

DREAMING OF BEING KING

From Mesquite to the Lion King stage,
Christin Byrdsong made his dreams come true

By Rich Lopez, page 8



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WHAT'S THE TEA: DallasVoice.com



State Rep. Jessica Gonzalez's wife Angela Hale, center, and mother-in-law were at the State Capitol on Tuesday, Jan. 6, to see Gonzalez sworn in for her third term representing District 104 in the Texas House. Gonzalez was one of the founding members of the House LGBT Caucus. See David Taffet's reports from opening day of the 2023 Legislature on pages 10 and 11 in this issue. (David Taffet/Dallas Voice)

Dallas Pride registration opens Jan. 15

Registration for the Dallas Pride Music Festival, Teen Pride, Family Pride Zone and the Alan Ross Texas Freedom Parade will open at 8 a.m. on Sunday, Jan. 15.

Dallas Pride celebrates its 40th anniversary this year with events scheduled June 3-4 at Fair Park. The music festival, including Teen Pride and the Family Pride Zone, takes place on Saturday, June 3, and the parade will be on Sunday, June 4.

To register as a festival vendor or as a parade entrant, visit the registration pages at DallasPride.org/registration. Note there are separate pages for the festival and the parade, and you must register for each separately if you want to participate in both the festival and the parade.

For general information about Pride weekend, visit DallasPride.org.

— David Taffet

Scarborough Academy holding auditions for 2023 festival

Scarborough Renaissance Festival's Scarborough Academy of Performing Arts is holding auditions for cast members for the festival's 2023 season, which runs from April 8-May 29. Auditions will be held Jan. 21, by appointment

only, with rehearsals happening every Saturday and Sunday from Feb. 5-April 2.

Scarborough cast members create their own character, grounded in history, to perform in the lanes of the festival grounds throughout the season. You can be a villager, a seaman or a member of the royal court.

For more information, visit SRFestival.com.

— Tammyte Nash

Patti LuPone to headline TCC's 2023 'Rhapsody' gala

Gay gasps and clutched pearls!

The Turtle Creek Chorale has been bringing in the big divas for its Rhapsody events each year, such as Idina Menzel and Audra McDonald, and they do not disappoint with this year's official announcement: Three-time Tony Award-winner Patti LuPone will headline this year's annual benefit gala on April 1 at the Meyerson Symphony Center.

"It is an honor to welcome a true musical theater legend to Dallas as part of the third annual Rhapsody," TCC Executive Director Jeremy Wayne said in a Jan 6 email announcement. "Ms. LuPone has been a longtime supporter of the arts and LGBTQ+ arts organizations, and we look forward to her sharing her talent with our

Continued on next page

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Obituary



Edward "Eddie" Michael Caswell, 68, died Nov. 23 at Medical City Dallas Hospital following a short illness.

Eddie was born Nov. 5, 1954, to Gale and Mickey LaJune Caswell in Hollis, Okla. A graduate of Frederick High School, he attended the University of Oklahoma where he was a member of Lambda Chi Alpha fraternity, and received a 1978 degree in journalism.

Eddie worked as a copywriter and editor

for a number of DFW metroplex corporations, such as Lennox International and MBank. After leaving the corporate world, he completed a 1992 master's degree in education from the University of North Texas, eventually establishing a successful private practice in Dallas as a licensed professional counselor for more than 28 years. As a dedicated and experienced psychotherapist, he provided treatment and healing for literally hundreds of individuals and couples over the course of his long career.

Eddie enjoyed art collecting, history and planning and executing European travel, and he delighted in introducing family and friends to places and sights he had previously visited.

Eddie was preceded in death by his mother Mickey and is survived by his father, Gale Caswell of Hollis, Okla.; sister Tammy and her husband Scott Hicks of Hernando, Miss.; nephews Cole Morgan and his wife Kristen, Ty Davis and his wife Brooke, Grant Davis and his wife Nakota, and niece Abby Franklin and her husband Dave; great-niece and -nephew Rylee and Cameron Morgan, and a host of loving friends.

A memorial service will be held at 2 p.m. Saturday, Jan. 21, at The Claridge, 3510 Turtle Creek Blvd. in Dallas.

Adoptable / ELSA



Meet **Elsa**, an adorable and loving retriever mix who is 4 years old and weighs 61 pounds. She has jet-black fur with some white sneaking in here and there. Elsa has a good bit of energy and likes to get out and play. She would love to go to a home with a securely fenced backyard, but any owner who makes sure she gets

her exercise will too. Elsa gets along with other dogs and seems to do well with human kiddos to. She is waiting at the Jan Rees-Jones Animal Care Center, so no prior appointment is necessary to meet Elsa in person.

Adult dogs and cats are normally a \$75 adoption fee from the SPCA of Texas. Puppies and kittens under the age of six months are \$150. Adoption fees vary for small mammals, equestrian and livestock. Fee includes spay/neuter surgery, age-appropriate vaccinations, a heartworm test for dogs six months and older and a FIV/FelV test for cats four months and older, initial flea/tick preventative and heartworm preventative, a microchip, 30 days of PetHealth Insurance provided by PetHealth, a free 14-day wellness exam with VCA Animal Hospitals, a rabies tag and a free leash. The Jan-Rees Jones Animal Care Center is open to the public seven days a week from noon-6 p.m. Appointments are required for foster animals and animal housed in the Russell E. Dealey Animal Rescue Center. Browse available animals at SPCA.org/FindAPet and visit SPCA.org/DogAdopt to inquire about a dog or SPCA.org/CatAdopt to inquire about a cat.

Continued from previous page

patrons, organization, and community in 2023."

From TCC: "Ms. LuPone will explore — through indelible interpretations of classic Broadway show tunes by the likes of Richard Rogers, Lorenz Hart, Jule Styne, Stephen Schwartz, Leonard Bernstein, Stephen Sondheim, Cole Porter, and Irving Berlin — how her life-long love affair with Broadway began and the unpredictability of the Great White Way."

Patti LuPone has won three Tony Awards, two Olivier Awards and two Grammy Awards and has been inducted into the American Theatre Hall of Fame. She most recently returned to Broadway in Marianne Elliott's award-winning

production of the Stephen Sondheim-George Furth musical *Company*, for which she won her third Tony. She was also awarded the Olivier and What's OnStage awards for her performance as Joanne in the same production in London's West End.

Tickets are now available for the gala and concert as well as tables and sponsorships. The Gala features a seated dinner, premium concert seating and an after-party. Proceeds from Rhapsody will benefit the musical, cultural and educational programs of the Turtle Creek Chorale. Visit Give.TurtleCreekChorale.com.

—Rich Lopez



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It's going to be a bumpy Congress

Kevin McCarthy's weakness empowered the insurrectionist right

The Honorable Donald J. Trump of the State of Florida has received one [vote]," said Clerk of the House Cheryl Johnson as she announced the results of the 11th ballot for Speaker for the 118th Congress. This despite Trump having endorsed Kevin McCarthy.

Setting aside the former president's total lack of honor, that was one of my favorite moments from the GOP's intra-party fight in Congress last week. Another was a photo of Rep. Katie Porter, D-Calif., reading *The Subtle Art of Not Giving a F*ck*.

C-SPAN camera operators, unconstrained in the absence of anyone in charge, captured images of activity on the House floor that we wouldn't normally see. After the 14th ballot, Rep. Mike Rogers, R-Ala., nearly started a brawl with obstructionist Rep. Matt Gaetz, R-Fla., and was pulled back. Rep. Matt Rosendale, R-Mont., waved away a call from Trump ("DT") that Marjorie Taylor Greene, R-Ga., tried to hand him.

Like other demagogues before him, Trump has unleashed a beast he cannot control.

Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries, D-N.Y., was the antidote to Republican chaos. He consistently received unanimous support from Democrats. The nominating speeches for him before each ballot told of all the things Democrats accomplished for the American people in the previous Congress.

Republicans, for their part, painted a post-apocalyptic hellscape that evoked Trump's dystopian 2017 inaugural address.

Rep. Cori Bush, D-Mo., tweeted that Rep. Byron Donalds, R-Fla., an alternate Speaker nominee with a Tea Party and election-denying background, "is a prop." Republicans were indignant. But



Richard J. Rosendall
Contributing Writer

what else caused Donalds, one of the few black GOP House members, to be pushed forward after being ignored previously?

Across the aisle, Jeffries has been a leading House Democrat. If Republicans see their Black colleagues as more than props, why did they oppose the John Lewis Voting Rights Act?

All week, Democrats illustrated what Sen. Mitch McConnell calls "candidate quality." Jeffries was pitch-perfect in his gay-inclusive remarks before presenting the gavel to McCarthy in the wee hours of Saturday morning, Jan. 7. While Republicans lie to their base and use the inflamed reaction to justify their mischief, Democrats continue to demonstrate their seriousness about governing for all Americans. They should be sure to communicate as clearly with voters about it as Jeffries.

McCarthy, in his first address as Speaker, included in his culture-war priorities a pledge to stop "woke indoctrination in our schools." The GOP equates any teaching of tolerance with predation. This is ironic considering that Gaetz sought a pardon while being investigated for sex-trafficking a minor.

Projection doesn't just happen in movie theaters.

Rigid and intolerant attitudes toward learning are nothing new. McCarthy be-



came speaker on the 413th anniversary of Galileo's letter about his discovery of moons orbiting Jupiter, which confirmed the earlier work of Copernicus and contradicted Catholic Church doctrine that the Earth was fixed at the center of the universe. This got Galileo into a great deal of trouble.

Now Republicans are eager to grill Dr. Anthony Fauci over the origins of COVID-19 as part of their conspiracy-mongering over China. (Although I'm not sure why they want to take him on considering how deftly he has parried Sen. Rand Paul, R-Ken.)

Like the 17th century Vatican, MAGA leaders regard their dogmatic certitude as far superior to the cautious, incremental discoveries of science. Thus Fauci, who recently retired as director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, is derided and attacked because our knowledge of COVID has grown over time. By contrast, self-described "stable genius" Trump once recommended ingesting bleach as a cure.

Given House Republicans' predilection for revenge over governance, they

may refuse later this year to raise the debt ceiling, which is about paying for debts already incurred, not new spending. Defaulting on our debt would be catastrophic; but ruination appears to be the main goal of the insurrectionist GOP.

Too often we talk as if we all have shared values, despite considerable evidence to the contrary. Why should the most radical 10 percent of House Republicans care about the views of the other 90 percent when they didn't care about the votes of the majority of Americans in the 2020 election?

Nevertheless, congrats to McCarthy on his elevation, though that seems an odd term considering how much he debased himself to get it. No good can come from a legislature being held hostage by aggressively ignorant saboteurs who treat government as an enemy. They are the burn-it-down caucus. To paraphrase Bette Davis, fasten your seatbelts. It's going to be a bumpy Congress. ■

Richard J. Rosendall is a writer and activist at rrosendall@me.com; © 2023 by Richard J. Rosendall. All rights reserved.

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To be KING

BEHIND THE CURTAINS

Queer actor takes his pride to Pride Rock in 'The Lion King'

RICH LOPEZ | Staff Writer
lopez@dallasvoice.com

When a lifelong dream begins at 8 years old, there is a lot to be done to carve out that path into the future — not to mention all that growing up to do. Christin Byrdsong saw his dream born when he saw *The Lion King* musical at age 8. And from that moment on, he knew something for sure: "I wanted to be a part of that someday."

The actor/singer was speaking by phone from Chicago where he is finishing up the run of *The Lion King* as the Simba understudy and swing. The show has made its way to Fort Worth's Bass Hall now, and runs through Jan. 29 as part of the Broadway at the Bass series.

So dreams that began in Los Angeles and were nurtured in Mesquite have come true.

"To be here and to be playing Simba when needed has really just blown my mind," Byrdsong said. "It's all going really well, and I think we've sold out some shows already in Fort Worth."

February will mark Byrdsong's one-year anniversary with the show which has already made its own history. The world's No. 1 musical just celebrated 20 years on the road, and it is the third-longest-running show on Broadway. *The Lion King* also won the Tony for best musical in 1998.

Outside those numbers, the show has had its magical effect on Byrdsong himself.

"The show reminds me that everyone is connected, and we all play our role," he said. "We all have a responsibility to each other that's sometimes looked over."

Plus, Byrdsong said, he feels that excitement of people still returning to the theater after the pandemic shutdown. "*Lion King* really invites you in, and, after the pandemic, it's like a call back to theater. It's this opportunity to sit down as a community and take in this wonderful story."

From a young boy dreaming big to being part of the Disney blockbuster musical practically reaffirms the show's song "Circle of Life."

At 31, the actor is a veteran of the entertainment business. He began performing at the age of 3 with commercials in L.A. But it was when he got to Horn High School in Mesquite that he found theater.

Byrdsong ended up in Mesquite when his mother remarried and the family relocated to Texas. It was a new chapter for him and his family, but at the same time, Texas was gonna be Texas.

"Growing up in Texas was very difficult as a Black queer young man," he recalled. "I was bullied [in Mesquite where] people were telling me my sexuality when I wasn't even thinking about it."

Like many queer people, Byrdsong endured, and now he's living the life he dreamed of as a boy. And that is more than a victory for any troubled youth, it's a beacon for those with their own dreams.

"My intention in what I'm doing with my life is to hopefully inspire young Black queer youth," he said, adding that he wants them to know that "Loving yourself in spite of everything around you is an act of bravery."

Outside of theater, Byrdsong has been seen on television as part of the cast of HereTV's drama *Conframa* about a gay Black couple who invite in a third. Then there is that scene with Eric Dane in HBO's *Euphoria*. Look it up.

For now, though, it's all "hakuna mata-ta" as Byrdsong continues down the path that started at 8 while also helping others find their own path. Recently, he was named a diversity-equity-inclusion ambassador for the show where he now works to make sure everyone involved has an opportunity to be heard.

"Disney is a wonderful company to work for, and they take great care of us," he said. "This is my legacy, too — to be an example of standing up and having perseverance.

"Not everyone has that desire or foundation to speak up, so it's the responsibility of those of us who are comfortable to do so."

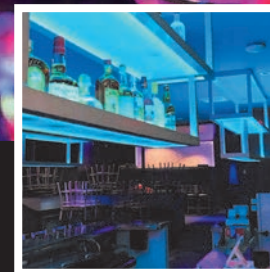
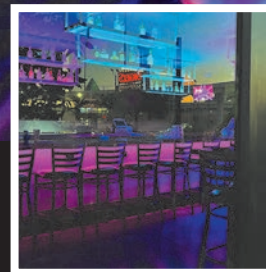


Christin Byrdsong (Dirty Sugar)

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Legislative session *opens*

AT THE CAPITOL

LGBTQ freshmen enter Legislature with cautious optimism

DAVID TAFFET | Senior Staff Writer
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AUSTIN — Three LGBTQ legislators were sworn in for their first legislative session, and each expressed cautious optimism on their first day in office. Rep. Jolanda Jones of Houston, who won a special election last spring, enters her first full session with the experience of delivering constituent services for the last six months and having had the time to prepare legislation she plans to file.

“I’m hoping to get things done,” she said. But, she added, “I know it’s very partisan.”

Jones said her experience as a trial lawyer will help because “I will say what others won’t,” and she always asks the right questions.



State Reps. Jessica Gonzalez and Christian Manuel are sworn in for the 2023 Texas Legislature (David Taffet/Dallas Voice)

herself with a staff of diverse and experienced “young people who will work longer and harder.

“It’s sad,” she added, “that it took until 2022 to get the first Black LGBT person elected.” But she is proud to have been the first of three that will serve during this term.

Rep. Venton Jones of Dallas replaces Rep. Jasmine Crockett who is now filling the congressional seat long held by Rep. Eddie Bernice Johnson. Jones said he was excited to join the House, listing his priorities as healthcare, public education, strong communities and voting rights.

As the first legislator who is out about his HIV-positive status, Jones said healthcare will always remain his top priority. “I’m looking forward to working with colleagues across the aisle to get these things done,” he said as he sat in his office that was crowded with well-wishers before the session began.

And if the session gets tough like the

last one and any fight about healthcare comes down to denying trans kids the care they need? “So what’s another fight?” Jones said.

Rep. Julie Johnson, sworn in Tuesday for her third term, wasn’t as optimistic as the newcomers. “I’m very concerned about some of the more extreme Republicans’ desire to attack the LGBT community, exemplified by hired staff with an extreme anti-LGBT past,” she said.

Among those staff hires is Rep. Tony Tinderholt’s choice of Jake Neidert as legislative director. Neidert was known in college as a hard-right activist, and his sister is the organizer of protests at Dallas and Tarrant County-area drag events.

While a variety of anti-transgender legislation has already been filed, Johnson said she didn’t yet have a sense of which of the more than 30 bills already filed had any chance of getting committee hearings or making it to the House



State Rep. Jolanda Jones

Jones has been described as extremely smart and relentless, yet she’s also utterly charming. She said she’s surrounded



State Rep. Venton Jones

Electing a speaker

AT THE CAPITOL

Rules make a difference

DAVID TAFFET | Senior Staff Writer
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The Texas House of Representatives elected a speaker of the house on the first ballot on Tuesday, Jan. 10, on the opening day of the 2023 Legislature.

What happened in Washington the previous week couldn't have happened in Austin.

The rules make the difference.

In the Texas Legislature, first, members are nominated for speaker with a speech limited to three minutes. Then each nomination may be seconded with up to five seconding speeches.

Then a recorded vote is taken. If no one receives 50 percent in the first vote, the top two candidates go into a runoff, just as in Texas primaries and general elections, and the winner becomes the speaker of the Texas House.

Had the U.S. House of Representatives used those rules and the 20 Republican holdouts continued to withhold their votes from U.S. House Speaker Kevin McCarthy, Democratic Rep. Hakeem Jeffries would be speaker.

Another difference between what happens in Austin and what happens in Washington is the order of business.

The process of choosing a speaker in the Texas Legislature doesn't begin until after members are seated.

Rep. Dade Phelan, who served as speaker of the house in the previous session, and Tony Tinderholt, a right-wing representative from Tarrant County, were both nominated on Tuesday.

The nomination speech for Phelan emphasized his "integrity and honesty" and laid out his agenda of building roads, water infrastructure and jobs to accommodate population growth.

His bipartisanship at the end of the speech received a standing ovation.

The nomination speech for Tinderholt was contentious, beginning with an acknowledgment of accomplishments in



Rep. Dade Phelan is sworn in as speaker.

the 2021 session under Phelan's leadership and ending by criticizing Democrats for having the state in 2021 to break quorum and staff anti-choice legislation.

The speech received cheers in the chamber when mentioning "kids forced by parents to go through barbaric gender surgery" and "drag shows in public schools." Tinderholt, the nominator pledged, "votes conservative biblical values."

Four seconding speeches for Phelan included one by Dallas Democrat Toni Rose.

Two representatives seconded Tinderholt — one was a Tarrant County freshman and the other was Tinderholt himself, who promised to treat everyone the same. "I consider each and every one of you friends," he said.

By the applause in the room for each side, the race appeared tight. But when the recorded vote was taken, Phelan won with 147 votes. The three votes for Tinderholt were his own, his nominator and his seconder.

In a ceremonial escort of the new speaker into the House chamber, 10 representatives are chosen for the honor. Among those selected was freshman LGBT Caucus member Christian Manuel.

In his acceptance speech, Phelan noted that the new House included a record 45 women, and he laid out his priorities of tax relief, healthcare at affordable prices, access to healthcare, criminal justice reform, exceptional schools and teachers, youth health and safety and stopping "rogue district attorneys."

What wasn't clear is if youth health and safety includes trans kids and their families and whether the rogue district attorneys refers to Dallas County's John Cruzot, who isn't prosecuting minor marijuana offenses, for example. ■

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HRC's first Black queer woman leader

VOICES IN ACTIVISM

Kelley Robinson talks family, fighting back and the future

Kelley Robinson, the new president of the Human Rights Campaign, is the first Black queer woman to lead the organization. She's also the mother of a toddler. Being a mom and wife is "the center of everything I do," she told me in an interview about her family, her work and her vision for the future.

Before starting at HRC last November, Robinson was executive director of the Planned Parenthood Action Fund. She said her work at HRC is "deeply informed" by the reproductive rights world and a deep concern about racial and social justice.

On a personal note, she shared, "Strides in reproductive health and reproductive rights have been fundamentally important in building the family of my dreams." She and her wife began their family via reciprocal in vitro fertilization, with her carrying her wife's egg.

She noted her privilege here, though: Not only are reproductive rights being rolled back, she explained, but many people still face barriers to accessing health care and health insurance for reproductive health, gender-affirming care and more.

"I want to create a world where the next generation has more rights than we enjoy today and not less," Robinson asserted. That goal is "more urgent than ever" in the face of current political and policy attacks, which are "more cruel and harmful than anything I've ever seen. The way they are attacking our kids, particularly our trans kids and folks of color, is vicious."

Every parent — LGBTQ and not — that she's spoken with, she said, is "concerned about building a world that's safe for our kids, about ensuring that they can grow up to be kind humans who are treated with dignity and respect in every area of their lives. It's that fundamental principle that is under attack right now."



Dana Rudolph
Contributing Columnist

She pointed out examples including Texas Gov. Greg Abbott's attempt to define parents as abusive if they support their kids with gender-affirming care; anti-LGBTQ bills in state legislatures across the country, and Florida's "Don't Say Gay or Trans" law, the passage of which was "coupled with a social media campaign led by very specific political actors" that resulted in a 400 percent increase in slurs like "groomer" and "pedophile" being used online to refer to LGBTQ people, per a 2022 HRC report.

"This is literally killing our kids and our families," Robinson said, noting the deadly shooting at Club Q in Colorado last November, as well as the recent death by suicide of Henry Berg-Brousseau, a young transgender member of HRC's own staff.

The situation "demands critical interventions," she declared. "We have to be clear that we're fighting political attacks against our kids. We're fighting against hateful rhetoric, and we're also fighting against real individuals whose goal is to divide our communities."

While HRC is the country's largest LGBTQ organization, Robinson said that working with other organizations is a key strategy, because "It's going to take all of us to fight this fight. The resources that our opposition has are terrifying."

The people attacking LGBTQ families are the same ones pushing anti-trans legislation, trying to ban books in schools and attacking voting rights, she said. She therefore wants to build "a broad progressive coalition that can fight back on all fronts," starting in state legislative sessions and continuing by "holding these bad actors accountable for what they're doing."

Additionally, Robinson said, "HRC

is uniquely able to work in a lot of different sectors of public life." She noted the organization's Corporate Equality Index, Municipal Equality Index and Healthcare Equality Index, which set standards "for what it means to be supportive of LGBTQ families and people," and the HRC Foundation's Welcoming Schools program, which offers "concrete resources" for "creating schools where every child can get the dignity and respect that they deserve."



Kelley Robinson (Human Rights Campaign)

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She explained, "So much of what shapes the lives of our people does happen in the political realm, but it's also happening every day, in our schools, our workplaces, in every place that we're out in public."

Each of us can help, Robinson stressed, citing the adage that making change requires "your time, your talent, and your treasures." She encouraged people to volunteer their time with local organizations, including local HRC steering committees.

"We're about to enter a really challenging state legislative season," she said. "Help us to fight back." As for talents, "If you've got a skill, use it. If you like to chitchat on the phone, we've got phone banks. If you're an expert community builder, we have digital organizing. If you work in a particular industry that could promote change, we've got tools and toolkits."

Finally, she said, "This work takes resourcing, so to the extent that folks are

able, donate and give."

Despite the challenges, Robinson remains optimistic. "There are fundamentally more of us than our opposition," she said. Although some people "feel like the system is so out of whack that our voices can't really make a difference," she noted that Democrats have retained control of the U.S. Senate "because people organized and we showed up and made our voices heard," and that "even in a post-Roe world, people are fundamentally redefining healthcare to get people to care and care to people."

And Biden administration officials like Assistant Secretary for Health Rachel Levine, Secretary of Transportation Pete Buttigieg and White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre are "people in positions of power who represent the LGBTQ community in ways that we have never seen."

Robinson reflected, "For me to be able to sit next to my wife, a first-generation woman of Indian descent; to look at our son — our life was unimaginable a generation before."

Change happened "because people kept showing up," she said. "I feel like there's a real opportunity for us to do that and create new possibilities for the next generation." ■

Dana Rudolph is the founder and publisher of Mombian (mombian.com), a GLAAD Media Award-winning blog and resource directory, with a searchable database of 1000+ LGBTQ family books and more.



Kelley Robinson, right, with her wife Becky George and their son Izaiah. (Eric Kayne-AP images for Human Rights Campaign)



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SESSION, From Page 8



State Rep. Mihaela Plesa

floor.

One weapon Johnson and other LGBT Caucus members have during this session is the addition of three members to their ranks. "There's strength in numbers," Johnson said. "I'm excited to have Venton Jones as part of the caucus," she said, and welcomed "the authenticity of his experience to the fight."

Johnson commented on the hypocrisy of extreme right-wing legislators promoting an anti-transgender agenda for "perceived political gain." She was referring to bills that criminalize parents who seek medical care for their trans children. "How can you be a parent advocate and then not let parents make decisions about their kids?" she asked.

Rep. Mary Gonzalez of El Paso, who was sworn in this week for her sixth term, previously served as vice chair of the appropriations committee. Her approach is to "make sure we attend to things we've ignored." On her list is public education and the foster care system.

Rep. Jessica Gonzalez of Dallas, also starting her third term, said she expects a brutal session. She's also sticking to her areas of expertise — election bills, criminal justice and affordable housing. But she has also filed an omnibus LGBTQ nondiscrimination bill. She said she plans to be more proactive on that bill than she was last session and hopes it will get a hearing in committee this time around.

Gonzalez's seatmate on the floor of the House is new LGBT Caucus member Christian Manuel of Beaumont. His office said they are putting together his legislative agenda and will announce it

soon.

Rep. Ann Johnson of Houston, returning for her second term, filed a bill to add six more courts in Harris County to alleviate a backlog of cases. Her office said the bill was killed in committee last session so the Republicans could point to a failed judicial system in the state's largest county and point fingers at the Democrats who run the county.

Rep. Erin Zwiener of Hays County, just south of Austin, filed a bill "to decriminalize pregnancy outcomes." Women who have experienced miscarriages have been denied medically-necessary care, with some medical facilities questioning whether the loss of pregnancy was self-induced.

She also filed a bill to update and repeal unlawful statutes relating to same-sex relationships.

One other freshman weighed in on her optimism going into the 88th Legislature: "I am really optimistic," Mihaela Plesa said. "I have 30 billion reasons. We need to get relief to families."

The 30 billion referred to the state's budget surplus.

Plesa is the only freshman who flipped a seat from Republican to Democratic in the November election. Her Collin County district includes parts of far north Dallas, Richardson, Plano and Allen.

She said she plans to work across the aisle to get property tax relief and is filing a bill to benefit the national guard working along the border who are "overlooked and overworked." Other border solutions she offering include a guest worker program that she hopes Republicans will support.

She said she believes most Republicans are looking for solutions because "People are tired of partisan politics."

Plesa has also filed a bill to increase the number of cannabis licenses in the state and another addressing pet policies at county and municipal housing authorities. And she's looking forward to doing her part to help derail the spate of anti-transgender legislation with which some members are flooding the House.

While experienced legislators weren't as optimistic going to the session as freshmen, no one predicted another walkout as happened during the 87th Legislature. ■



Fort Worth's Celebration Church, led by the Rev. Jorene Taylor Swift, pictured, as pastor, celebrates its 30th anniversary with a gala event Saturday, Jan. 14, in the Trinity Ballroom at the Hilton Garden Inn and Suites, 912 Northton St. in Fort Worth. The church, founded in 1993, began renting the sanctuary at 908 Pennsylvania Ave. in 1998 and in 2001 purchased the historic building that had previously housed the St. Evangelical and Reformed United Church of Christ. Celebration Church holds worship services every Sunday at 10 a.m. Watch previous services on Celebration's YouTube channel.

- **Red for community events**
- **Blue for arts and entertainment**
- **Purple for sports**
- **Green for nightlife**
- **Orange for civic events / holidays**

WEEKLY

■ Frontrunners

Running club for the LGBTQ community and allies of DFW. Meet at 7:15 p.m. on Wednesdays and 8:30 a.m. on Saturdays at the corner of Hall Street and Turtle Creek Boulevard in Turtle Creek Park for a one-hour walk/run on the Katy Trail.

JANUARY

■ Jan. 13-15: Grizzley Pines Bonfire

Who doesn't love to sit around a nice fire? In this case, it'll be a huge burn pile. Grizzley Pines, 16930 Whippoorwill Road, Navasota. GrizzleyPines.com.

■ Jan. 13: Drag Race viewing party

Macarena and Pinche host a weekly viewing party for season 15 of *RuPaul's Drag Race* each Friday from 7-9 p.m. at The Round-Up Saloon, 3912 Cedar Springs Road. Visit the Facebook event page for details.

■ Jan. 14: Celebration Church 30th Anniversary Gala

Celebration Church celebrates its 30th anniversary with a gala at Hilton Garden Inn and Suites, Trinity Ballroom, 912 Northton St., Fort Worth, \$50 and must be purchased by Dec. 28. Scardinal@celebrationtexas.com.

■ Jan. 14-15: Transgender & Christian

With Austen Hartke, author of *Transforming: The Bible and the Lives of Transgender Christians*. Jan. 14 at 7 p.m.: Transgender and Christian: A Coming Out and Coming Home story. Jan. 15 at 12:30 p.m.: Who is my Transgender Neighbor. Northaven Church, 11211 Preston Road. Northaven.org.

■ Jan. 14: Dallas Bears

Dallas Bears monthly meeting at noon at Cathedral of Hope, 5910 Cedar Springs Road. Email secretary@dallasbears.org for an invite if you are not a current member.

■ Jan. 14: Buzz'n Babe'zz Drag Brunch

Daphne Rio hosts Buzz'n Babe'zz Drag Brunch, with special guests Xochi Mochi, August Edwards and Chanel Devereaux, at 1 p.m. at The Brews Arms at BuzzBrews Lakewood, 5815 Live Oak St., No. 102. Tickets are \$15, available at EventBrite.

■ Jan. 14: Metropolis at Texas Theatre

The restoration of Fritz Lang's SciFi masterpiece, accompanied by a live score performed by David Didonato, screens at 8 p.m. at Texas Theatre, 231 W. Jefferson Blvd. Tickets range from \$18-\$28, available at PreKindle.com.

■ Jan. 14-15: Danny Tenaglia at It'll Do Club

D.J. Danny Tenaglia spins at It'll Do Club, 4322 Elm St., from 9 p.m.-2 a.m. Tickets are \$20-\$350, available at EventBrite.com.

■ Jan. 15: BEAR Tea Dance

Liberty Lounge, 515 S. Jennings in Fort Worth, hosts Brews, Beards and Bears Tea Dance, featuring Gentle Bears with DJ Hunter, starting at 3 p.m. The music will be trash disco, and those attending are encouraged to dress in bear gear, which means jeans and flannel and boots.

■ Through Jan. 15, 2023: "Octavio Medellin: Spirit and Form"

Octavio Medellin was an influential Mexican American artist and teacher who helped shape the Texas art scene for six decades. The first-ever museum retrospective for Medellin explores the evolution of his sculptural practice, his public art commissions, and his legacy as a beloved and respected teacher. Dallas Museum of Art.

■ Jan. 15-22: Aspen Gay Ski Week

For photos and videos check out our website: dallasvoice.com. Explore: gayskiweek.com.

■ Jan. 17-18: "Two Dykes and a Mic"

Rachel Scanlon and McKenzie Goodwin, hosts of the weekly podcast *Two Dykes and a Mic*, bring their show to Hyena's Comedy Club, 5321 E. Mockingbird Lane, at 8 p.m. each night. Tickets are \$15-\$20, available at PreKindle.com.

■ Jan. 19-21: "Legally Blonde"

Broadway at the Center presents the musical *Legally Blonde*. Winspear Opera House, 2403 Flora St. ATPAC.org.

■ Jan. 18-29: "The Lion King"

The Disney musical comes to Bass Hall, 5225 Commerce St., Fort Worth. BassHall.com.

■ Jan. 20: DMA 120th birthday party

The Dallas Museum of Art celebrates its 120th birthday with music, tours, performances and art-making from 5-11 p.m. at Dallas Museum of Art, 1717 N. Harwood St. Dress up as your favorite work of art or artist in the collection for \$5 off your walk-up ticket. \$20. Free for members. DMA.org/LateNights.

■ Jan. 21: Apres-Ski Gaybingo

Get your Uggs out, put on your puffer jackets, and grab your cutest scarf for the super "cool" Apres-Ski Gaybingo at 6 p.m. Play for a chance to win over \$2,500 in cash and prizes. \$4, 3911 Cedar Springs Road. Tickets at myresourcecenter.org/gaybingo.

■ Jan. 21: Queer Prom

Flips Darts Pool & Cocktails, 1125 E. University Drive, Denton, hosts "Queer Prom: A Rainbow Tie Affair," starting at 8 p.m. Find details at the Facebook event page.

■ Jan. 21: Classic Chassis Car Club

Lunch at Rodeo Goat, 1926 Market Center Blvd. at noon. Board games, card games, role play games and more at Common Ground Games, 1314 Inwood Road after lunch. Check out: classicchassis.com.

■ Through Jan. 21: Women Life Freedom

Woman Life Freedom DFW Collective, Pegasus Media Project, and Irving Arts Center have partnered to present a topical conversation through the visual and performing arts mediums in a special exhibition and performance event with spoken word, poetry, storytelling, video, performances, paintings, photographs, sculptures and more at the Irving Arts Center, 3333 N. MacArthur Blvd., Irving.

■ Jan. 24-Feb. 5: "Pretty Woman"

Broadway Dallas presents *Pretty Woman: The Musical* at Fair Park Music Hall. Tickets at BroadwayDallas.org.

■ Jan. 25: "Rise Up"

Celebrate the opening of *Rise Up: Stonewall and the LGBTQ Rights Movement* with a discussion on the events surrounding the Stonewall Uprising and the legacy of this revolutionary moment in the LGBTQ rights movement. Reception at 6 p.m. Program at 7 p.m. at Dallas Holocaust and Human Rights Museum, 300 N. Houston St. \$10 for nonmembers. Free for members. Tickets at DHHRM.org.

■ Jan. 25: Same-sex spouse grief group

Grief support group for people who have lost a same-sex spouse or partner meets on the fourth Wednesday of the month from 6:30-8 p.m. Contact Richard DeKnock at tastefullyrichard@gmail.com.

■ Jan. 27: "Space Oddity"

David Brighton's *Space Oddity: the Quintessential David Bowie Tribute* at 7:30 p.m. at Irving Arts Center, 3333 N. MacArthur Blvd., Irving.

FEBRUARY

■ Feb. 4: Love Equality

An evening of fun and celebration benefiting Equality Texas from 8-11 p.m. at Crozier Hall, 2218 Bryan St., Suite 105. \$100 at the door. \$75 if purchased by Jan. 4. EqualityTexas.org.

■ Feb. 7: Classic Chassis Car Club

Monthly meeting. Come ready to eat, enjoy our cars and catch up with fellow club members from 6-8 p.m. at Ojeda's, 4617 Maple Ave. classicchassis.com.

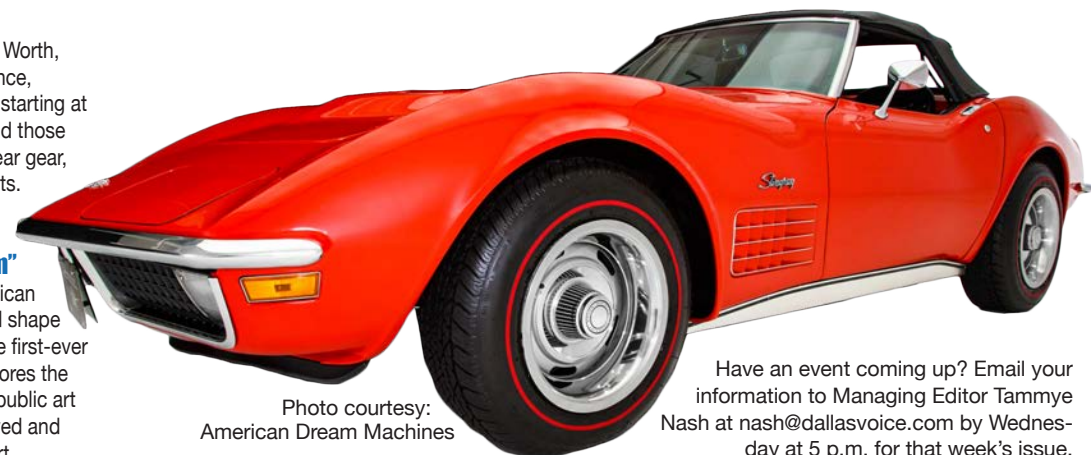


Photo courtesy: American Dream Machines

Have an event coming up? Email your information to Managing Editor Tammye Nash at nash@dallasvoice.com by Wednesday at 5 p.m. for that week's issue.

Cassie Nova

ASK A DRAG QUEEN



I was home alone a lot. If I didn't want to go to school, I didn't. It was very much a paradise for a self-sufficient kid like me.

Then my step-brother and -sister, Keith and Ashleigh, moved in with us. They were four and five years old, and I stepped up to take care of them.

For about 3 months I took care of them and my dad. I cooked, occasionally cleaned and made sure the kids got to school and the babysitter. She was next door. My dad was constantly working on cars or helping someone fix something. He was never far away but rarely there.

Then everything changed: Dad met Lynn.

Their relationship moved fast. Within a few weeks, Lynn and her son had moved in with us, and she immediately went into mother mode. And I was not having any of it.

Suddenly she was telling us what time to go to bed and making me get up and go to school. Hell no! I went from running everything to running nothing. She was getting on my nerves, but she did get my dad to come home more and more.

Lynn basically let me be a kid again and kept me from being a complete fuck-up from missing so much school. I, of course, did not realize that until years later. I don't think I ever thanked her for that.

She was the first person to take me to the dentist; I was 13. When I was going through puberty and was having literal

pain in my balls, she forced me to tell her what was wrong and took me to the doctor. It turned out I had some sort of infection in my nut — embarrassing, but thank God she made me tell her what was wrong.

Then it got to a point that I realized my mother needed me more, so I moved back in with her. Keith and Ashleigh were in good hands with Lynn, and so was my dad. She was the best thing that ever happened to my dad and to his kids.

My young gay ass couldn't wait to get out on my own. Before coming out, all I could think was, "My family will disown me when they find out I am gay, so I need to hurry up, move away and be self-sufficient so I don't have to rely on anyone." And that is pretty much what I did. Except, when I needed help with my car I still called my dad, and he was always there to help.

I wasn't the son my dad wanted. He wanted a boy that he could work on cars with, go fishing with, talk about women with. That was not me. Luckily, he has that with Keith.

I instead pushed everyone away — better to reject everyone before they can reject you. I moved on and rarely looked back. Years passed, and I had little to no contact with my dad's side of the family. I had family members tell me that I thought I was better than them, and my response was always, "I am better than you." I can be a very shady homosexual.

Now I realize I'm not better, but I am different. Now I would tell them "You don't understand my world at all, but I understand your world and want more." I am so thankful for my gayness and the life that comes with it.

I actually think Lynn understood that for me.

Jamie and I had a 10-year anniversary party 10 years ago. (Fuck! where does the time go?) We invited our families. It was a big deal for us because this was before we could legally get married, so we had a small ceremony to pronounce our love for each other. Lynn was the only person from my entire family that showed up. I will never forget that.

Lynn got on my nerves sometimes in the way that family does, but I will miss her random texts saying that she loves

me and misses me. I will miss her randomly tagging me in a Facebook post that made her think of me — anything from a rainbow to an Ellen DeGeneres comedy clip, literally the most random stuff. But she was thinking of me.

She had a good heart, but she didn't have a strong heart.

I wish I would have been a better son to her.

Rest well DeVorra Lynn Love. I love you.

Remember to always love more, bitch less and be fabulous!

— XOXO, Cassie Nova

Thinking of Lynn

Hello everyone. Today I am sad. This week we lost my stepmom, Lynn. I'm not sure I should even write about this because it has brought up a lot of emotions for me. Between the sadness of losing her and concern for my Dad and the rest of his side of the family, I am feeling a lot of guilt. Lynn was the lifeline that kept a dialogue between my father and myself. Without her, I guess that falls on me.

My relationship with my dad is strange: I love him; he loves me. He was even somewhat okay with the gay thing, but we just have never been close — well, not since I was, like, 13 years old and was living with him.

Having divorced parents mean that if you are a manipulative kid, you can live with whoever you want. When I was 12, I moved in with my dad and pretty much did whatever I wanted. He worked, so

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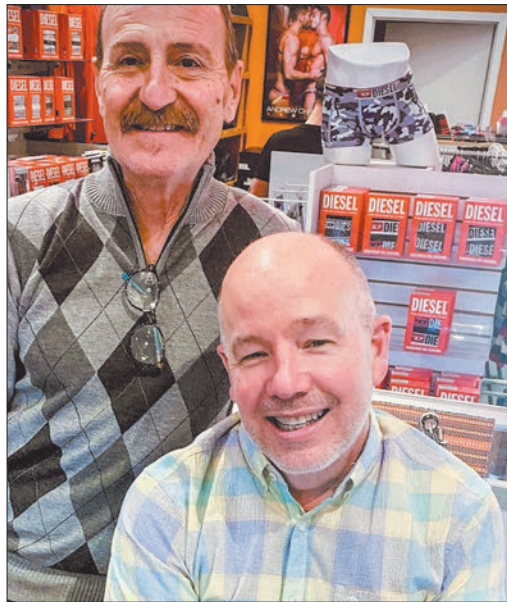
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Check out the ballots and let us know who is your favorite in categories ranging from Shops to Shows, and when you cast your ballot you will be entered into a drawing for our Grand Prize.

GRAND PRIZE!

One lucky winner will get the PERFECT date night:
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YOUR LIFE. YOUR CHOICE. YOUR VOTE.

The Readers Voice Awards issue will be published on Friday, March 31, 2023.