dr. Kanika Tomalin, Pinellas Co. Commissioner Rene Flowers, Mayor Rick Kriseman and City Councilmember Darden Rice announce St. Petersburg's latest plans to combat COVID-19 Dec. 7 at City Hall. PHOTO COURTESY RICK KRISEMAN

5 LARGO LOVE: Largo Community Center staff welcomes Commissioner Michael Smith (3 from L) and Santa Dec. 5 during the 2020 Largo Santa Paws. PHOTO COURTESY MICHAEL SMITH

6 TIS THE SEASON: Balance Tampa Bay board and volunteers (L-R) Cam Smith, Jason Fields, Nathan Lance, Mark Warden and Marc Retzlaff unwrap the 10th annual Party 4 Presents Dec. 5 at EPIC St. Pete. PHOTO COURTESY BALANCE TAMPA BAY

7 BRADLEY'S BROS: Bradley Nelson (3rd from L) and Bradley's on 7th staff share their festive welcome to guests Dec. 3. PHOTO COURTESY BRADLEY'S ON 7TH

8 ROYAL T: (L-R) Vincent Bailey-Santamarina, Tiffany T. Hunter, Matthew Steele, Star Hayes, Monica Moore and Aaron Bailey-Santamarina celebrate a successful 2020 Sunshine State All American Goddess, At Large & Gent Pageant Dec. 6 at Hamburger Mary's Clearwater. PHOTO COURTESY POLK PRIDE





1 COMMUNITY HELPERS: Members of GOALCfl and the LGBT+ Center Orlando work to “give back” to Central Florida families during Thanksgiving at The Center Orlando Nov. 24. PHOTO COURTESY GOALCFL’S FACEBOOK

2 PARADE REPRESENTATIVE: State Rep. **Anna V. Eskamani** is masked up for the socially-distanced, 68th Annual Christmas Parade in Winter Park Dec. 5. PHOTO BY REP. ANNA V. ESKAMANI

3 CHRISTMAS GALS: (L-R) **Ginger Minj**, **Divine Grace**, **MrMs Adrien** and **Gidget Galore** as The Golden Gals during their Christmas Musical at HAOS on Church in Orlando Dec. 4. PHOTO BY JEREMY WILLIAMS

4 HAOS DRINKS: **Axel Andrews** (L) and **Kate Maini** toast to the success of HAOS on Church, the newest hot spot in downtown Orlando, Dec. 2. PHOTO COURTESY KATE MAINI’S FACEBOOK

5 HOLIDAY BALLET: Watermark Editor-in-Chief **Jeremy Williams** (L) and **Melissa Hussein** attend the opening of Orlando Ballet’s holiday tradition, “The Nutcracker,” at the Dr. Phillips Center in Orlando Dec. 5. PHOTO BY JEREMY WILLIAMS

6 BABY GIFTS: Watermark Business Manager **Kathleen Sadler** (R) and husband, **Keith Sadler**, are all smiles during their baby shower at the Orange County Sportsmen’s Association in Orlando Dec. 5. PHOTO BY DANNY GARCIA

7 DANCE REVOLUTION: **Philips Ancheta** (L) and **Adonus Mabry** grab a photo at the Dr. Phillips Center before performing with the Crawford Jazz Project during FusionFest at Seneff Arts Plaza Nov. 28. PHOTO COURTESY PHILIP ANCHETA’S FACEBOOK

8 CELEBRITY SPOTTING: **Doug Ba’aser** (L, dressed as Santa Claus) and **Leigh Shannon** (as Bette Midler) celebrate the holiday season safely in downtown Orlando Dec. 5. PHOTO COURTESY LEIGH SHANNON’S FACEBOOK

AUDITIONS

Orlando Gay Chorus (OGC) announced that it will hold open auditions for its next season Jan. 6 at the First United Church of Christ in Orlando. OGC is looking for singers, dancers, fundraisers, supporters and more. 2021 events will include performing at the Wayne Densch Performing Arts Center for a 70’s-themed show and at Dr. Phillips Center’s Frontyard Festival for OGC’s spring show “One Nation: Indivisible.” To sign up or for more information, visit OrlandoGayChorus.org/Audition.

EVENTS

Equality Florida is hosting the Orlando Virtual Safe & Healthy Schools Equality Connection online Dec. 10 from 6-7 p.m. The Safe & Healthy Schools program is a new Equality Florida partnership with Step Up for Students and the organization’s expanded support for young people in foster care. The event will feature Ian Siljestrom, Equality Florida Associate Director of Safe & Healthy Schools; Tatiana Quiroga, Director of Family Equity and Diversity for Family Equality; and more. The Zoom event is free and you can RSVP at the link located at Equality Florida’s Facebook event page.

“**The Golden Gals - A Christmas Musical**” — starring **Ginger Minj**, **Gidget Galore**, **Divine Grace**, **MrMs Adrien** and **Doug Ba’aser** — plays at HAOS on Church in Orlando Dec. 11, 12, 19 and 20. Get your tickets at TVLandLive.com.

“**Wanzie’s 1970’s Christmas Eve Radio Hour**” has two performances — one at 2 p.m. and one at 7 p.m. — Dec. 20 at The Abbey in Orlando. Tickets are available at WanzieChristmas.Eventbrite.com.

LOCAL BIRTHDAYS

Orlando comic and actor **Jeff Jones**, Hope & Help’s **Joshua Myers**, Mitzi Morris’ alter ego **Kevin Kreigel** (Dec. 10); onePULSE Foundation’s **Mark Cady**, Central Florida actor and vocalist **Zachary Thomas**, Royal Caribbean International’s **David Bain**, Central Florida Ford-dealing bear **Fred Berliner** (Dec. 11); Massage therapist **Isaac Torres**, Orlando Chorus baritone **Jamie Decker**, Altamonte Springs chiropractor **Dr. Bradford Levine** (Dec. 12); Walt Disney Creative Entertainment Talent Casting Director **Mark Catlett-Miller**, 4 Corners writer **Lawrence W. Caul** (Dec. 13); Orlando Weekly publisher **Graham Jarrett**, Come Out With Pride festival director **Joyce Almeida**, Come Out With Pride’s **Holly Strout**, Orlando Regional Chamber Business Development Manager **Greg Mason** (Dec. 14); Orange County library’s **Ben Garcia** (Dec. 15); Watermark contributor and entertainer **Divine Grace**, 26 Health’s **Brittani Acuff** (Dec. 16); OAK Central Florida’s **Ken Terrell**, actress **Becky Fisher** (Dec. 17); GayDayS owner **Chris Manley** (Dec. 19); Orlando bartender with flair **Tish**, Orlando realtor **Jeff Ritchie**, The District at Mills 50 manager **Jamey Harper** (Dec. 20); Disney darling **Rae L’Heureux**, Universal Orlando team captain **Christian Conde**, Orlando’s Hamburger Mary’s co-founder **Tom Schneider** (Dec. 21); Pilot **Abel Marowitz** (Dec. 22).

ATTORNEY



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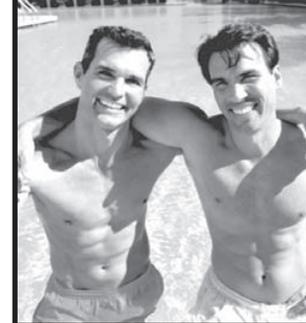
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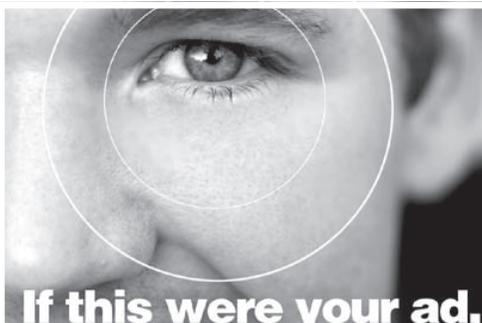


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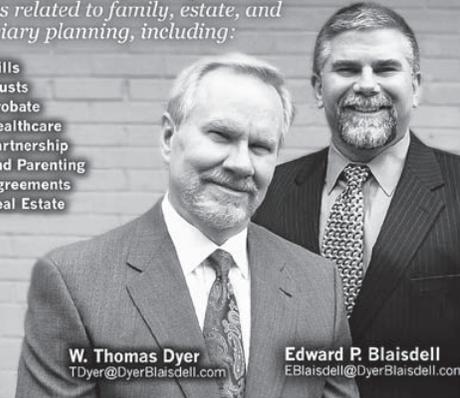


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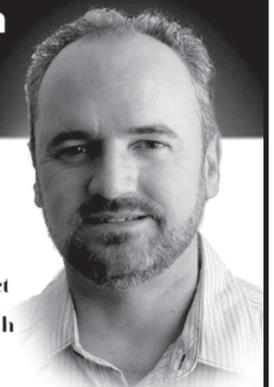
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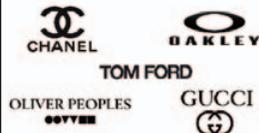
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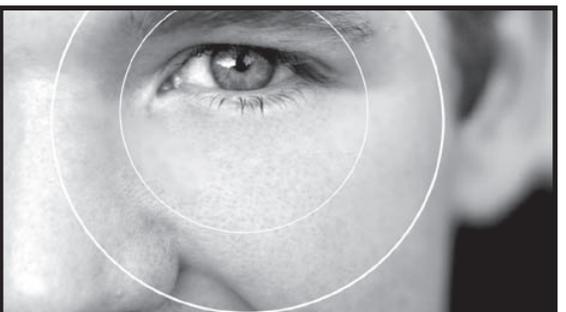
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