



VOL 38, NO. 3
JUNE 15, 2023

'We're queer all year'

THE PRIDE ISSUE

Nobody's Darling, Dorothy and Whiskey Girl Tavern provide new space for queer women to connect

PAGE 6



avery r. young
Chicago's Poet Laureate

6



JASON KNOWLES
Out and proud on the airwaves

5



PEARL DICK
Arts mentor to young trauma victims

8

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.

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INDEX

Consumer affairs reporter Jason Knowles	5	Sarah Gailey crosses paths with Marvel	18
Poet Laureate avery r. young	6	The masks of artist Isabella Mellado	19
Art-felt: Mentor Pearl Dick	8	Fabrizio Subia navigates loss and grief through art	20
'We're queer all year': The return of Chicago's lesbian bars	10	Chicago creative Elijah McKinnon	22
'Take my picture': Patric McCoy exhibit at Wrightwood 659	16	Model/senior advocate Stefanie Clark	24
		Howard Brown's Lake View expansion	26

PUBLISHER Terri Klinsky
EXECUTIVE EDITOR Matt Simonette

DIGITAL DIRECTOR Jean Albright
ART DIRECTOR Kirk Williamson
BUSINESS MANAGER Ripley Caine
SENIOR ACCOUNT EXECUTIVE Terri Klinsky
CONTRIBUTORS

Andrew Davis, Carrie Maxwell, Jerry Nunn, Kayleigh Padar, Matt Simonette, Jess Savage, Michelle Zacarias

WEB HOSTING LoveYourWebsite.com
(lead programmer: Martie Marro)

(773) 871-7610 FAX (773) 871-7609
Editorial: matt@windycitymediagroup.com

Sales: terri@windycitymediagroup.com
Art/ad copy: kirk@windycitymediagroup.com

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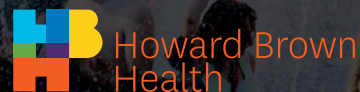
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Jason Knowles:

Consumer affairs reporter Jason Knowles discusses being out and proud on the air

BY MATT SIMONETTE

If a Chicago-area resident has been ripped-off, swindled or otherwise cheated, there's a good chance they'll call Jason Knowles.

Knowles, who is gay, has been ABC 7's consumer investigative reporter since 2014, and has been with the station since 2004. He covers everything from traffic cameras to lead exposure, to dangers posed by social media and other emerging technologies. Knowles described his job as "ever-changing," adding that it entails "juggling a lot of balls in the air at the same time."

"We have several irons in the fire at all times," he further explained. "We may have three, four, five stories that we've shot video on, and are trying to get responses on. At the same time, we're looking ahead at the next batch of stories. We're getting those stories from viewers who are calling or emailing, or ideas that we generate."

Knowles has long been heavily involved in the Pride-related programming—dubbed "Pride 365"—which entails LGBTQ+ content year-round. This year he'll report on the street at the Chicago Pride Parade, which he first did in 2022, as well.

He recalled covering last year's parade: "It was so cool to be in the thick of it, talking to everybody and running around. At least for me, it was nice to have something unscripted and fun, being able to be on TV and just go with it. With investigative reports, things are kind of 'legal' and very scripted. It was great—I loved it."

The bulk of the station's Pride programming airs in June—the day he spoke with WCT, for example, the station was about to broadcast Knowles' report on transgender teenagers and their families—but ABC 7 has made an effort to air LGBTQ+ related stories all year long, Knowles said. He has done stories to mark LGBTQ History Month and Trans Visibility Day, for example.

Knowles was especially proud of a 2022 story that he did, under the auspices of both his investigative unit and the Pride 365 initiative, about difficulties marginalized groups face in LGBTQ+ bars. "It was cool to bring both...brands, I guess...together," he said.

Knowles praised ABC 7 and Disney (the station's corporate owner) as "being nothing but

supportive." He added, "I really enjoy the Pride work.... Even if I wasn't doing the LGBTQ coverage on the side [of the consumer-reporting], I think it would be a great situation, where they'd be supportive."

He admitted to being aware of the importance of being a high-profile, visible member of Chicago's LGBTQ+ community.

"It is important for LGBTQ+ children—and adults—to see themselves represented," Knowles explained. "They can look at the television and say, 'Hey, I can do that one day,' if you're a kid who wants to be a reporter or an anchor. 'He's out and he's in a good space and I can do it too.'"

He stressed that people who can and choose to be out of the closet should be active in the community as well. Television stations are extremely sensitive to how their anchors, reporters and other on-air personalities present themselves to the public, leading to many LGBTQ+ broadcast journalists staying closeted. Knowles recalled doing so did so while at an earlier position in Ohio.

"I was very worried at that former station," he said. "Not because of the way anybody treated me. They were all very nice. But it was a different time. It was Toledo, Ohio between the years of 1997 and 2004. Being on air, I was a little concerned. But I had to let that go—and I did when I came here."

Knowles loves covering the hot-button issues most of all; one such example was his reporting about Chicago's controversial traffic cameras.

"There was a lot of criticism around them, even though a lot of people say they're for safety," he explained. "There are some safety benefits. But there is criticism from people who just say that they're money-makers for the city. ... People really relate to that and feel as if they shouldn't have to pay for some of these violations."

Another of his favorite stories concerned wait-times for DNA labs. Delays at the labs had resulted in hundreds of unsolved investigations, and after Knowles' team did their reporting, the state police revamped its crime lab.

"Anytime we can make a difference like that, I love it," Knowles said.



Jason Knowles in the studio (above) and out in the field (left). Courtesy of ABC 7 Chicago



avery r. young.

Photo by Patrick L. Pyszka, City of Chicago

avery r. young:

Poet Laureate draws inspiration from West Side upbringing

BY MICHELLE ZACARIAS

North Austin native and multi-dimensional poet avery r. young made history in April after being selected as Chicago's inaugural Poet Laureate.

The announcement came as no surprise to those who follow young's career as an award-winning poet, teaching artist, and musical producer—among many other hats he wears. The city's poet laureate program was announced in January and aims to increase awareness of Chicago's historic contributions to the literary arts while celebrating and honoring the efforts of Chicago's working artists.

Although the program itself is new, young is a veteran performer and has made a name for himself in the city's storytelling community. When he performs, he might recite a poem, sing it or even stomp and clap it out—but his words never fail to captivate audiences. The distinct way he commands the room has become signature in his brand of performance.

The multidisciplinary artist has been drawn to poetry since he was a boy. "Literature is always around me, and I've written for a long time," he said.

His passion for artistry was apparent as early as third grade. He partially credits having grown up in the Baptist Church on Chicago's West Side, where scriptures from songs were read and performed constantly.

young recalled, "I was introduced to the world of oratory composition through church, which led to teaching artistry and spoken word performanc-

es ... then I really got interested in the idea that poetry is not just a genre of literature, but actually an art form."

He has since amassed a plethora of achievements and accolades. young recently performed at the inauguration ceremony for newly elected Chicago Mayor Brandon Johnson. He is also the co-director of The Floating Museum; a co-mentor for the Rebirth Youth Poetry Ensemble; a fellow with Cave Canem, an organization centering and promoting the work of Black poets; a 2022 recipient of the Field Foundation of Chicago's Leaders for a New Chicago award; and a performer with his band, de deacon board, whose work merges gospel, soul and funk.

young's appointment as poet laureate is made possible by the City of Chicago, in partnership with the Chicago Public Library (CPL) and the Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events (DCASE) as well as the Poetry Foundation. In his role, young will be awarded a \$50,000 two-year contract for both the commission of new poems and the creation of public programming, as well as serving as an ambassador for the city's literary and creative communities.

young takes pride in mentoring young artists. He said, "I think my teaching artists work is the best of me. Mentoring is the best of me, because it's not necessarily about crafting a poem—it's about caring about another human being, and that has been the best part of my work."

Something as simple as walking down a city block can spark creative inspiration for young on

any given day. He explained, "There are so many things that inspire me in Chicago, but one of the most pertinent things is where I grew up in North Austin."

He described growing up on the West Side, listening to the sounds of the street: "When you walk down North Avenue you see a storefront church, two doors down from a liquor store, then across the street from there a tavern—on Sundays you hear the music hitting the streets and the sounds of washing machines from the laundromat" He likens the composition of these noises to that of a "symphony" that learns to occupy and intersect together in harmony.

Spontaneous inspiration is plentiful in Chicago, but young's creative writing process is much more disciplined. He described meticulous steps that go into constructing a poem, which he said are about extracting the language that is presented in his head, so that he can actualize the artistic vision.

"I laugh at this idea that I'm walking around like a metal detector—or like a poem detector—and all of a sudden I start blessing," young said.

The announcement of Chicago's inaugural Poet Laureate program marks the beginning of a new chapter in the city's creative investments. young is excited to create opportunities for poets and artists outside of himself, as he continues to work on developing creative spaces.

"Creating substantial programming that will have a significant impact on the city means opening doors," he said. "So we gotta make that door a little wider ... or we gonna bust it down."

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Both photos
on this page:
Pearl Dick.
Courtesy of
Dick



Art-felt

Pearl Dick helps young victims of trauma by mentoring in glass arts

BY ANDREW DAVIS

Almost a decade ago, glass artist Pearl Dick and clinical psychologist Dr. Brad Stolbach co-founded Project FIRE (Fearless Initiative for Recovery and Empowerment), an arts program that provides victims of trauma the chance to heal through glassblowing. Program components include mentoring, art and psychoeducation.

Project FIRE (in partnership with Healing Hurt People-Chicago, a hospital-based violence-intervention program) is now part of the nonprofit organization Firebird Community Arts, an art studio in Chicago's East Garfield Park area.

Windy City Times recently talked with the outspoken Pearl Dick about the program, politics and her message to younger LGBTQ+ creatives.

Windy City Times: Talk a little bit about Firebird.

Pearl Dick: Absolutely! Firebird is a 501(c)(3) and we do a lot of youth programming that is trauma-focused. We're trauma-informed and that information is based on what we learn through Project FIRE, which we run out of our studio.

I'm the artistic director of Firebird, and I co-founded Project FIRE in 2014. We devised this idea for having this glassblowing arts-education program specifically for young people who have been impacted by gun violence. They do glassblowing and ceramics, and have group psychology sessions as well; they work really closely with mental health professionals and with teaching artists.

We rebranded and became Firebird Community Arts around the beginning of the pandemic; we were formerly known as ArtReach Chicago. [ArtReach] was part of Lillstreet Art Studio and that's been around for 30 years.

I had been working at another studio where I had Project FIRE. But we wanted our own space where nobody would judge us. So [Firebird Executive Director Karen Reyes] and I were on a search at the same time and we were friends; we joined forces around 2015. She learned about Project FIRE and we agreed on the need to have this programming through a trauma-informed lens. We wanted to work with young people and address issues of social justice and equity in the arts. So this iteration is fairly new.

WCT: So it makes sense that you believe in activism through art.

PD: Absolutely—in all the ways. I believe in providing access to art and increasing diversity in rarefied art forms that have been traditionally white, cis and male. We also work with immigrant populations and more visible work, politically speaking. Of course, we

address issues of gun violence, racism and segregation.

I think the nature of what we do [constitutes] activism. We take people to rallies and educate our young people about voting. We really advocate for them in spaces where they have not had a lot of representation. We have a lot of people here involved in the juvenile justice system, which doesn't have that much justice.

WCT: What does it mean to you to be LGBTQ+ and BIPOC in today's America?

PD: Well, what it means for me is that I feel a great responsibility to advocate for the next generation that's coming up in the arts. They're demanding visibility, they're demanding access that we didn't have and that hasn't been there throughout history. I feel a great responsibility to shift the way things have been.

We're in a moment right now where there's some opportunity for visibility; we need to push and fight. The way things have been is not the way it'll continue to be done.

However, [the anti-LGBTQ+ bills passed throughout the country] feel like a pendulum swing. We made a lot of motion toward visibility, access and equity—but then there's swing toward the Dark Ages concerning women's rights and LGBTQ+ rights. They're draconian.

I have a 14-year-old nephew who's exploring his gender identity and all of his friends are part of the queer community. They've got so many options to explore and ways to see how they fit into the world. He sends me [anti-LGBTQ+] articles and it's heartbreaking to see his outrage about what's going on.

On one hand, I feel like they have these really great opportunities that I didn't have at his age, in the arts and elsewhere. But it's also really terrifying to see some of the things coming out against young folks today.

WCT: What's your advice to the next generation of LGBTQ+ creatives?

PD: I really want to encourage people to speak their truths and to stand up for what they believe in. Young people don't have to do this alone anymore. There are allies and others who will support them. They can have strength through solidarity and be more confident in who they are at that moment.

For more information about Firebird Community Arts, visit firebirdcommunityarts.org/.

This article was made possible with a grant from Comcast Corporation that was awarded to News is Out, a six-newspaper collective in which Windy City Times takes part. See newsisout.com.



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‘We’re queer

Nobody’s Darling, Dorothy and Whiskey Girl Tavern



Illustration by Anna White

all year’

provide new spaces for queer women to connect

BY KAYLEIGH PADAR

Three Chicago lesbian-owned bars have opened in the past few years, creating more spaces where queer women can feel comfortable and build community with each other.

Andersonville’s Nobody’s Darling, Dorothy in Ukrainian Village, and Rogers Park’s Whiskey Girl Tavern join a long history of queer-owned community spaces in the city.

These three bars carry on the tradition of spaces safe for lesbians in Chicago and its suburbs, from Tiny and Ruby’s Gay Spot in the ‘50s, to the long-running Lost & Found and the much-lauded Paris Dance. Other bars included Ladybug, Swan Club, Augie & CK’s, The Patch in Calumet City, Star Gaze, Temptations, Razzmatazz, and many more—including floating parties such as Executive Sweet.

Today we also still have woman-owned Big

Chicks and The Closet, a lesbian-owned bar operating in Lakeview since the ‘70s, and many floating parties, including Slo ‘Mo.

Queer women are specifically centered at Nobody’s Darling and Dorothy, while Whiskey Girl Tavern is more of a neighborhood bar. However, each of the business partners (and in some cases partners in life) who own these bars designed them to be places they themselves would feel comfortable in.

Whiskey Girl Tavern isn’t geared toward any community in particular, but co-owners Christina and Heather Roberts created a space where they could enjoy time with friends and gather around women’s sports.

“We wanted a bar that we could see ourselves going to,” Roberts said. “We love to watch football on Sundays, and women’s basketball with a nice cocktail and some dinner, so we geared it to

what we would like. We want it to be for anyone who likes craft cocktails, sports and community.”

Zoe Schor, who first opened Dorothy in February 2020, also started her business with the intention of designing a space she’d enjoy and that was reminiscent of the lesbian spaces she grew up in. Dorothy closed within four weeks due to the pandemic, but reopened last summer with the help of Schor’s co-owner and life partner Whitney LaMora.

Schor said she “was really moved by” T’s, a bar in Andersonville that closed in 2013, where Schor and her friends could relax with cheap beers, a game of pool and a jukebox.

“I was really bummed when T’s closed, and I just got the feeling that it was time to open a lesbian bar,” Schor said. “I’ve always been very interested in spaces that were specifically for queer women.”

Schor also felt an urgency to “invest” in creating spaces for the queer community, after learning that lesbian bars across the country were disappearing. In 1980, there were 200 lesbian bars throughout the country but now there are only 27, according to the Lesbian Bar Project.

“There’s not always access to capital and funding for people who are marginalized,” Schor said. “To have this opportunity, where there were investors who were excited to invest in a lesbian bar, landlords who were excited to have this bar in their basement and so on, it just felt like something we really owed to our community.”

Business partners Angela Barnes and Renauda Riddle shared Schor’s concern about the loss of women-centered spaces. Riddle had spent years organizing monthly pop-up parties for women throughout the city that Barnes said were popular and well-received.

"I certainly enjoyed going to them and I think a lot of women were feeling like it would be nice if we could have a more consistent space to go to," Barnes said. "We decided we would give it a go and see if this was something that the community would want and would receive well, and it's been great."

Nobody's Darling opened in May 2021 and will soon expand into the space next door.

Just before opening Dorothy, Schor said she "got cold feet" because she was worried the bar wouldn't be sustainable and that it could be dangerous.

She recalled "We didn't live in a queer neighborhood and I was worried about if we'd have enough business. I worried, 'Is it too esoteric?' I worried, 'Would there be violence?' after we had all seen the shooting that happened in a queer club in Colorado, which was so horrifying."

Like Nobody's Darling, Dorothy has experienced plenty of success, Schor said, adding, "Our community is incredible—both the people who come out to the bar and the people who work in the bar. It's been a really special thing to be a part of."

Nobody's Darling, Dorothy and Whiskey Girl Tavern each have their own unique atmospheres and bring people together through curated community events.

Whiskey Girl Tavern is a classic sports bar, Roberts said. Visitors can expect craft cocktails, delicious chicken tenders and plenty of TVs showing sports games. The bar sponsors numerous local sports teams, including the semi-professional local soccer team Edgewater Castle, and invites neighborhood leagues to use its pool tables.

"Christina and I were both very active in sports—that's how we met," Roberts said. "So it's a big part of who we are and the events that we have here."

The bar hosts a variety of other events, like trivia, karaoke and live performances, and rents its space out for parties, Roberts said.

"Depending on who's here, they sort of make it what they want it to be," Roberts said. "We're just trying to meet the needs of the community and be a space that anybody can come to and

Turn to page 12



Whiskey Girl co-owners Heather (left) and Christina Roberts.

Photos by Kayleigh Padar



Nobody's Darling co-owners Angela Barnes (left) and Renauda Riddle.

Photos by Kayleigh Padar



Illustration by Anna White



Dorothy co-owners Whitney LaMora (left) and Zoe Schor.

Photos by Riané Human





parties draw large crowds of people, Roberts said. "People who hadn't watched women's sports before were saying they really wanted to do it again," Roberts said. "People don't want to just sit at home."

Dorothy is home to Fruit Salad, a queer open mic, and plenty of viewing parties for lesbian cult-classic television shows and movies. When in her early twenties, Schor would gather all her friends to watch *The L Word* together because it was "unheard of" to have a show centered on the lesbian community.

"You could hear a pin drop," she said. "There'd be like 40 lesbians in somebody's living room and you weren't allowed to talk. The show always had a really strong sense of community for me."

Schor relishes that customers gathered to watch the recent *L Word: Generation Q* follow-up in her bar. "It's an extraordinary, full-circle experience," she said.

The three bars each feature women and queer-owned alcohol companies and other brands in order to amplify their audiences. Nobody's Darling invites food vendors into the space, like Taylor's Tacos, which is run by two Black queer women.

"Taylor's Tacos really resonated with us, and the partnership was hugely popular," Barnes said. "We thought it would be cool to give people the opportunity to come in and introduce their products to our clientele, but it also takes the burden off us when it comes to making food."

Right above Dorothy is Schor's restaurant Split-Rail and LaMora's gallery The Martin.

"Something we find challenging is that people really want to support our businesses during June, which is nice, but I like to remind people to think about where you're spending your money

all year round," Schor said. "We're queer all year. There really are so many places where you can come and be a part of something, whether you want dinner, a cocktail or an art gallery."

Whiskey Girl Tavern is home to the yearly Whiskey, Wine & Women Festival, which is a tasting event where attendees can sample a variety of drinks created by women-owned companies.

"It's really important to do these kinds of things and to acknowledge that promoting the people out there making these products is part of the business as well," Roberts said. "We want to get them out into the market because it's hard to compete against all the big companies with lots of marketing."

The creation of these spaces has provided more opportunities for women to come together, share their interests and just relax with a drink. But, each of these spaces are welcoming to any customer interested in what they have to offer.

"It's really important to us that you don't feel like you have to be a certain kind of way to come into Dorothy and spend time in our space," Schor said. "We're a lesbian bar in that we're prioritizing women, trans and non-binary people and trans men, but it's also for everyone."

As a queer woman, Barnes said she's been in spaces where she didn't necessarily feel welcome, so it's important to her to create a space where women are "recognized and acknowledged."

"It's hard to explain, but on some level, it's just about feeling like you're safe, that you're not going to be harassed, that if you don't want to engage in a certain way, you don't have to," Barnes said. "There's just something about being able to exhale and actually just have a cocktail and have a conversation."

continued from page 11
feel comfortable."

Nobody's Darling has blossomed into a "laid back intergenerational space" where all kinds of people come together to converse over a cocktail or glass of wine, Barnes said. Later on in the night, the lights dim and they bring out a single disco ball, so people can dance.

"You're always going to get a great cocktail from eclectic mixologists who will entertain you," Barnes said. "There's always some regulars here who will give you a recommendation."

To enter Dorothy, visitors pass through a secretive red door, traverse a steep staircase and emerge in a dimly lit speakeasy with velvet couches, a photo booth and an "unexpected little community," Schor said.

"We didn't set out necessarily to emulate the speakeasy vibe, and we certainly didn't set out to put gays back in the basement and make them hide away," Schor said. "But, it was more about creating a special and unexpected experience."

Dorothy offers a variety of craft cocktails, "good tunes," and "a place where you can talk with your friend without feeling totally overwhelmed," Schor said.

Each of these bars' atmospheres shift depending on which events are going on. At Whiskey Girl Tavern, for example, women's sports watch



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“Take my picture”

Patric McCoy exhibition unearths forgotten moments from Chicago’s Black queer history

BY MATT SIMONETTE

It’s the unusual person who is able to transform commutes to and from their office into anything meaningful, let alone a profound body of work documenting a generation. But Patric McCoy has done just that.

McCoy, a retired scientist as well as an art collector, spent years carrying his 35mm camera on his bike commute, photographing a number of men whom he encountered along the way. McCoy also took photos of men he met in various bars around Chicago, particu-

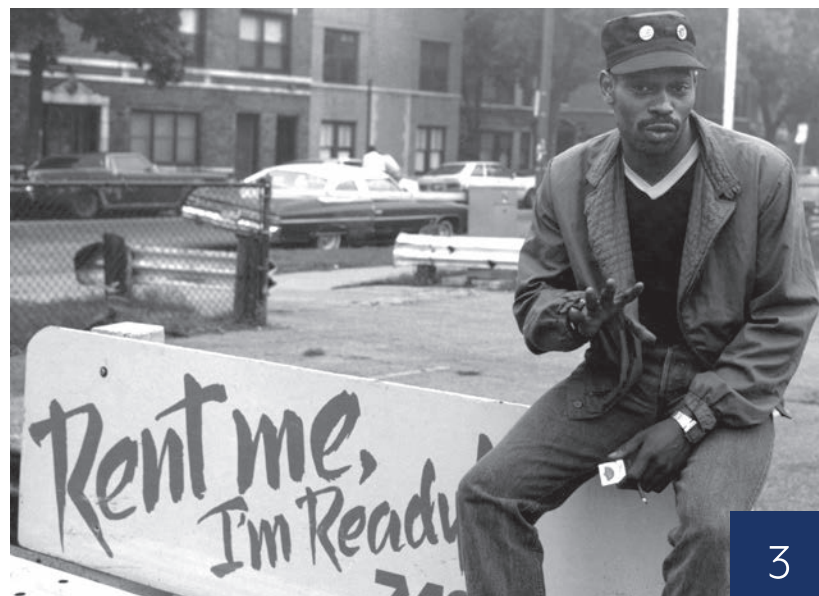
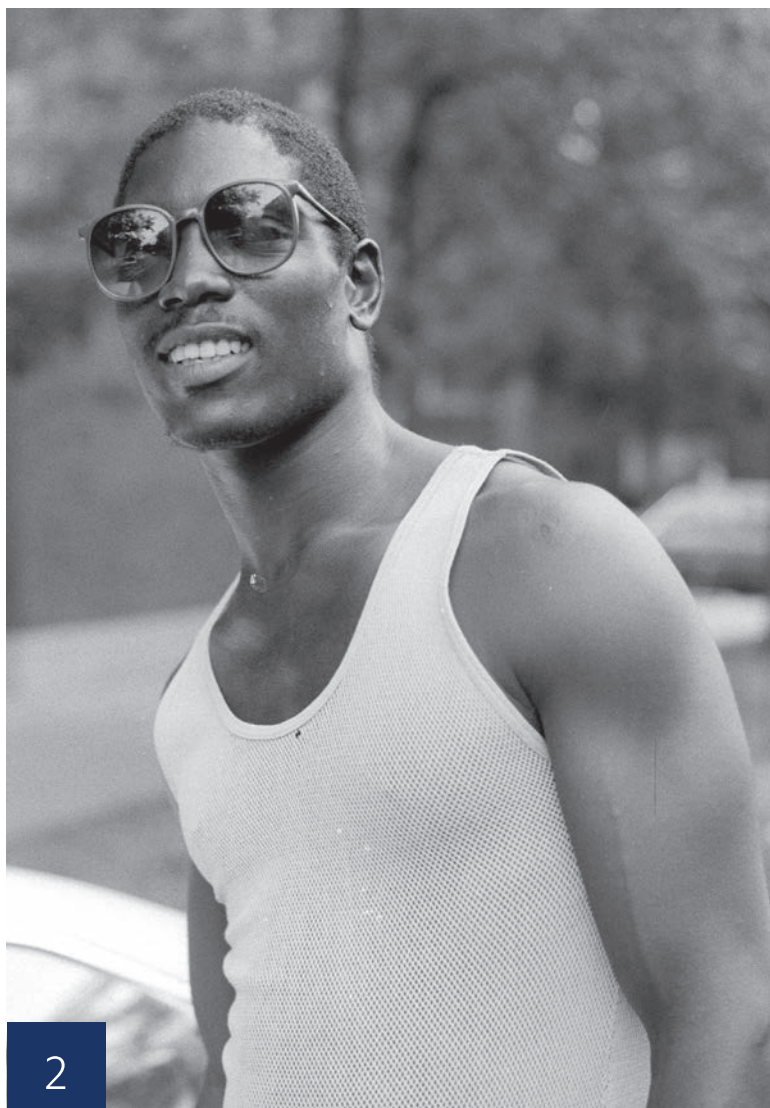
larly the Rialto Tap, where Black men who had sex with men frequently gathered.

The result was a collection of thousands of photographs portraying mostly gay and queer Black men in the city during the ‘80s. Many of his subjects died at the height of the AIDS crisis, and McCoy’s pictures could very well be some of their last remaining photos.

Several of those photographs have been on display in the exhibit “Patric McCoy: Take My Picture” at Wrightwood 659 Gallery, 659 W. Wrightwood Ave., which runs through July 15.

Photos from the exhibition *Patric McCoy: Take My Picture* at Wrightwood 659.

- 1) Cream and Green.
 - 2) Jeff
 - 3) Five
 - 4) Smoke Clouds
- Photos by Patric McCoy



"I didn't have a natural inclination to take the photography in a technical and professional sort of way," McCoy recalled. "I have always been interested in visual imagery because I grew up in a home filled with art and photography. My father was a painter and a photographer."

As a young man during the '60s and '70s, McCoy carried a point-and-shoot camera and took "lots and lots and lots of pictures." A friend who worked at a camera shop eventually convinced McCoy that he should graduate to a 35mm model.

"I had a hesitation because I had not been that 'tech-y' with a camera," he said. "But he convinced me."

In December 1984, McCoy made a three-pronged promise to himself. First, he committed to getting serious about learning how to use the camera. Second, he would take his camera with him everywhere he went. And third, if anyone asked him to take their picture, he would stop what he was doing in order to do so.

He thus bicycled each day, with his camera, from his home in South Shore to his job with the Environmental Protection Agency in the Loop.

McCoy said, "Invariably, people would see me—because I'm sure I looked like quite a little nerd—and they would holler out at me, 'Hey, take my picture.' With this commitment, I had to stop [and do it]."

He never told his subjects what to do or how to pose. Among McCoy's subjects were residents of various South Side neighborhoods, and people experiencing homelessness who were at the time living in Grant Park. The patrons from the Rialto Tap particularly seemed to enjoy engaging with McCoy's camera.

"It was in the south end of the Loop, in the seedy portion," McCoy recalled with a laugh. "They all also started asking me to take their picture. It became a flood."

McCoy now recognizes the pertinence of his pictures for the bar's patrons.

"These are people who wanted to be seen and wanted to be documented," he explained. "During this time period, most people did not have good photographs of themselves. Point-and-shoot cameras were popular, but we now know that the film was not set up to make Black people

look good, and most people looked like smudges. ... People seeing me with what was considered an expensive, professional camera were saying, 'Maybe I can see if he can make me look good.'"

McCoy would develop and print the film each night in his father's darkroom, then present his subjects with their photo the next day.

"They would be astounded—it was a 5x7, so something larger than what they were normally accustomed to—and excited that I was just giving it to them," he recalled.

Though McCoy gave away many of the pictures, he nevertheless was left with a huge collection of his work. In 2022, his friend, artist Juarez Hawkins, set about curating those photos for an exhibit.

"I had the daunting task of looking at about 1,500 images," Hawkins said. "For the first run, I just looked to see what bubbled up. Just in the looking, I began to see groupings ... like men at leisure, men hanging out, busy with life. Lots of fashion—fashion was a lot of fun ... men on bikes, lots of beautiful men on bikes. From there, I started narrowing it down. From each grouping,

I asked, 'What's going to tell the story the best?'"

By the time Hawkins narrowed it down to 200-250 pictures, she admitted to herself that she still had a "curatorial juggernaut."

"There were no duds in the bunch," she said. "But I wanted things that talked to one another so each grouping fed a piece of the narrative."

Hawkins considered herself lucky that McCoy was around to contribute his ideas: "Patric definitely had a say," she said.

McCoy, who is himself assembling the images for a book, said that he regards the Wrightwood show as "the opening of a discourse, a conversation, about that time. Since we're in a world where queer identity is accepted, [we have to ask], 'Where did that come from? What came before this?' ... If we didn't start this conversation, [the history] would be totally lost."

This article was made possible with a grant from Comcast Corporation that was awarded to News is Out, a six-newspaper collective in which Windy City Times takes part. See newsisout.com.



Sarah Gailey.
Photo by Allan Amato

Writer Sarah Gailey crosses paths with Black Cat for Marvel Voices: Pride #1

BY JERRY NUNN

Publishing company Marvel Comics has been showing its true colors, with Marvel Voices: Pride #1 returning in 2023 for its third year in June. The comic book series features a wide range of out and proud characters and was nominated for a GLAAD Award in 2021.

Nonbinary writer Sarah Gailey (pronouns they/them) contributes to the special issue with a Louisiana tale about cat burglar Felicia Hardy also known as Black Cat. They started writing short stories in 2014, and in 2018 won the Hugo Award for Best Fan Writer. Gailey has also written several novels including *When We Were Magic*, *The Echo Wife* and *Just Like Home*.

After producing multiple comic collections for Boom! Studios, Voices will be the first time they have worked with Marvel Comics.

Windy City Times: Have you been a comic fan for a long time?

Sarah Gailey: I spent many hours reading comics as a young person, and would obsessively trace any beautiful woman that was on the page. That was a hint of what was to come!

WCT: As a young gay boy, I always studied their physique and the male characters would sometimes take their shirts off.

SG: I am currently reading old *Werewolf by Night* comics, and there are men with chiseled jawlines and shirtless. It is such a gift for us! *[laughs]*

WCT: Do you have a favorite character?

SG: I was always deeply invested in Spider-man and had an intense imaginary relationship with Mary Jane Watson.

WCT: What led you to this Pride comic?

SG: I have been writing comics in the indie space for a while like *The Vampire Slayer*. I also worked on the original series *Eat the Rich and Know Your Station*.

My experience in the indie comic realm has been incredibly fun and rewarding. People seem to like what I am doing there. I was asked to work on a one-shot for *Marvel Voices: Pride* and I immediately said yes. Having an invitation to be extremely queer on the page is an indescribable thrill.

When I heard it was *Black Cat*—and knew she is a beautiful thief that loves crime—that was truly special. To write an explicitly queer story for a queer audience is such an opportunity for me. I was chill on the outside, but on the inside, I was screaming!

WCT: How does Black Cat identify?

SG: In the comics, they usually identify her as bisexual. I always use the word queer because there is too much temptation to divide our community. The bisexual versus pansexual crusades have been going on longer than I have been alive. I try not to marry people to one side or the other on that because I think that is a false distinction. We can safely say she is bisexual or pansexual.

WCT: Were there any limits placed on how you could depict the character of Black Cat?

SG: They did not set any limits, but if I had her say that nuclear war was a good thing, for example, then they might have asked me to pull that back.

My editor there actually told me to be less careful. I put in a subtle nod towards heroes fighting back against the forces of evil who are trying to damage the queer

community, and the editor said I shouldn't avoid stepping on toes. I was told to say the thing I want to say. In this day and age, there's so much preemptive censorship that to have someone with a major company say that was so incredibly healing.

WCT: I remember reading comics in the '70s when they were not supportive of women, so the industry has come a long way.

SG: Yes, just the depiction of queer people and celebratory queer stories makes my heart want to explode!

WCT: Is the Marvel Voices scene set in New Orleans during Pride?

SG: Yes. *Black Cat* is visiting New Orleans in the story for some nefarious purposes. She hangs out with *Gambit*, who is the prior king of the New Orleans Thieves Guild, and [they] have an adventure together.



Marvel
Voices:
Pride #1.
Cover art
by Amy
Reeder

WCT: Were Buffy the Vampire Slayer fans difficult to please with writing The Vampire Slayer series?

SG: I was expecting such a ruckus, but *Buffy* fans have been very kind to me. They have been supportive and picked up on every bit of subtext that I put in the comics. Queer *Buffy* fans specifically have been so excited with the storylines I have created for the series.

WCT: The Marvel Voices series has meant a lot to people such as myself and I have collected it previously.

SG: I was reading the previous *Marvel Voices*, and there was a reprint of the first time a major character named *Northstar* came out as gay in *Marvel Comics*. I was bawling when I read the last page where the creators wrote about how AIDS has affected their lives.

WCT: What are your Pride plans?

SG: I have to stay home from the parade because I am immunocompromised. I will be at home promoting my queer peer friend's work with this Pride issue. Many of us this year will be focused on promoting trans authors and voices, since they are at risk in this country right now. That is where my energy will be!

Look for more rainbows and variant covers at your local comic shop or by visiting [marvel.com](https://www.marvel.com).



Left: Isabella Mellado in front of their piece *Temperance*.

**Photo by Mack Baker
Below: *Damsel* mask.
Photo by Isabella Mellado**



Chicago-based artist Isabella Mellado's paintings and sculptures are vibrant, colorful and larger than life. Her work represents autobiographical and allegorical scenes, nearly all of it featuring characters inspired by the tarot.

Mellado (she/they, pronouns she alternates between) designs elaborate physical sets with hand-made props to generate reference photos, which are further rendered in Photoshop to create fantastical images that more closely match her expressive vision for her paintings. The shining stars of Mellado's prop-making, however, are the papier mâché masks she creates to represent tarot characters, like the Sun, Moon or Death cards.

"Queering the tarot" is a common sentiment in various queer discourses. Many in the LGBTQ+ community have woven the tarot into their dating apps, their belief systems, and their core identities.

"Tarot is a symbolic framework that allows me

to insert myself because it's made for that," said Mellado. "It's about identity."

They just completed their final semester at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, and earned their MFA from its painting and drawing department in May. Growing up in Puerto Rico and completing their undergraduate degree at the Rhode Island School of Design, Mellado has had plenty of experience moving between different cultural spaces.

But it wasn't until Mellado came to Chicago that she finally found an ideal mix of Latinx and queer communities: "Because my work engages with being part of the diaspora ... I decided to go with SAIC, and I'm very happy that I did."

A supportive community is vital for most artists and creatives, and Mellado is no different; they keep community at the core of their work. Switching between communities—returning to their family in Puerto Rico, moving about

Facing up

Artist Isabella Mellado illuminates the masks within community

BY JESS SAVAGE

their neighborhood (Pilsen), engaging with various Latinx and queer spaces—for Mellado is indeed almost like donning different masks.

Her work started exploring what it meant to be a queer artist relating to her community, how queerness is a part of social dynamics, and her core identity as an artist. The city allowed her to find ways to express themselves authentically. She took on a role, as many artists

do, as a recorder of history. "We are capturing what the culture is around us, and that's intuitively what I'm doing and what I'm still doing—just capturing the world around me," Mellado said.

She initially combined this experience of masking and code-switching with their original inspiration, the vejigante, a Puerto Rican folkloric character that teases the audience during parades and festivals. These are jesters, whose name directly translates to "liver giant." They carry dried cow livers with seeds rattling inside like a maraca. Learning about and engaging with the vejigante, a deeply rooted aspect of Puerto Rican culture, was the beginning of Mellado's deep interest in mythology and folklore.

Mellado's first mask, used as a prop in the painting called "Interview with a Gargoyle," drew from folklore about a local Puerto Rican town that couldn't get rid of a gargoyle attacking their

livestock. Inspired by this story, Mellado created a mask with chicken wire and beads; their sibling posed as the gargoyle being interrogated by the town, and the years-long series began.

Mellado then started making masks and paintings that reflected their life experiences, and how and where they aligned with the teachings from the tarot.

"I was using the tarot as a framework, thematically, for what I wanted to say that related back to me, personally," she said.

Rather than the deity-like characters from the tarot, Mellado paints human characters donning masks. Their characters are vulnerable; they have flaws, they experience hardship.

Over time, the meaning of the masks have changed and deepened. Mellado explores their multiple meanings, employing the traditional background of tarot characters, but applying the metaphor of using masks as protection for moving through cultural and community spaces.

Mellado's identity has transformed since their arrival to Chicago in 2021. She wasn't as 'out' before she moved, but said that "moving [to Chicago] emboldened me, because I was able to move from conservative spaces, where I was afraid that I wasn't going to be accepted, to a space where I'm in art school, surrounded by other queer people. I felt safer to explore making work about being queer."

Indeed, Mellado feels safest within the queer community: "When I'm here in Chicago ... and I'm in queer community, I'm masking less; I know I'm safe there." On the multiple masks she wears, she explained, "They're different aspects of my identity, and they all belong to me."

In the last few months, they have had works in Heaven Gallery, The Martin, Kavi Gupta Gallery, Blind Barber and Art in Common. They believe that Chicago's ability to convene artists and creatives in such a powerful way allowed them to explore their impact as an artist who seeks to connect directly to their audience.

Mellado said, "I want my audience to look at my paintings and see themselves in it. As a Puerto Rican artist, as a queer person, I want to provide that representation, and I want to open doors for other people who are like me...I just want them to feel seen; that's the point. I want you to feel seen, I want you to feel held; that is the core value."



Fabrizzio Subia's performance of a past piece.
Courtesy of Subia

When it comes to loss, Fabrizzio Subia may know more than most people.

Having dealt with everything from familial loss to the erasure of his history, the Ecuadorian-American multidisciplinary artist (who has also done things like host the open-mic event *Tortas y Talento*) this past spring unveiled a video installation “*Año Nuevo (2023)*”—a grief performance which was on display through early May at Chicago’s International Museum of Surgical Science. The piece was dedicated to his late brother and was the sequel project to “*Año Nuevo (2019)*.”

In a talk that sometimes turned emotional, Subia (who now utilizes “he/they” pronouns, acknowledging their life is a journey) discussed constraints against art and how he ultimately decided to do what they felt was necessary.

Windy City Times: Tell me about your life and background.

Fabrizzio Subia: Sure. I was born in Guayaquil,

Ecuador; it’s a city named after two indigenous founders—Guayas and [his wife] Quil. I left when I was eight years old, during the late ’90s. I’m 32 now. It was a time of intense political instability in Ecuador; I remember getting out of elementary school and having to cover my nose because there was tear gas. My mom, brother and I came to the U.S.; my dad went to Spain. I reconnected with my dad after my brother’s death, and it’s been very healing.

Around 2000, the Ecuadorian economy collapsed. That’s in another project I’m doing, as my work deals with migration. The national currency disappeared and the U.S. dollar appeared. To this day, the national currency of Ecuador is the U.S. dollar.

We moved to the West Side of Chicago. We went to the suburbs for high school; after that, we moved to Uptown and I’ve been there ever since.

WCT: What are LGBTQ+ rights like in Ecuador?

FS: Oof ... There’s a lot of machismo there as well as Catholicism. The church controls so much of the politics. A lot of people there don’t feel comfortable sharing their identities. There are some brave people there—and I am very proud of them.

WCT: What drew you to art?

FS: Ha—that’s such a good question. When I was 6, my mom put me in a painting class after I threw a tantrum. [Laughs] I remember looking forward to going to class, but then we moved to the U.S.

This next part is very important: We overstayed our visa and were undocumented for seven years. So we were very poor, and I wasn’t put into art classes again.

And I was discouraged from being an artist as well. Imagine that you’re a poor single mother of two—and, to this day, my mother doesn’t speak English. I was constantly told that there are no jobs in the arts and that I should be a doctor. I really rejected that [artistic] part of me, and I

didn’t paint again until I was 27 or 28. But I did write; paints are expensive but you can steal a pen from class. [Laughs] So writing and poetry are the foundation of my art. I consider myself a writer and a performer. So I studied, at age 9, to be a doctor—but I also wrote.

When I turned 13, I told my mother that I wanted to be a writer when I grow up. She said, “That’s great. However, that’s not going to get you money.” I can’t blame her; she did the best with what she had. I studied to be a doctor until I was about 25—and I was so depressed. I dropped out of school twice.

At The College of DuPage, I studied art and the humanities. Surprise, surprise: I got straight A’s there. Then I went to DePaul to study medicine; but I again became depressed and I dropped out. I then went to the City Colleges of Chicago—behind my mom’s back—and studied art; it was incredible and I built a portfolio. I ended up at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago—going there on a Presidential Scholarship—and I graduated in 2020.

2020. My whole life was just dictated by moving here to the U.S., and all I had for protection and a connection to my previous home were my mom and older brother.

WCT: How did your brother pass away?

FS: [Sighs] That's a hard question. Some would lead people to believe that he passed away from COVID and that was certainly a factor. It was only after his death that I realized how deep his mental-health issues were. He put on a facade [of strength] and I modeled my life after him. [Tears well in Subia's eyes.]

The police report—at least, the one that I got ... Something that I have to say is, "Fuck cops. Fuck the police." There was definitely corruption in this case, but the short few sentences said that my brother was hit by a car. What I can say is that the pandemic really took a toll on his mental health. There are so many COVID casualties that are due to the isolation—and being an immigrant is isolating enough as it is.

WCT: So tell me about "Año Nuevo." It's based on the "Año Viejos" tradition [in which people burn effigies to end the old year], correct?

FS: Yes. The Ecuadorian New Year has everyone with an effigy. When the clock strikes midnight, we put them, filled with fireworks, into a bonfire. It's very healing. I've always considered it a grief ritual even though many Ecuadorians see it as a celebration—burning the old to make way for the new.

Once we got our papers here in the U.S., we



Fabrizio Subia.
Courtesy of Subia

were able to travel back. I go back every year; it's how I stay connected to my home country. It's strange because so much of my work deals with destruction in some way. The theme of my works has been that Latin American people and immigrants are themselves the result of a culture that no longer exists; it's what's called an "embodied knowledge." We don't know the real history. Colonialism and policy literally burned down our history and that, to me, is very indicative of this celebration—it's us who are burning.

Since my brother passed away, I've been thinking about making art that isn't so community-based but more for myself. But what's weird is that with this project—"Año Nuevo (2023)"—I thought it would be an individual project in which I meditate on grief. I don't know what grief is, but I know that you have to do something—maybe perform—and

that brings people together. The [effect] of my grief ritual has been generational. The performance itself was intense because we burned one effigy an hour for 24 consecutive hours.

WCT: Do you feel like you've healed?

FS: That project made me feel like I'm a different person and that I'm in a different place. I don't know if that's what healing is, but I can say that I've lived the happiest moments of my life. Doing this project—even a grief performance—was a happy moment for me. Art is my therapy.

WCT: What's your advice to the next generation of LGBTQ+ BIPOC artists?

FS: Firstly, don't take advice from me. [Laughs] I will say that community's a responsibility.

It's healing. When you find your community, make sure you take care of the others around you.

Also, it's okay to take your time; it's a scary world out there. Protect yourself, more than anything. If you're an artist, you're going to be made to feel like you have to make work about your identity for a white gaze. Treat your artwork like it's a gift to one specific person. Also, know who your audience is.

I don't know if my words mean anything, but if you need anything, I can be there. Hopefully, you'll feel the love and connection that I've felt with my art communities.

This article was made possible with a grant from Comcast Corporation that was awarded to News is Out, a six-newspaper collective in which Windy City Times takes part. See newsisout.com.

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Elijah McKinnon.
Photo by DeLovie Kwagala

Elijah McKinnon

A Chicago creative talks about Open Television and intersectionality

BY ANDREW DAVIS

Elijah McKinnon (they/them/their) is definitely marching to the beat of their own drummer—and many people are benefiting from their vision.

McKinnon—who describes themselves as a BlaQ, nonbinary #queerdragon—is an artist (artist/activist) and entrepreneur who, in 2015, co-founded (and is executive director of) OTV | Open Television in Chicago with Dr. Aymar Jean Christian. OTV is an “online and city-based platform for intersectional television, film and video art,” according to its website. It aims “to amplify voices that have been marginalized for centuries in the United States and globally to build empathy and equity in our society.”

However, this isn’t McKinnon’s only endeavor/achievement. A former Windy City Times 30 Under 30 honoree, they, among other things, became the founder and director of People Who Care, Inc., their independent consultancy and studio practice; and was a recipient of the prestigious New Leaders of Chicago award by the Field Foundation of Illinois and MacArthur Foundation in 2020.

This interview was edited for length and clarity.

Windy City Times: I know that language is constantly evolving, and I noticed that you describe yourself as “BlaQ” and a #queerdragon.” Is [the former] in reference to “Black queer,” or is there even more to it?

Elijah McKinnon: Yes! [Smiles] It means “Black queer” and it provides an expansiveness for “Black.” There’s not only one way to be Black and I feel the intersections of my Black and queer identities are what allow me to understand both and how they work together.

I started using “#queerdragon” back in university about 10 years ago. A lot of people don’t know this, but I enjoy sci-fi and Black speculative fiction. Dragons are mythical creatures that, historically, are protectors and guardians and I feel that I’m a healer/protector/guardian of all things anchored in queer legacy. Don’t get too close or you might get burned! [Smiles]

do you feel it’s like to be Black and LGBTQ+ in today’s America?

EM: I think the world is deeply nuanced and challenging to exist in any identity in this current landscape. It becomes increasingly challenging to be Black and queer and nonbinary in these conditions that we live in because the world is in a constant state of catching up to language, feelings and information. For me, it’s challenging—but I believe those challenges present such great opportunities for us all to expand. To be Black, queer and nonbinary is a truly revolutionary act of deeply understanding myself, my values, and my position in the world to deliver purpose and meaning. It’s a vehicle to a whole other world that I get to be a part of and help build.

WCT: And you’re becoming an activist and role model in the process.

EM: The world has made me a role model. [Smiles] I believe that the passions and commitments that I have to mobilizing ideas, sharing resources and cultivating opportunities for intersectional people to thrive have called me to pursue this work. I didn’t find this work; the work found me. That can be true of any individual in any industry.

I consider leadership to be ordained. I’m very wary of people who elect themselves to be leaders or visionaries. I believe that those positions come with a lot of responsibility and require investment from the people who are directly impacted by that work. To me, it’s about showing up, doing the fucking work and going home. And I have a really great life outside of what the world sees, and that’s sacred and beautiful.

WCT: Let’s jump to OTV. I know that we’re making our way out of the COVID pandemic but how did that affect OTV?

EM: People around the world have had to adapt the best way they know how and, for OTV, we were extremely privileged to be a resource to organizations and to already be experimenting in the digital/online live space. So the pandemic really invited us to create space for expansiveness in a world that felt restricted and confined in a variety of ways.

WCT: You mentioned intersectionality. What

What was really beautiful about that process for us—although it was also quite challenging—was that we were able to cultivate a sense of joy through enduring the pandemic. I'm not sure we would've been able to do that if we already hadn't been playing in that space. We experienced our first livestream in 2016 through a collaboration with [art center] Mana Contemporary and The Propeller Fund; the year after that, we hosted a livestream with the Museum of Contemporary Art. In 2020—through funders and resources—we launched our own app, which provided us a really great opportunity to reach people in a way we hadn't been able to before.

WCT: Regarding OTV, how exactly does it work regarding submissions, for example? There's a wide variety of items but there are guidelines, I assume. Also, please talk about OTV's mission.

EM: OTV began as a platform to make television more artistic, open and sustainable. Our framework is feminist, anti-racist and inclusive; it focuses on individuals who live at the intersections of multiple identities that are constantly marginalized by markets, industry and society. We wanted to see what stories exist and why they're not given the [proper] platform.

Over the years, and through many different iterations, we've become a nonprofit streaming platform and a media incubator for intersectional storytelling. I think what really differentiates us from a lot of people/organizations/initiatives in the TV/film landscape is that we really center artists and their creative visions as anchors; we support them in various ways, such as nurturing their careers. We want the next generation of intersectional storytellers to dream, create and thrive—on their own terms.

We have cultivated a pipeline for people who have completed projects that need distribution. We have rolling submissions; people share their information on our website and our development/production team reviews the content. What's wild is that we used to actively ask for content; now, so many people from around the world have discovered our platform—mostly through other artists, which is really beautiful.

In terms of guidelines, there are none; we take an anti-capitalist approach. There are eligibility criteria that we must adhere to for our values. The core pieces are that the work needs to be developed by an intersectional creator and/or the content needs to be framed through an intersectional lens.

Behind the scenes, our marketing and production teams work really hard to cultivate an annual slate of programs that speaks to the world around us.

WCT: What is your advice to the next generation of intersectional storytellers regarding entering the business or being part of the larger narrative?

EM: I think my advice to all types of storytellers/creators would be to get close to yourself in a way that may feel uncomfortable. I think the world is dominated by media, and media has a way of documenting and archiving and exploiting a particular perspective that is not the full story. We need to understand what we want, deserve and dream of—that will help them actualize their dreams and goals in a way that feel tangible and accessible.

Spend as much time as you can trying to understand the parts of yourself that are being developed and cultivated when no one is watching. There are times you need to be fearless, and times when you need to be vulnerable and soft.

WCT: Is there anything you wanted to say in conclusion?

EM: OTV is and always will be a platform that prioritizes artistic vitality. It's important for us to know that this organization, which is approaching its 10th anniversary, was built on the backs of Black, queer, nonbinary, trans people. That's where our work begins and ends. Anything in between there has been an immense gift for us.

This article was made possible with a grant from Comcast Corporation that was awarded to News is Out, a six-newspaper collective in which Windy City Times takes part. See newsisout.com.

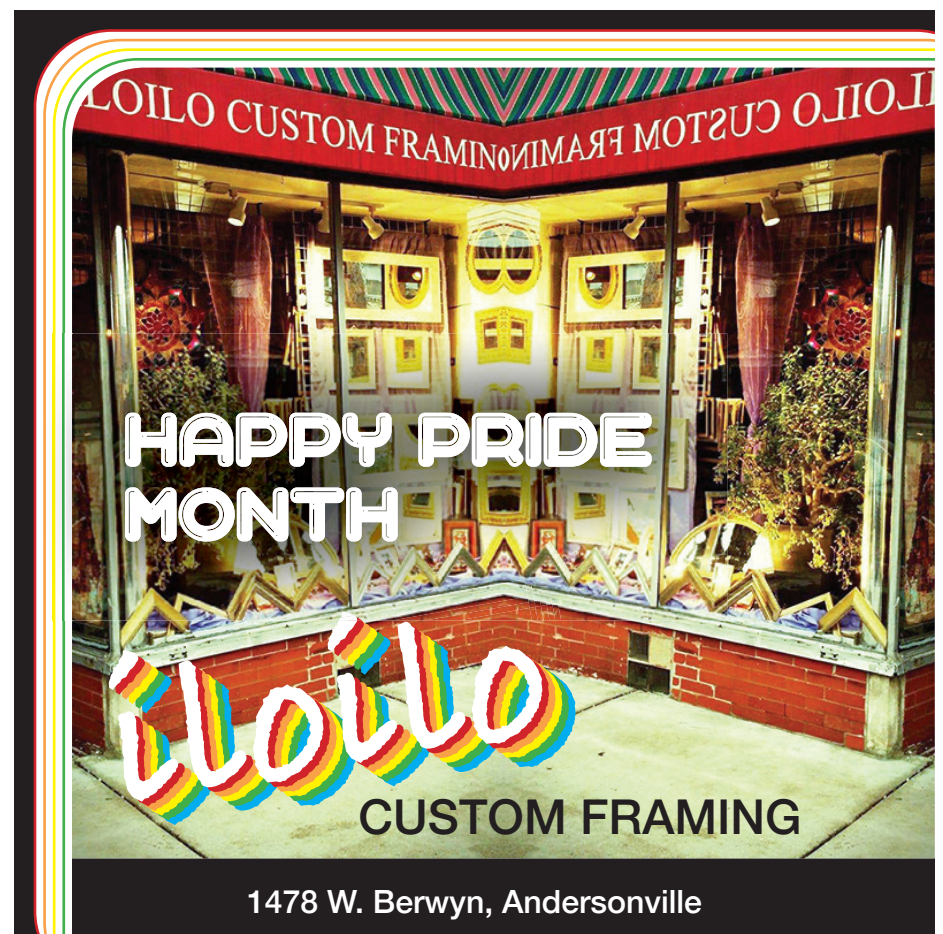
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Stefanie Clark

reflects on life as a
both a fashion
model and
senior
advocate

BY MATT SIMONETTE



Stefanie Clark.
Courtesy of The FashionBar, LLC

An oft-repeated quote from F. Scott Fitzgerald—usually taken out-of-context—suggests that “there are no second acts in American lives.” Local activist—and, as of lately, model—Stefanie Clark has been putting a lot of effort into disapproving that maxim lately.

Since transitioning in her early seventies, Clark—originally an accountant by trade—has been speaking publicly about her experiences living as a transgender senior, calling attention to issues faced by individuals who contend with societal challenges around both their gender-identity and age.

“There are very few of us trans older seniors,” Clark said. “You get Mama Gloria [the late activist Gloria Allen] and me—I’m [now] the oldest. I didn’t get her mink coat, but I got the responsibilities.”

Last year, she doubled-down on the idea of raising trans senior visibility when she got the opportunity to work locally as a fashion model.

One day last August, her daily meditation prompt was, “You can be anything you want to be.”

Clark said she stood up and said, “I want to be the most visible 79-year-old transgender model. And then I humbly said: ‘in the Midwest.’

A friend with connections had taken her to a fashion show at Water Tower Place. She called

and asked if she could walk the runway once at the next show.

Three hours later, she got her answer: “Yes, be at Water Tower Place at Wednesday at 11.”

When she arrived, she was told she’d be doing two days of fashion shows, with several changes of clothes—including a wedding dress. She closed several of the programs, essentially occupying the most-coveted spot in the shows.

“How’s that for a lark?” She said, laughing. “It’s a now a business career.”

Indeed she has now has representation from a modeling agency in San Francisco called Celebrate the Gray, specializing in models over the age of 50.

“Whenever I see a photographer post on Instagram now, I say [to call me], ‘If you ever need a unicorn,, as defined by a 79-year-old runway model who has a 5’11 frame, 46-inch shoulders, reasonably height-weight proportionate, and can carry any loose-hanging garment.’”

On May 20, Clark took part in the Trashion Revolution fashion show at Macy’s. She was one of 50 models intended to showcase “the diversity of humanity”; the event centered pollution and climate change as its theme.

“Chicago nor the world has never seen anything like it,” Clark said. “Pre-sales were such we had to seek a new venue. With our move to Macy’s

State Street, [we] more than doubled our capacity and ticket sales sold out.”

Being visible and staying active has long been foremost on Clark’s mind. Following coming out as transgender in 2016, She did some-soul searching, and was eager to make a contribution to the LGBTQ+ community.

“I joined [Human Resources Professional] Britta Larsen’s speakers’ bureau,” Clark recalled. “She had gotten a request from SAGE USA for some of the seniors to talk about the additional challenges LGBT seniors have when accessing healthcare.”

It was the perfect request for Clark, who’d faced numerous such challenges over the course of her transition. She publicly spoke on the matter over two dozen times over the course of four years. In 2021, she became active, alongside Pride Action Tank Executive Director Kim Hunt, with the group Storytelling for Advocacy.

“All I knew about was transgender issues, stuff on data collection and stuff like that,” Clark recalls. “We had 11 issues to advocate for, that year, and all of them became law. I touched on four of the 11, such as telehealth.”

One issue she’s passionate about is finding competent physicians, which is a challenge shared by transgender folks of all ages.

“That’s not easy, because they don’t put rain-

bow flags after they list ‘M.D.’,” Clark explained. “Our healthcare systems don’t make it any easier, since everything now involves some kind of provider network. So you have to go through the morass of your insurance carrier to find out who you could even consider, without knowing whether they’re culturally competent or not.”

Clark works extensively on housing issues as well. She has been involved with Center on Halsted, Howard Brown Health, Equality Illinois, Illinois Masonic, The Village Chicago (a large social community for people over 50) and has sat on numerous advisory boards and councils. She’ll also be a subject of an upcoming Peacock documentary, which she she said is still on “the ground floor.”

Many—if not most—transgender individuals wish not to use the name they had before transitioning. That’s not the case with Clark, who notes that she’s “a Gemini, a twin spirit.” As such, her male persona, Stephen, still lives inside her, she said.

“Stephen had his way for 68 years, and now he’s in the background,” she said. “Now Stefanie is dominant, driving this unicorn. But one of the other runway models one time said, ‘Stefanie, don’t ever forget Stephen. As good as you think you are, he carried you for 68 years! So now both Stephen and Stefanie live inside me.’”



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IML 45 takes over Memorial Day weekend

Right: Welcome your new International Mr. Leather, Marcus Barela (Mr. Eagle LA), flanked by first runner-up Chris Gonzalez (Mr. GNI Leather, left) and second runner-up Matthew Moody (Mr. Phoenix Leather, right). The sweaty weekend culminated in the final contest, May 28 at the Congress Theatre. The throngs then flocked to House of Blues Chicago for the Victory Party (below). Photos by Joseph Stevens



Howard Brown Health's upcoming Lake View clinic to expand healthcare access

BY CARRIE MAXWELL

Howard Brown Health (Howard Brown) is preparing to open a new, larger and more holistic facility at 3501 N. Halsted St., two blocks south of Center on Halsted in Lake View, for this coming Fall.

Organization officials hope that the new facility—located on the former site of Little Jim's tavern—will both reduce wait times for Howard Brown clientele and allow them to more easily access services.

"The current Melrose clinic, which lacks capacity for new patients, already serves as an epicenter of care in the heart of one of the nation's oldest LGBTQ+ neighborhoods," said Vice President of External Relations Katie Metos. "Maintaining the location for the new Halsted clinic within this community is consistent with Howard Brown's practice of placing clinics and outreach efforts within communities affected by social determinants of health, such as disproportionately high rates of HIV, and ensures patients feel safe accessing and receiving care."

Community and political leaders broke ground in March 2022 and construction has been ongoing since that time. This new facility has been five years in the making with funding coming from capital reserves, state and federal grants, lending and philanthropy from individual, corporate and foundation donors.

Howard Brown was founded in 1974 and serves over 35,000 patients annually at its 10 clinics in locations on the North, South and West Sides of Chicago. The new 71,000 square-foot, five-story facility will double patient capacity from the 7,500 patients it serves at the current Melrose clinic location.

The first floor of the new facility will have a lobby as well as a Walgreens retail store and culturally-competent pharmacy. Only the second floor will be utilized for the medical clinic initially, and the fourth floor for dental care. Later on, the medical clinic will be located on the second and third floors. The fifth floor will be an all-purpose training facility.

Metos added, "The new Halsted clinic will



New Halsted Howard Brown Health facility corner view.
 Rendering by Eckenhoff Saunders Architects

maintain its close connection to the surrounding community, staying true to the agency's mission of providing high-quality, affirming healthcare to everyone who seeks it. Especially in today's anti-LGBTQ climate, this building affirms that we deserve to be seen, we deserve to be healthy and we deserve to be here."

An especially important facet of the new clinic will be the dental services, officials said. Howard Brown Director of Construction, Design and Real Estate Frankie Reynolds noted that the agency has "a population of patients who travel to 63rd Street for appointments. We have recently been providing dental on the North side through the dental van—there is pent up demand for competent, accessible dental care."

Howard Brown Chief Medical Director Dr. Patrick Gibbons added, "Although primary care providers can help a little bit with dental concerns, for the most part we do not have the expertise to handle cavities and beyond Having dental in this facility means that we can offer our patients

access to providers able to see anyone regardless of their ability to pay."

Howard Brown Chief Dental Officer Dr. Robin Gay said, "We have a North Side contingent of patients, especially those who are low-income or on Medicaid, that are in need of affordable dental services, who will now have access."

The new location will offer more exam rooms, and improve access to gynecological- and anal-health services, according to Reynolds. Behavioral health and social services will be better supported at the new location as well, Reynolds added, noting that the more comprehensive scope of services will help clients stay on a continuum of care.

"With greater access, we promote greater adherence to important lifesaving and life-changing medications," Reynolds said.

Metos told Windy City Times that patients currently have to wait for four months for a return appointment at the Melrose clinic, while for new patients that wait is about six months. Organiza-

tion officials anticipate the new facility will cut down on that wait time, with the expanded medical staff Howard Brown will be hiring.

Once the new facility is opened, there will be about 100 staff to serve patients' needs with a target of 170 staff members over time. Patient capacity will eventually reach 23,000 people and 65,000 patient encounters a year. The building was designed by the firm Eckenhoff Saunders, while construction was led by McHugh Construction.

"Providing quality health care and social services for the LGBTQ+ population in Chicago is more important now than ever," said Eckenhoff, Saunders Architects Senior Associate Mark Parrucci. "We are delighted to be partnering with HBH on its new Northalsted facility that will increase access to these necessary services. As a member of the LGBTQ+ community, I have seen firsthand the much-needed benefits HBH provides throughout the city. This new project represents HBH's continued commitment to its cause, and I am

proud to be a part of this endeavor."

"McHugh Construction was absolutely honored to have earned Howard Brown's confidence and trust to build this project that encompasses the mission of Howard Brown," added McHugh Construction President Michael Meagher. "Our relationship began with their owner representative, Inland Real Estate Group who led a selection process to select a firm that would deliver the best value."

The new Halsted clinic overall means means "simplified" healthcare, said HBH Chief Behavioral Health Officer Belinda Stiles. "Knowing that you can schedule to see your PCP, pick up your prescription, get labs done and check in with your behavioral health provider all in one visit to the clinic makes managing your health feel doable. This clinic will help our patients feel like their needs are truly being heard by their health care team."

Reynolds added, "We have been constrained by our sites' capacity to serve. This new Halsted facility allows us to increase access to care for people who have historically been left behind by healthcare systems. Whether that is PrEP, HRT or an mpox lesion—Howard Brown wants to serve patients with gender-affirming, sex positive and accessible care."

Additionally, Howard Brown is looking at building a clinic on Chicago's South Side to meet the growing health and wellness needs of residents there. Howard Brown began providing services on the South Side in 2017, and has four clinics and a mobile health program operating in the Canaryville, Englewood and Hyde Park locations that serve more than 15,000 patients across 25,000 square feet.

See howardbrown.org/.

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