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froSkate

Safe space for BIPOC queer skaters

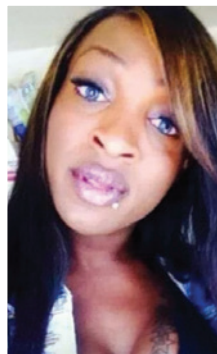
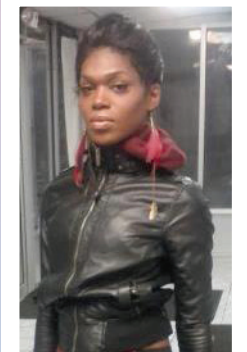
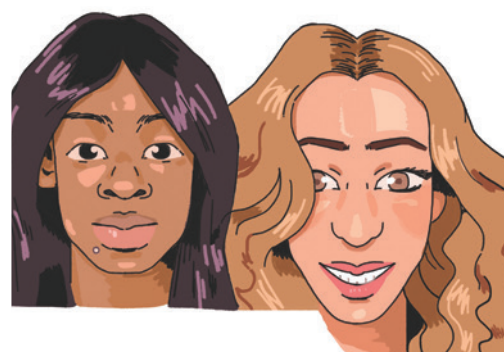
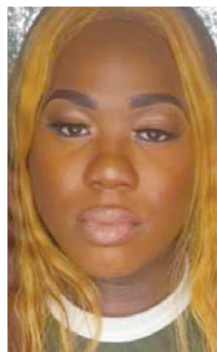
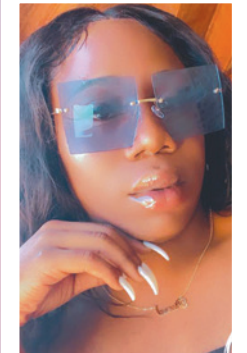
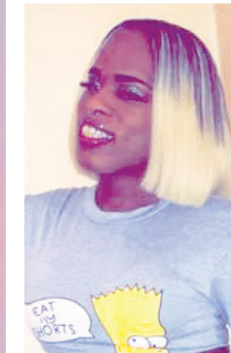
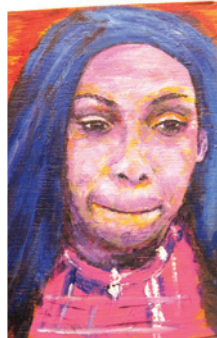
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LONGTIME ADVOCATE GREGG GONSALVES

talks activist roots, Larry Kramer and COVID

BY ANDREW DAVIS

When it comes to dealing with HIV/AIDS, few people have been on the front lines—in the areas of activism, research and instruction—like Gregg Gonsalves.

Gonsalves, a MacArthur fellow, is an expert in policy modeling on infectious disease and substance use, as well as the intersection of public policy and health equity. His research focuses on the use of quantitative models for improving the response to epidemic diseases. For more than 30 years, he worked on HIV/AIDS and other global health issues with several organizations, including the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP), the Treatment Action Group, and the AIDS and Rights Alliance for Southern Africa.

He is currently an associate professor at Yale School of Public Health and an associate professor at Yale Law School.

Windy City Times: You have been involved in activism for quite some time. What propelled you to go in that direction?

GG: Gonsalves: I graduated high school in 1981—when the first case of HIV/AIDS/GRID appeared in gay men. My coming out in young adulthood was at the dawn of this epidemic.

In the first few years of that decade, I was in college but then I dropped out. Then, when hanging out in Boston, I met somebody. We started dating and then one night, he came over and was drunk—and he said, “We gotta break up.” After a half-hour or so, he said, “I’m HIV-positive.” I said, “You know what? We’ll get through this together.” But this was before the internet; information was from the newspaper or the library, which I couldn’t go into because I wasn’t a student anymore—so the first place I got information from was [activist organization] ACT UP Boston. It was also around the same time Queer Nation was exploding around the country.

It was thrilling. Yes, it was scary because AIDS was there—but, all of a sudden, I had found my people. There were people who cared about social justice, LGBT rights and AIDS. I was hooked—so much so that when my partner went to New York for law school, I stayed in Boston with ACT UP and Queer Nation.

[Eventually,] I follow and join ACT UP New York, and my whole life became consumed with activism. That’s how it started.

WCT: I’ve had some people in the HIV at 40 series talk about the day they found out about their HIV status. Could you take me back to the day you found out?

GG: It was ‘95 or so, and my cousin was dy-

ing of AIDS in New York. I was in ACT UP and was HIV-negative, or so I thought. I went to my physician, Dr. Joseph Sonnabend, to get my test results. Joe called and said, “I’m coming over.” I thought, “This can’t be good.”

We came over and said, “You’re positive.” This was right before protease inhibitors come down the line, and my cousin is deathly ill. It was my old apartment that I lived in with David Barr on Second Avenue and 12th Street, in New York. A couple friends came over and we talked, and that was it. And then I had to tell my conservative Italian-Portuguese Catholic family, and come out as an HIV-positive gay man.

Within a year, protease inhibitors were on the scene and I signed up for a clinical trial. I seroconverted at the right time.

WCT: Did finding out you were HIV-positive affect your approach to activism in any way?

GG: Not really. I was so identified with my friends, who had HIV, and was working so diligently on HIV-treatment stuff that it hadn’t occurred to me that anything was different.

WCT: I know you deal with health equity. For our readers, can you discuss the difference between equity and equality?

GG: Oh, God. [Both laugh.] Anyone who does this for a living would probably yell at me, but inequality is two doesn’t equal three; it’s a statement of facts, like “John makes less money than Sandra.” Inequity has a justice component and a value judgment; there’s something wrong with an imbalance.

WCT: So inequity would have a tie to activism?

GG: Yes.

WCT: As you know, activist giant Larry Kramer passed away last year. What do you think he meant to activism, and what did he mean to you?

GG: He was a complicated guy. I wasn’t in ACT UP from the beginning, so I didn’t know him in his foundational role. I only knew him when I joined ACT UP in New York, and then he split off to found TAG [Treatment Action Group]. Larry was very angry at us. Larry was angry at lots of people at lots of points in his life.

My colleague, Mark Harrington, and I, recommended that there should be a reorganization of how NIH does AIDS research. Larry and Martin Delaney wanted something on a larger scale, like the Manhattan Project. Mark and I wanted a leadership change with research at NIH; Larry was livid. We were still friends enough that he invited us out to his place—and he’s yelling at us across his kitchen table, saying, “I want to flush your head down a toilet.”



Gregg Gonsalves. Photo courtesy of Gonsalves

stration put into the vaccine was critically important. I did affect everyone, as you said; the disparities or inequities between who COVID kills and who gets it are not equal. But it affected enough people in power that it became a national priority.

WCT: Regarding AIDS, it seems people of color are still disproportionately affected. Why do you think that is?

GG: I [recently] wrote a piece for The Nation that deals with white supremacy and the history of race in this country. I wrote, “The fact that more people of color are dying from COVID-19 is not surprising.”

The HIV epidemic is another case in point, but you can go back in history to Jeffrey Amherst saying we should give smallpox-infected blankets to Native Americans to kill them. There’s a historian named Jim Downs who wrote a book called [Sick] from Freedom about how, at the end of the Civil War, freed slaves were stricken with smallpox—but nobody ever wrote about it because of who it was happening to. I looked at some medical records a few years ago and realized that there’s a smallpox epidemic in the Southwest that nobody talks about. We talk about Tuskegee, but we don’t talk about the gas riots in El Paso [a 1917 event sparked by a requirement that Mexican immigrants take kerosene delousing baths and get vaccinated]; that policy lasted until the ‘60s. If you’re wondering why African Americans are infected with HIV and die of diabetes and other diseases, look at healthcare and race.

WCT: Well, we’ve covered the past and present, so let’s talk about the future. On a certain level, there seems to be some apathy regarding HIV/AIDS. Where do you see AIDS activism going?

GG: Because of COVID, I’ve been thinking a lot about this. A lot of activists from the old days and the young ones now are working on COVID vaccine access as well as PrEP. If we want to deal with HIV, we have to deal with the rest of the shit we’ve been talking about, right? We need to consider the COVID and HIV epidemics as one piece of the puzzle, but there’s also police violence. The Black Lives Matter movement is a public-health movement. We have to think about climate change; mosquito patterns come up from the Gulf Coast and now we’re going to have malaria back in the United States.

The environmental movement, the fight for racial justice and more are all part of the same thing, and a huge movement is needed. Rich people are always going to get what they need. This is the moment of truth.

WCT: Is there anything you wanted to add?

GG: Any of the achievements we’ve made, we fought for. They didn’t come because someone thought we were deserving. We just have to be vigilant, and steel ourselves for the next challenge.

So he could be incredibly cruel and, in a way, he disowned some of the [people] who went to found Treatment Action Group—but, years later, he turned out to be very generous. I ended up going back to college in my 40s and ended up applying here at Yale; Larry wrote me a recommendation. The second-to-last time I saw him was at a party/reunion and I said I hadn’t the Broadway revival of The Normal Heart. And he said, “Closing night’s next week. Why don’t you come with me?” So I went to the closing night. The weird thing was that I was there 25 years after seeing it in the West End, in London. I was listening to everyone crying and I was thinking, “This was history”—and no one in that room knew it. I blew Larry a kiss and walked away. It was probably the last time I saw him, and it was a long time ago—more than a decade.

Everybody’s complicated, but he was more complicated than most.

WCT: As you know, there is no AIDS vaccine. Does that surprise you?

GG: What surprised me was that we had a COVID vaccine in under a year. I write a column for The Nation magazine, and one of my first was, “It’s 40 years later and we don’t have an AIDS vaccine. Don’t get your hopes up about a COVID vaccine.” Eight months later, we had a COVID vaccine.

It’s turned out to be a very difficult and technical project to make an AIDS vaccine—and who knows if we’ll ever have one? It’s remarkable: We spent a lot of money on it, and a lot of research has been instrumental in developing a COVID vaccine.

WCT: In a way, I wasn’t surprised about the development of a COVID vaccine. There was a whole “moral” aspect in the ‘80s to AIDS; COVID immediately affected everyone.

GG: Yeah. I think the science had progressed that made the achievement possible. I hate to say it, but I think the dollars the Trump admin-

House of Chanel

creates charitable foundation to promote community service across ballroom scene and beyond

BY MAX LUBBERS

Almost 50 years after the founding of House of Chanel, the ballroom house is creating the Chanel Cares Charitable Foundation to give back to the community.

The foundation will organize community engagement projects, including an upcoming toy drive and holiday dinner. With an official launch planned for January 2022, overall queen mother Tatyana Moaton said that Chanel Cares was born out of a continued push for service.

"When I say service, this is not just us taking the talent from the community, but truly making an intentional investment within the community," she said. "We are not an organization only existing in name."

Because of that, Moaton said House of Chanel members will be required to complete volunteer hours. Later on, she hopes that Chanel Cares can provide microgrants to community-based organizations.

This effort is rooted in the rich history and values of the house, Moaton said. Founded in 1974, the House of Chanel is one of the longest-standing ballroom houses. It also has never closed or merged with another house.

"There are not many houses around that can say that," she said. "Chanel Cares is showing that we're continuing to evolve and continuing to be that beacon of light for those marginalized and ostracized within their communities."

Moaton said the new foundation aligns with the start of House of Chanel's story. After pioneering icon RR Chanel asked to join the House of Dupree, ballroom legend Paris Dupree told him he needed to win a trophy first. Yet when Chanel



Chanel Cares held its first event on Nov. 28, coming together to cook for houseless people. Photo by Max Lubbers

came back with an award, Dupree still laughed in his face.

"This was during the height of the AIDS epidemic, and people were feeling like this is the only place that we can kind of find some solace and community," Moaton said. "Even within [the ballroom scene], people were still being ostracized, and so he started the house."

Now, she said she's proud to add Chanel Cares as the next chapter of history. Legendary overall father Derrick Barry said the foundation fits into the overall vision of the house. That's something Barry takes incredibly seriously.

He said he always looks for opportunities to take the house to the next level. But he also understands that he is one of only a few people to hold his title in the lifetime of the house, and so he wants to make past generations proud with every decision he makes.

"This is something that we've never done before and I feel like it will help us take a step into the forefront," he said. "Ballroom is going more mainstream, and as an overall father of one of the oldest ballroom houses, I want to be sure that we can stay innovative, be excited, and keep the flow going."

They can do all that while also caring for the community, he said. At its core, ballroom was built on shade. But it was also built on people who came together to make new families and care for one another after being cast out from society.

According to Moaton, the house empowers its members to be good citizens and strive for excellence in all areas of life.

"Ballroom happens for a moment maybe once or twice a month, but then life happens," she said. "We are always supposed to be good stew-

ards of our community by advocating for those issues that we are passionate about."

In particular, Chanel Cares will focus on social services and public health, Barry said. That includes promoting HIV prevention and care, as well as mental health care.

With a holistic viewpoint, Chanel Cares will advocate for resources surrounding health, like housing, food security and education.

"In this day and age, a lot of house parents are just worried about the kids competing and not worried about their mental health situations or their physical health," Barry noted. "It's important that we bring those kinds of issues forward."

This type of care isn't new for House of Chanel, Barry said—both he and Moaton are heavily involved in their children's lives. But they hope to spread this emphasis on health to the entire community. This work will not be exclusive to house members, he said. They want to involve people in the ballroom scene as a whole as well as partner with community-based organizations.

As they plan their first events and gear up for a full calendar of projects next year, Barry said they hope the announcement of Chanel Cares will make people excited to participate in community service in the long term. And with more than 10 chapters, some international, the House of Chanel will create a broad impact, Moaton said.

For its first event, Chanel Cares fed people experiencing homelessness at Breakthrough Urban Ministries on Nov. 28. As they plan further events and gear up for a full calendar of projects next year, Barry said they hope the announcement of Chanel Cares will make people excited to participate in community service in the long-term. And with more than 10 chapters, some international,

the House of Chanel will create a broad impact, Moaton said. See <https://breakthrough.org/>.

"Chanel Cares is showing that we're going to put our mouth and our minds and our hearts to work in the same places we've committed ourselves," she added. "We want to give more to ballroom than take from it."



Derrick Barry and Tatyana Moaton. Photo courtesy of Barry

Remembering Chicagoans lost to ANTI-TRANS VIOLENCE

BY MATT SIMONETTE

Transgender and gender non-conforming (TGNC) Chicagoans have not escaped the epidemic of violence that has faced so many TGNC people in the United States.

A group of Windy City Times fellows, as part of a project conducted in partnership with the Field Foundation, profiled a number of local TGNC individuals who lost their lives to such violence in the past 10 years. We have also included a report on what local authorities say they are doing to address this violence that looms

as a threat for so many in our community.

Windy City Times is aware that this list is by no means exhaustive. Much violence against TGNC goes unreported and, even when it does, there are few guarantees that authorities and media will properly identify a victim as being part of the TGNC community.

Constructing a well-rounded profile for several of these Chicagoans has been equally challenging. While some of these individuals were well-remembered members of their families and communities, others preferred—or were forced by their circumstances—to live lives that were relatively quiet. The passage of time can be equally

difficult a challenge to overcome; some may not have had social media pages memorializing them, and the friends and loved ones who remember them best may have dispersed over the years.

When Transgender Day of Remembrance is observed each year, people are all urged to say the name of the victims who have fallen to anti-TGNC violence. With this project, Windy City Times hopes to go beyond just the names and create, when possible, richer portraits of these persons whose lives were lost in this violent pandemic.

CIARA MINAJ CARTER FRAZIER

BY MAX LUBBERS

“And hold that pose for me.” That’s what Ciara Minaj Carter Frazier’s family would hear in the middle of the night, as Ciara was up late voguing, said her sister Lunetta Frazier.

“We definitely miss her, listening to that,” she said. “Dancing, voguing through the kitchen, through the house.”

Before her death in 2018, Lunetta didn’t know a world without Ciara. Her very first memory is of Ciara being born—they’re two years and seven days apart, she said.

“She would always give me a real tight hug,” she said. “To know that I won’t have that hug again, or our kids won’t....It’s hard to put into words.”

Years after Lunetta went to the hospital for Ciara’s birth, she said Ciara returned the favor. When Lunetta had her son in 2009, Ciara was one of the first people to hold him. From that point on, Ciara was a patient and fun aunt.

“These kids would go back and forth over a toy, and she would be gentle about that,” Lunetta said. “She would just start singing, ‘Let it go, let it go!’ And she’d give them some other stuff to play with.”

It hurts to know that she won’t be there to see the kids grow up, Lunetta said. But each Christmas, their dad buys a gift for the kids on behalf of Titi Ciara, Lunetta said—she is certainly not forgotten.

To Ciara, her family mattered more than anything. Lunetta said she had tattoos of the initials of her mother, dad, siblings, niece and nephews. And she was a fierce protector.

When they were kids, Lunetta said she was scared that a ghost would be outside the bathroom. Ciara’s room was across from hers, so Lunetta would throw her shoes down to her door and wait for her to come out before she walked down the hallway. In those moments, Ciara would always make her feel safe, she said.

As they grew up, it was always clear that Ciara would become Ciara, Lunetta said. At 15 years old, Ciara started working in a cafe that did outreach for LGBTQ+ teens. And after leaving home at 18, she came out when she came back to visit.

“We accepted it, because we knew her truth,” she said. “I could see how it was liberating for her.”

Her name came from her favorite singers: R&B princess Ciara, rap boss Nicki Minaj and Queen B Beyoncé Carter. She took her style seriously, too, Lunetta said. One of her signature looks was her lashes. It used to be difficult to buy long lashes outright, so she would get two or three packs and glue them together, Lunetta said.

Lunetta and her sisters now run a company called Queen Litt, selling lingerie, lashes and can-

dles. They have a fluffy, long lash named after Ciara, as well as a candle. The scent is modeled after Chanel No. 5, a nod to how Ciara walked in ballroom categories for the House of Chanel.

Ciara’s unique style also drew inspiration from Nicki Minaj, said her friend Destinii Jones. The first time they met around 2009, she had hair like Minaj: black with a bang, pink tracks in the back. Later on, Frazier would use Minaj for inspiration in some of her ballroom looks.

“No matter what, Ciara was herself and you couldn’t help but respect that,” Jones said. “I liked her drive.”

But Jones said that a lot of people didn’t understand Ciara, and she wishes that people wouldn’t prejudice her. That’s something that Ciara faced both in life and after her death, she said.

“I just wish they really would have seen her for her spirit and her character versus how she looked,” she said. “I’m not saying that my friend was ugly, because she was beautiful. But a lot of people don’t understand the life of what it’s like to be a Black transgender woman, and they judge us before they meet us.”

If someone knew Ciara, they would love her, Jones said. Whenever the Mariah Carey album *Memoirs of an Imperfect Angel* plays, Jones thinks about Ciara. That was Ciara’s soundtrack, Jones said, along with Nicki Minaj. And to Jones, Ciara was the real angel.

“She was just always so protective of me,” she said. “I would have a pocket full of money and Ciara would have a pocket full of money but she would make sure I wouldn’t have to spend anything. She really showed me love.”

That’s just what Ciara was like, Jones said. Her friendships meant much to her, and there wasn’t anything she wouldn’t do for them. It’s this girl that Jones chooses to remember.

“That was someone who was proud of me and supported me,” Jones said. “People and police might think of her as just another dead transgender (woman) but we have relationships with people. We have bonds. Whoever took her life, I want them to know what they took from us.”

Ciara was a friend. She was a sister, a daughter and an aunt. She used to sing and laugh, dance and vogue—over the tracks of R&B, through the houses of family and friends and across the ballroom scenes of Chicago and Minnesota. In the memories of her friends and family, that’s how she will stay: smiling, sweet and confident, and always, always, holding that pose.

Ciara Minaj Carter Frazier.
Photo courtesy of Destinii Jones





Tiara Richmond/Keke Collier, 2015.
Photo from Facebook

TIARA RICHMOND/ KEKE COLLIER

BY CRIS VILLALONGA-VIVONI

Tiara Richmond, also known as Keke Collier, was killed on Feb. 21, 2017, after being shot while sitting in a car with a man in Englewood. She was only 24 years old and was the second Black transgender woman killed in Chicago over six months.

Richmond grew up on the South Side of Chicago and attended Dyett High School. From 2013-2015, she studied at the BIR Training Center to be a medical assistant and she was looking for a job just before her death.

Richmond's relationship with her family is unclear; however, it seems that she had a lot of love for them. According to LaSaia Wade, CEO of Brave Space Alliance and who was in contact with them following the murder, they accepted her when she came out as trans.

She was incredibly close to her mother, Marilyn Maria Wilson, who passed away in 2015. Richmond was grief-stricken and would often turn to her social media, writing long paragraphs sharing her feelings and crying for her mother.

Richmond had also just become a new aunt to three baby nieces.

She was a popular girl, with over 1,200 Facebook friends, several of whom were active commenters on Richmond's posts. From responding to rants to hyping her up, Richmond's friends evidently loved and cared for her.

Her Facebook photos, which mainly consist of mirror selfies, are a testimony to Richmond's confidence. She was strong-willed, emotional, fun and an avid personality quiz-taker.

Richmond was also artistic, and she often posted red, glitter collages of her friends, partners and family. She would post the collages with numerous red hearts and the person's name in cursive. She used her creativity to express her love for those closest to her.

"She loved to dance all the time," Retta Collins, a decade-long friend of Richmond, told the Chicago Tribune. "She was always the life of the party. Even when we got into fights, she didn't want to fight."

Richmond's family and friends were not available to comment. This information comes from her memorial Facebook page and other articles written on her. Persons who would like to share further details of Tiara's story should contact cvillalonga.vivoni@gmail.com.

T.T. SAFFORE

BY CRIS VILLALONGA-VIVONI

Jalayah Armstrong can still remember how brightly T.T. Saffore smiled.

"Silly T.T.," Armstrong called her.

Saffore's "magic"—that jokester smile—would bring Armstrong solace regardless of what was going on around them. Saffore's loud, sweet, echoing laugh had the same effect.

"No matter what she was going through, she had always been a person that smiled," Armstrong said. "She'd be going through hell, but she still had a smile."

In 2016, Armstrong stood with 30 other West Garfield Park community members looking at the glowing candles on the asphalt arranged to spell out, "R.I.P. T.T."

Saffore, 28, was killed on Sept. 11, 2016. Her body was found along railroad tracks, with her throat cut. She was one of two Black trans women murdered in Chicago within six months and the 20th known transgender person to be murdered in the country that year.

Saffore grew up in West Garfield Park with her siblings and father. Her older brother, Jermaine, told Windy City Times in 2016 that Saffore was the "baby of the family." Their father passed away sometime before the murder. The family was not available to comment for this story.

Armstrong described Saffore as so "full of life" and a "beautiful person." She was always complimenting people and was ready to help anyone.

Saffore was known for her sharp wit; it wasn't uncommon to hear people laughing in her presence. She would crack jokes with everyone even if the situation she was in was terrifying. Armstrong recalled how Saffore's smile and laughter helped her through their time incarcerated together. Somehow, Saffore made things feel easier.

"I was crying, didn't know what to do. Thought it was the end of the world," Armstrong said in an interview with WBEZ Chicago in 2016. "She was there to just keep me going through my days with jokes. Even though she didn't have much, she gave. She sent me snacks, little cookies and cakes. It's just the small things that count. She had a heart."

Saffore loved "girly things," Armstrong added. Namely, she loved to change up her hairstyle, often dyeing her hair different colors. She could also never leave home with her shimmery, glitter lip gloss.

"I will always remember her as a happy person," Armstrong told Windy City Times in 2016. "I will always remember her smile."

People who would like to share their stories about Dejanay can contact cvillalonga.vivoni@gmail.com. WBEZ's report is at <https://bit.ly/3172NBA>.



Lilly Wachowski portrait of T.T. Saffore.
Photo by Andrew Davis

TIFFANY GOODEN

BY MAX LUBBERS

When Tiffany Gooden was killed in August 2012, she was only 19 years old. Almost a decade later, her murder remains unsolved—but there's more to her than the details of her death, according to her friends and family, who remember her as being both smart and courageous.

Gooden is well-loved by her mother, who spoke with Windy City Times in 2012, asking to be identified as "Mary." At that time, she told WCT that Gooden graduated at the top of her class in a three-month educational program.

"I was so proud," Mary said. "But what with peer pressure and neighborhood pressure, the streets were calling."

Eisha Love, Gooden's friend, said that Gooden stayed to herself on "the stroll," where trans women on the West Side of Chicago gathered. But Love also said that Gooden's personality stood out.

"Despite what people thought of her, and the experiences and lifestyle she had to live, she still carried on stuff in a way where it was like: 'I'm me,'" she said. "(She faced) the fact that others may look and judge, but she still held her head high."

Love also said that Gooden was brave, and would stand up for girls who were in danger.

"We was always out, having fun, trying to hype each other up just to keep going for the night, because we knew going out was really dangerous," Love recalled. "She had a fun, courageous personality."

Love and Gooden had each other's backs. They typically spent time together after nights of working. One night, a group of men tried to attack them, and Love hit one of the attackers with her car as she fled. When Love went to the police, she was arrested with charges of aggravated battery, and later, first-degree attempted murder.

After that, Love was cut off from Gooden. Later that year, Gooden was found dead. Four months before Gooden's murder, another trans woman from the West Side, Paige Clay, was killed.

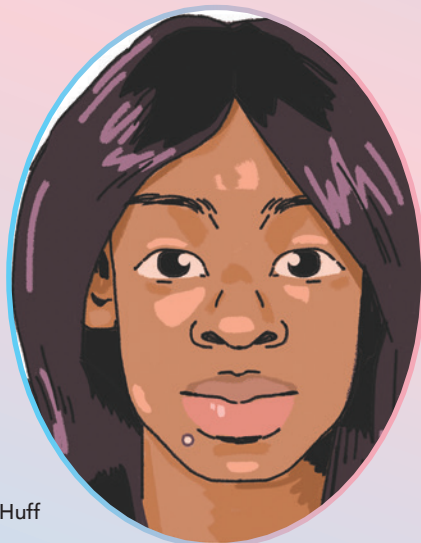
Mary told WCT that, at that point, Gooden was frightened, and she began to only go out on the stroll when the sun began to rise in the morning.

Gooden also told her aunt of plans to return to school. She wanted to help out and support her family, who were coping with the death of her grandmother.

Mary said she and Gooden spent time together on a Saturday morning, just like they usually did. But just after midnight that Sunday, Gooden suddenly left the house. Realizing something was amiss, Mary began searching for her and filed a missing person's report — on August 14, she heard the news of her murder.

"I just remember (her) smile," she said. "After that, I never seen my child again."

Windy City Times made many attempts to contact friends and family members of Tiffany Gooden, but understands we could not reach everyone. Those who can speak to her memory—or know of someone else who can—can email by.max.lubbers@gmail.com.



Tiffany Gooden.
Illustration by Amber Huff



Tyianna Alexander.
Photo from Facebook

TYIANNA ALEXANDER

BY MATT SIMONETTE

Chicagoan Tyianna Alexander, also known as Davarea Alexander, was the first trans woman to die by murder in the city in 2021. She was 28.

Alexander was shot to death the morning of Jan. 6 at the 800 block of West 57th Street, according to reports. A man who was with Alexander, Brandon Gowdy, 31, was also shot in the incident and taken to University of Chicago Medical Center where he later died.

Alexander was misgendered in early reports. Her death has remained unsolved as of publication. A few months before her death, Alexander posted on social media that her car had been shot at several times.

In a remembrance of Alexander published in March by AIDS Foundation of Chicago (AFC), Alexander, who lived with her mother, was remembered as "the life of the party." She was an aficionado of Chicago House music and loved to dance, and sometimes used the moniker Barbie the Dance Diva. That love of dance was seemingly infectious throughout her family; on December 21, Alexander live-streamed her young niece's Tik Tok-themed birthday party, roaming through the party with her phone as girls joyously danced in celebration.

"Her energy was intoxicating," Alexander's friend, Beverly Ross, said in the AFC remembrance. "I think that's what's going to be missed most. She was a sweetheart. She loved everybody, and everybody loved her."

A graduate of Harper High School, Alexander also worked in various retail and restaurant positions.

A funeral for her took place Jan. 14 and 15, while a balloon release and a remembrance was also held Jan. 8, just two days after her death.

The notice for that latter, impromptu gathering remembered her as, indeed, "the life of the party": "Please come out to help us celebrate the life of Barbie the Dance Diva, who loved, cared and laughed with everyone."

AFC's article about Alexander is at <https://tinyurl.com/33c29x5d>. To share any anecdotes or memories of Alexander, contact matt@windycitytimes.com.

SELENA REYES-HERNANDEZ



Selena Reyes-Hernandez.
Illustration by Amber Huff

BY HENRY ROACH

Selena Reyes-Hernandez, 37, lived on the Southwest Side of Chicago in the Marquette Park neighborhood. She was an artist and used the stage name Selene Maldonado.

In the early hours of May 31, 2020, an 18-year-old man shot Reyes-Hernandez to death in her home when he learned she was transgender. When she said she was transgender, he left, only to return an hour later with a handgun, detectives reported.

Reyes-Hernandez had spent the day before with three friends, attending a birthday party before having drinks at a friend's home, prosecutors said. Around 5 a.m. on May 31, Reyes-Hernandez dropped a friend off at home, about 25 minutes before she met her killer.

"May our memory of Selena Reyes-Hernandez show your gorgeous wide smile rather than the cruel smirk of your killer," one Twitter user shared in June 2020. "She was an artist. Her stage name was Selene Maldonado. Fly, Selena, Fly #ProtectTransWomen."

The person tweeting did not know Reyes-Hernandez personally, but was in contact with some of Reyes-Hernandez's friends, she told Windy City Times. "Selena should still be here today," said Tori Cooper, Human Rights Campaign director of community engagement for the Transgender Justice Initiative, in a statement following Reyes-Hernandez's death. "Our continued failure to support and empower transgender, non-binary and gender non-conforming people is as inhumane as it is unacceptable. We need to take action now as a community and as a country that takes us towards racial justice and trans liberation."

According to the Transgender Law Center, Reyes-Hernandez's family didn't want to recognize or acknowledge their trans daughter. They buried her in Mexico under her deadname. The Chicago medical examiner, police and media also deadnamed and misgendered Reyes-Hernandez in their initial reports.

Pittsburgh Lesbian Correspondents, Pittsburgh's oldest LGBTQ+ blog, posted a remembrance of Reyes-Hernandez in June 2020.

"Rest in power, Selena," the posting said. "There is progress towards justice, but we cannot change the facts of your burial. Posts like this one will say your name so your memory will live on. You deserved a long life far from this violence. I hope we learn more about your lived life. You are not erased."

Windy City Times attempted to reach out to sources who knew Reyes-Hernandez personally, but they declined to comment or did not reply by the time of publication. Those who knew Selena Reyes-Hernandez and would like to speak about their memories of her should contact s3d5w4@u.northwestern.edu.

TRANS OMNIBUS PROJECT

Advocates: Black and Latinx trans women are more vulnerable to violence; holistic approach needed

BY KAYLEIGH PADAR

At least 50 trans or gender-nonconforming (TGNC) people have been murdered in the United States in 2021, making it the deadliest year on record for that demographic, according to the Human Rights Campaign.

Most of the people killed this year and in past years were Black and Latinx transgender women.

Of the 10 murders of Black trans women that have taken place over the years in Chicago that Windy City Times profiled, only two cases—the murders of Dejanay Stanton and Selena Reyes-Hernandez—involved the arrest of suspected offenders. The other eight cases remain open and unsolved.

Channyn Lynn Parker, the director of strategic partnerships at Howard Brown, said the violence Black trans women experience is just one symptom of the systemic injustice BIPOC TGNC people

face.

Research from the National LGBTQ Task Force showed Black transgender people have an extremely high unemployment rate, at 26%, four times the rate of the general population. They're more than five times more likely to experience homelessness than the general population and eight times more likely to live in extreme poverty, with a household lower than \$10,000, the research showed.

Parker explained these disparities in living conditions make BIPOC TGNC people more vulnerable to violence.

"We have a tendency to think very myopically about the murders of trans women as violence perpetrated against them through brute physical force," said Parker, who formerly worked as an advocate for LGBTQ+ people impacted by crime. "But there are much larger issues at hand. Those are the systemic injustices you see folks facing,

Center on Halsted, which provides LGBTQ+ sensitivity training for CPD officers.
Photo by Andrew Davis



like unemployment, a lack of housing, a lack of affirming resources."

Caitlin Tupper, the director of the Anti-Violence Project at Center on Halsted, works to help connect victims of crime and their families to resources, whether that involves law enforcement or linkage to health care.

Tupper explained "there are so many different barriers" for BIPOC LGBTQ+ people and their families who try to access resources after experiencing violence.

On top of the trauma people face after experiencing a crime or losing a loved one, people often fear discrimination when dealing with law enforcement or accessing other supportive resources, Tupper said.

This fraught relationship with law enforcement can make crimes against TGNC people more difficult to solve because "a lot of solving homicides

has to do with community cooperation," CPD Officer and LGBTQ+ liaison Megan Woods explained.

To improve the relationship between the Chicago Police Department and the LGBTQ+ community, six LGBTQ+ liaison positions were created in June.

"There are wounds caused by historical treatment from the police onto the community, and we're here to—I mean, we can't go back in time—but we can make sure moving forward we build bridges and close those service gaps," CPD Officer and LGBTQ+ liaison Phoebe Flores said.

These liaisons work to connect members of the LGBTQ+ community to law enforcement and other resources. A large part of the liaisons' work involves making themselves visible to LGBTQ+ people.

"The biggest thing is just to be seen in the community and to be recognized so they see that

TIARA BANKS

BY HENRY ROACH

On April 21, 2021, transgender woman Tiara Banks was killed in her car in the West Pullman neighborhood of Chicago. According to local news reports, Banks, 24, was sitting alone in her Ford Fusion when a person approached and shot her multiple times.

"Losing yet another member of our community to senseless acts of violence against transgender people, particularly Black transgender women, is both painful and incredibly frustrating," said Tori Cooper, Human Rights Campaign director of community engagement for the Transgender Justice Initiative, in a statement the week after the incident.

"At just 24 years old, Tiara had her whole entire life ahead of her and, instead, we are remembering her because of the ongoing fatal violence against transgender people. We must continue to urge everyone to call an end to the alarming rate of fatal trans violence," Cooper said.

Beverly Ross, a Chicago LGBTQ+ health advocate, said that Banks lost her mother, father and a sibling, Ross said, "but she still had family support" for much of her life. Banks is survived by a transgender sister who goes by the name Peaches, Ross said, noting that Banks and Peaches were "similar" to one another.

"At this time, I just think we have to figure out: How do we navigate these spaces and help girls be more safe in these practices and this work that we involve ourselves in?" Ross said.

Howard Brown Health also acknowledged the loss of Banks in a Facebook post the week following her death.

"We are feeling the effects of anti-trans hate in the loss of yet another member of the transgender community here in Chicago," Howard Brown officials wrote. "We must continue to fight against systemic transphobia and racism that is stealing the lives of our transgender siblings."

A visitation was hosted for Banks the evening of May 2, 2021 at Higgins Family Funeral Home, according to the funeral home's website. A wake and celebration of life followed the next day at Resurrection House Baptist Church in Dolton.

At this time, not much else is known about Banks' personal life. Those who knew Tiara Banks and would like to speak about their memories of her should email s3d5w4@u.northwestern.edu.



Tiara Banks.
Photo courtesy of Human Rights Campaign

they have representation," Woods said. "And you can see there's a huge difference in the way they speak with me or other liaison liaisons than just a regular beat cop on the street because it's more of a comfortable relationship."

Liaisons help victims of crimes or their families navigate the criminal justice system by checking in with them, offering updates on ongoing investigations and connecting them to outside resources, like LGBTQ+ affirming healthcare and therapy.

"The whole idea is that we don't want the trans community to feel like they don't have access to everything that everyone else in the city has access to when it comes to anything that the police do," Woods said.

LGBTQ+ people can also choose to file police reports or share information about an ongoing investigation with the liaisons if they feel uncomfortable going to another member of CPD. In part, this is to help increase community cooperation so police can more effectively solve investigations.

"We're just here as another avenue of communication in a way to disseminate such information that allows the LGBTQ family to feel more comfortable," Flores said.

Liaisons also partner with various LGBTQ+ organizations like Center on Halsted to share additional resources with people who come to CPD and to make the criminal justice process more accessible to those who seek community resources first.

Tupper said this partnership has been particularly helpful because speaking with liaisons that are part of the LGBTQ+ community "alleviates some fear" for those who are hesitant to go to the police.

Center on Halsted also provides LGBTQ+ sensitivity training for CPD officers. Earlier this year, CPD adjusted its policies so that officers are re-



CPD LGBTQ+ liaisons.
Photo by Michael Milstein

quired to address TGNC people by their names and pronouns and prohibited from stopping someone solely due to their gender identity, among other things.

CPD largely investigates the murders of TGNC people the same way it investigates other murders, unless they're specifically labeled a hate crime due to the way Illinois laws are written, CPD Deputy Director of Community Policing Michael Milstein said.

Parker said she thinks the police should approach murder investigations in a way that acknowledges that discrimination against TGNC people plays a part in any violence done to them.

"In a perfect world, our investigations are handled with more equity," Parker said. "And the police force, as I see it, when it comes to investigations, the government has a very one size fits all approach to things, and with all of the investigations that they have, well, people are going to get lost in the shuffle."

The "one-size-fits-all" approach Parker described also makes it difficult to record how many TGNC people are affected by crime because crime reports label everyone as male or female based on how they identify, without additional information about their gender identity.

Milstein said CPD takes every homicide seriously and investigates each case "to the best of our ability."

"There are always going to be barriers at some points just based on the individual and their background," Milstein said. "A challenge, to be frank, is that right now we have seven hundred homicides this year so far, so it's hard to keep up with every single one."

Parker said she's noticed an increased "pressure" on law enforcement and other systems to address violence against BIPOC TGNC people in recent years. Though she said more representation in the police force is helpful in achieving justice for TGNC victims, more needs to be done

to improve the resources available for people while they're alive.

"We have the LGBTQ flag on the doors and we can say trans-affirming space all day long," Parker said. "But if these spaces aren't actually consulting with community members to determine what trans-affirming actually means, then they're just spaces projecting onto the community their own idea of trans-affirming."

Tupper agreed that addressing violence against TGNC people involves reforming society as a whole. This includes creating more options for victims of crime that are separate from the criminal justice system but also addressing the dominant culture's perception of TGNC people, she said.

"We need to create more equitable opportunities for folks to be able to access care and housing and employment," Tupper said. "All of that is really important to prevent violence from occurring as well and just continuing to reduce stigma and transphobic rhetoric. These things are creating this environment where we're not valuing trans folks and it's actively harming them." As a part of this work, Center on Halsted tries to "combat erasure" of violence against TGNC people by honoring the names of those murdered and creating spaces to "combat isolation and show folks they're not alone in their experience," Tupper said.

"We can name the violence that's happening and how horrific it is and how we need to continue to do more work to protect the community," Tupper said. "And we also want to affirm and celebrate folks while they're here too. We want to highlight trans brilliance and trans creativity and trans wellness."

"Every year on Trans Day of Remembrance, we read off the names of people who've died," Parker said. "I look forward to a day where we don't have to read off names anymore."

DEJANAY STANTON

Dejanay Stanton, 2017.
Photo from Facebook

BY CRIS VILLALONGA-VIVONI

Although Darius Stanton had not seen his sister, Dejanay, in 12 years, he can clearly remember how Dejanay's laugh would fill up a room. It would echo and bounce off the walls. He remembers how infectious her humor was, especially whenever they watched any of Tyler Perry's *Madea* movies.

Darius Stanton's funniest memory with his younger sister was when they attempted to play a baseball game with a basketball with some friends from their neighborhood in Englewood.

Dejanay was up to bat. But she unfortunately was so into the game and wanted to "swing [the bat] so bad" that she accidentally whacked herself in the follow-through.

"Just wishing I could speak with you," Darius wrote on a recent post on Dejanay's Facebook memorial profile.

Dejanay was murdered on Aug. 30, 2018. She was found with a gunshot wound to the head in an alley by people who earlier had heard the shots. Her death was ruled a homicide.

According to the Human Rights Campaign, Dejanay was the 18th transgender person murdered in 2018 in the United States.

When news of her death broke, social media erupted as friends and family shared memories and expressed their grief. Local LGBTQ+ organizations also offered their condolences.

"She was so sweet," wrote LaSaia Wade, CEO of Brave Space Alliance, on a Facebook post about Dejanay. "Every time you saw her, she had a smile on her face. She was just trying to live her best life as a young girl."

Dejanay was a Chicago native, born and raised in Englewood with her mother, two sisters and two brothers. She came out to her family as trans in 2008 after she had run away from home, Darius said. After a lot of questions and a deep conversation, their family accepted her.

He described his sister as honest—brutally so.

Growing up, Dejanay would often snitch on Darius whenever he was up to no good. He chuckled to himself as he described how one time she caught him sneaking back into the house. He had gone out to hang out with friends and, to his surprise, Dejanay and their mom were patiently waiting for him at the kitchen table. They then proceeded to "grill" him on his whereabouts.

"I don't know where she got [her tattletale habits] from," Darius said.

Regardless of her snitching, Darius said he, Dejanay and his other siblings were very close and loved passing the time with each other.

Dejanay was incredibly fashionable, according to Darius and always dressed up regardless of her where she was going. Donning athleisure, a long weave, a large purse, and colorful Jordans, she loved to show off her body and often shared full-body photos on her Facebook.

"Fashion is what she made it," he said, adding that she always "looked nice."

Dejanay was also unbelievably kind.

"She was just really willing to help people [in the neighborhood] out," Darius said. "That's where we come from, and we need to extend a hand to others—that's what she was doing."

When Darius moved away from Chicago, Dejanay cared for their mother, who was frequently ill.

She was an active trans advocate and Darius believes that if she were still here, she would be fiercely fighting for her and her trans sibling's rights.

Dejanay's memory and "pure spirit" continue to live on through the people she had touched. Her memorial Facebook profile continues to be a digital platform on which family and friends can share in their grief.

On Oct. 28, Dejanay's birthday, her profile flooded with messages and photos as people shared their love for who she was and grieved for what she could've been.

"Sis was so pretty and sweet as pie," one person wrote. "Sweet voice always smiling. Keep resting and watching over us is I miss u so much."

Her mother, Valerie Griffin, posts about Dejanay on Facebook almost every day.

"Not a day goes past to my stomach and heart doesn't ache because you are not here with us in physical form," she wrote on one of the multiple posts dedicated to her. "But I do give the Lord thanks and praise for giving me the 24 yrs. of enjoying your presence. Happy birthday my diva. Mommy loves you."

Her posts are just glimpses into the depth of her grief, a digital chronology of her pain.

A few days before Dejanay's birthday, Griffin wrote, "1,095 days that you have been gone, Dada. Missing you is very HARD."

Outside of cyberspace, Dejanay's family and friends gathered for an outdoor vigil on the third anniversary of her death. They had created a massive banner in her honor. Decorated with her selfies, the trans flag colors and white doves, the attendees took photos with it as if attempting to get one last picture with Dejanay.

On her Facebook, one person wrote, "3 yrs later, we still say your name Dejanay Lanorra R.I.P."

People who would like to share your stories about Dejanay should email cvillalonga.vivoni@gmail.com.



COURTNEY ESHAY KEY



Courtney Eshay Key.
Photo from Facebook

BY HENRY ROACH

Courtney Eshay Key, 25, was a loyal and outspoken friend. She loved to make jokes, wear colorful wigs and invite friends to cook for her. In late 2020, she confided to a friend at a party that she was ready to set new goals for her life.

Then, on Christmas 2020, Key was shot and killed in the street around the corner from her mother's house, where she had spent the holiday, according to the Chicago Tribune. Her death was ruled a homicide, but police identified no suspects. Key's friends and family believe the murder may have been a hate crime.

"Nobody ever expected it to happen," Nathaniel Porter, Key's best friend, said. "It was devastating."

Porter said Key loved to spend most of her time with family and friends. She would visit her nieces, nephews and cousins at her mother's house, which was close to where Key lived. Key's family supported her and accepted she was trans, according to a Chicago Sun Times interview with Brave Space Alliance Director LaSaia Wade.

Key also spent a lot of time with her "Kors Family" on the South Side, a group of closely-knit LGBTQ+ friends who called each other family. The Kors family was a "foundation" for Key, Porter said.

"She was the Chicago mother for the Kors Family for a while," Porter said. She was always welcoming and comforting to other group members.

Key was also a giver and extremely loyal, Porter added. Porter recalled Key letting him stay at her place when he was struggling with employment and other issues. Key's apartment was in a convenient location for Porter to travel downtown for interviews.

She was high-energy, bright and spirited. "Any time you came around her, she would just want to laugh and have fun or put a smile on your face," Porter said.

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PAIGE CLAY

BY MAX LUBBERS

Paige Clay could turn anything into a runaway.

One time, she strutted up and down the middle of a street, feet sashaying on the yellow lines and cars driving past her in both directions. The wind blew her around like she was a supermodel—and she looked like one, too, according to her friend Zy'Aire Kyng.

"She was a very upbeat person," he said. "To know her definitely was to love her. She pretty much got along with everybody. I called her short and feisty—she wasn't really one you could push over. She had a big personality."

Even if Clay was in a room full of six-foot-tall people, you couldn't miss her, Kyng said. And often she would be surrounded by friends with her infectious joy drawing in people.

When Clay was murdered in 2012, Kyng organized an event calling for justice at TaskForce Prevention & Community Services, an agency serving LGBTQ+ youth on Chicago's West Side. The room was packed, he said. It was clear how many people loved and missed her.

One of the people who misses her every day is her sister, Toya Cole.

"We was like Bonnie and Clyde. Our bond was unbreakable," she said. "No matter how many years we was apart from each other, we could just meet up and get right back on point with our relationship."

Cole said they had a rough childhood, becoming wards of the state and moving from foster home to foster home. But through it all, she remembers how Clay would always be willing to spend time with her, whether they had tea parties or played with Barbies.

As they got a little older, they were adopted by Cole's aunt, who wasn't accepting of the LGBTQ+ community, Cole said. As Clay began figuring herself out, she started clashing with Cole's aunt, she said.

When Clay was about 11, Cole's aunt admitted her into Hartgrove Behavioral Health System, Cole said. After that, Clay ran away multiple times, finally leaving for good around the time she was 16.

Cole said that she is also a part of the LGBTQ+ community, so she and Clay connected over that.

"I explained to her, what don't break us will only make us stronger," she said. "They do not define who you are. Love yourself. 'I love you, I accept you.' That's all that matters."

But once Clay ran away, she lost contact with her, only seeing her occasionally. The last time Cole saw her was the Thanksgiving before she was killed.

"We understood each other," Cole said. "Our last Thanksgiving with each other was the best thanksgiving. We sat around the table, cracked jokes, brought up old memories...And in a blink of the eye, all that was gone."

They exchanged numbers after that night, planning to celebrate their birthdays together. But the following April, Clay was murdered. She was 23 years old.

It would take months for Cole to be informed of Clay's death. It was only by coincidence that

Continued from page 12

Beverly Ross, a lifelong friend, emphasized Key's sense of humor: "She loved, loved to joke."

Ross knew Key from childhood, since Ross's aunt lived in a neighborhood in the Woodlawn area near Key. "As a child I used to come over and visit my aunt. And Courtney, 'Eshay,' was basically their baby of the Black neighborhood," Ross said.

Those around Key knew she identified as a queer person, Ross said, adding that Key was navigating life as "a young person that was very open about who they are at a young age."

Ross, who was older than Key, said she was honored and happy to be around at the time Key was growing up.

"Courtney was just another teen adult growing up in the city of Chicago, trying to navigate life and what that looks like," Ross said.

One of the last times Ross saw Key was at a friend's birthday party, where Key was helping out. Key told Ross that she was ready to "elevate her life." She wanted to look for a job and start escorting. She wanted to spend more time with Ross's close-knit circle of friends, which was a "different type of environment" than Key was around at the time. She wanted to return to school and pursue gender-affirming surgery.

"We were ready to help her. We were ready to pull her in the right directions," Ross said.

Porter also witnessed Key's desire to set new goals for herself.

"She was progressing. We were still in our building stages in life," Porter said. "She was on a path of growing. She wanted more. She wanted to learn how to do makeup. She just wanted to be an adult. She wanted to learn the ins and outs of the world."

Though Key was close to her friends and family, she was careful around strangers, Porter said. She was aware of the dangers she faced as a trans woman in Chicago, so she didn't hang out with strangers or in random spaces.

"She was a short girl. She doesn't bother anybody. She's always minding her business. She's . . .

Paige Clay.

Photo courtesy of Zy'Aire Kyng

Cole's uncle saw Clay's father and heard the news. That broke her heart, she said.

"She was my baby," she added. "Everybody say they got a rider, they got somebody that's there for them that always had their back. This girl always had my back. Whether I was right or wrong, she was stepping for her sister."

She said that Clay was the type of person to come to someone's rescue—and to keep her promises. When they were children, Clay told Cole that she'd get her name tattooed on her. Years later, when Cole saw her again, there it was: "Toya" tattooed on her neck.

"In all honesty, it meant everything to me," she said, "Because we been through a lot of children."

While Clay was the big sister to Toya, she was like the little sister to a group of her friends. Khomeini Wajd, Eric Haywood and Kyng all met her around when she was 15 or 16, and they looked after her like she was family.

Kyng said that she helped him become the man he is today—she was the person to give him confidence to embrace his sexuality.

But Clay wasn't always confident, Wajd said.

"When I first met her, she was just so quiet and nonchalant," Wajd said, "But when she started coming around more gay people like her, she opened up more. She was happier, she was laughing all the time."

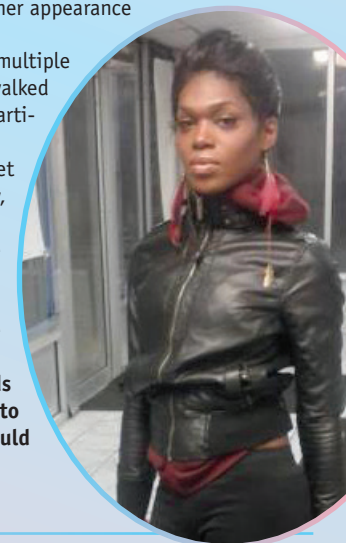
When Clay transitioned, Kyng said, it was like she found herself and became the person she really wanted to be. He recalled her putting a lot of care into her appearance and fashion, turning thrifted finds into classy looks.

Clay was also well-known in the ballroom scene, walking in multiple categories. Her ballroom name was Fendi, Kyng said, and she walked for the House of Evisu, according to a 2012 Windy City Times article.

Wajd said that Clay loved to vogue, and that it seemed to get her mind off the hardships she experienced. He said that Clay, despite all she went through, stayed sweet.

"I really wish people knew the love and caring person she was, how she been to hell and hot water all her life and she never let none of that get her down," he said. "She still lived her life. She didn't become sour to everybody just because everybody treated her the way they treat her."

Windy City Times made many attempts to contact friends and family members of Paige Clay. Those who would like to speak to her memory—or know of someone else who would like to—should email by max.lubbers@gmail.com.



. . . made sure that she's always been in a safe space," Porter said.

Porter said that to have little to no information about the murder 11 months after it occurred is devastating. "She was my sister as well as a best friend, so for me not to know anything still to this day, it breaks my heart," he said.

When she wasn't with her family or friends, Key would be home, watching movies or singing along to Beyonce, Porter said. Her favorite Beyonce album was "Four." Key also loved soul food, especially baked macaroni and candy yams. She wasn't a great cook, so she loved to invite friends to cook for her.

Key was also "upfront," Porter said. People never had to question where they stood with her, because if Key had a problem, she would address it directly without animosity. She was outspoken about her feelings.

Porter's favorite memory of Key is when he and Key went downtown a few summers ago to enjoy the weather and go shopping.

"She looked very good. She had her hair done, she had her nails done and everything. She had a little makeup on," Porter said.

Key bought shoes from the Gucci store and posed for a picture Porter took near a fountain. The two were in their "true element," Porter said. "Just me and her, enjoying each other's company."

Since Key's death, Porter has spoken to numerous news publications about her life.

"I've tried to represent her in the best way that I could. . . . She was one of the coolest, most loving, most beautiful, most loyal, most energetic, caring [people]—just all-around an amazing person," Porter said.

He added, "She was honestly one of my best friends. And I don't think I'll ever meet anybody like her, or ever encounter anybody on this earth like her. Just a true, beautiful person inside and out."



froSkate

creates safe space for BIPOC queer skaters to 'fall, laugh, shake it off'

BY KAYLEIGH PADAR

The organization froSkate—which hosts skate park meet-ups for the “non-traditional skate community”—launched in spring 2019 after a group chat of BIPOC queer skateboarders “got too big,” according to founder Karlie Thornton.

“It was just that the community really needed this kind of space,” Thornton said. “I started to skate in 2019 and really just wanted friends and people who looked like me to skate with, so that I didn’t feel alone or uncomfortable being the only girl.”

The “bread and butter” of the group is meeting up to skate. BIPOC, queer and femme skaters of all skill levels meet at various parks around the city twice a month, both to practice tricks together and get to know each other. No experience is required to attend.

“It’s just such a jam, you roll up and everyone just looks so cool,” Thornton explained. “I always say you’re guaranteed to make at least one or two new friends. It’s something you can come alone to. I take a lot of pride in making sure people feel included because a lot of us are shy and battling nervousness ourselves.”

Thornton’s background in community organizing and entrepreneurship helped her to get things off the ground, but she said the group “grew rapidly” because there was such a desire for this sort of space, which didn’t exist in Chicago.

In addition to meetups, froSkate donates skateboards and other equipment to people who can’t afford them. The group also participates in food and supply drives on the South Side and speaks on panels about racism and other issues

facing the city, among other activist efforts.

“We really want to create a community space and that oftentimes goes beyond just showing up and skating together,” Thornton said. “We definitely want to make sure our community has what they need in terms of skateboarding resources, especially since one of the biggest barriers for getting more Black and Brown people into skating is the cost of it.”

Though the group started with just a few friends and their boards, froSkate meetups currently average 25 to 30 people. At their last meetup of the season, over 100 people showed up. The organization’s Instagram account, where information about upcoming events is shared, has more than 15,000 followers.

“It’s hard to say [how many people are involved] because there’s no pressure to show up to every meetup,” Thornton said. “A lot of times we see familiar faces at meetups and we also see a lot of new faces each time.”

Jasmine Parks, a musician and froSkate’s executive assistant, explained that learning to “take up space” became easier when she started spending time skating with people who looked like her.

Parks started skateboarding as a means of transportation but said it has become much more for her since she got involved with froSkate. At meetups, she prioritizes learning, whether that means landing new tricks or “becoming a better person,” Parks said.

“At one point, I was so scared of my skateboard, like it was bigger than me, but I had to have a moment with myself to realize I have to overcome those fears,” she explained. “To have people around me who are also overcoming those fears, who are falling and laughing and shaking

it off, that’s even more encouragement to keep going.”

Parks’ favorite parts of the meetups are when everyone lines up to try a trick together.

“It’s like, everyone sees someone and thinks, ‘Oh, that’s cool, I bet I could do that,’” Parks said. “Having a line of five or six people back to back trying a trick until we all hit it is my favorite part because we’re all just trying to encourage each other.”

Thornton agreed and said she loves when people are trying things outside of their comfort zone, because they feel supported and are then able to “learn and grow from that moment.” For example, at a recent meetup, several skaters tried a “rock to fakie” which is a trick where you go up a ramp, hit the top and come right back down.

“For some people, it was a trick they wouldn’t even think about trying, but they tried it,” Thornton said. “And quite a few of them actually made it or at least now know what to work on more. But they wouldn’t have ever tried it if we weren’t all there, pushing them.”

Thornton emphasized that having a group of similar people creates the necessary, supportive space required for learning any new skill.

“If you’re in a room of people who don’t look like you, it’s uncomfortable and you feel nervous,” she said. “It’s important to have these spaces where people feel comfortable enough to learn and to fall so people can take that with them when they go skate on their own.”

Even for seasoned skaters, “sometimes it’s just nice to skate with a whole bunch of Black and Brown people,” Thornton added.

Those interested in joining can visit <https://www.froskate.com>.

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DOGGY DAYS
WITH SANTA

SUNDAY · DEC 12TH
3PM TO 9PM
WORLD'S SHORTEST
BAR CRAWL

FRIDAY · DEC 17TH
9PM TO 2AM
GRRR: JINGLE BEAR
ONESIE PARTY

SATURDAY · DEC 18TH
9PM TO 3AM
SLOPPY
OTTER XMAS

SUNDAY · DEC 19TH
9PM TO 1AM
JOLLY OL'
BEARAOKE

WEDNESDAY · DEC 22ND
8PM TO 10PM
POLAR BEAR
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Sun Dec 19 2pm-6pm Sunday Social Slay Ride Drag & Burlesque Revue

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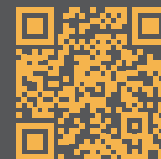


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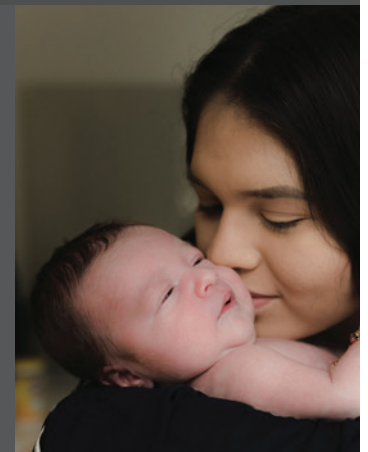


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Left: Dairen Marion-Burton at his ribbon-cutting ceremony. Below: Darien Marion-Burton, the president-elect of the chamber's Board of Directors, stands with Executive Director Liz Holt.

Photos courtesy of Darien Marion-Burton

Oak Park-River Forest Chamber of Commerce elects first Black LGBTQ president in organization's history

BY MAX LUBBERS

In November, the Oak Park-River Forest Chamber of Commerce elected Darien Marion-Burton to serve as the organization's first Black LGBTQ president.

Marion-Burton will begin his role in January 2022 and said he's excited to bring a fresh perspective to the chamber. Often, chambers of commerce are stereotyped to be stuffy, conservative groups, Marion-Burton explained. He wants to change that perception.

"It's just a group of business owners who got together that want to advocate for their businesses, that want to build community, and that really want to make a change here locally," he said. "I think we're going to be able to connect better with our community and we're going to be able to be more inclusive."

As a Oak Park community member through and through, it means everything to Marion-Burton to take on this role, he said. Today, he lives just four blocks away from where he grew up as a child. He still regularly passes by the well-loved restaurant Buzz Cafe, where he worked when he

was a teenager, and he said he values all the time he's spent in the town.

"I always kind of felt this sense of community, and that this was my space and these were my people, even if they didn't necessarily look like me or have (the) same socioeconomic backgrounds as me," he said. "It's really affirming now to be leading such an important organization in our community."

Growing up, Marion-Burton always envisioned himself becoming a leader in Oak Park. But to achieve this feat at age 28 is something he couldn't have imagined, he said.

He also hopes that his young age will help him create a "cool and collaborative" chamber of commerce, especially as Oak Park increasingly draws in a younger demographic of people.

"I have the ability to see things very differently than somebody who's maybe 40 or 50, in terms of what the broader issues are," he said. "Especially for our business owners who are just starting out and maybe don't have that brick-and-mortar location yet, [I can know] what they're experiencing."

His own history as a business owner will also

aid him in the role, he added. As the founder and owner of the marketing agency D.M. Burton, he helps businesses grow and thrive every day. He began the company in 2018, about a year after he started to become active in the chamber.

Since then, he's served on the chamber's Golf Outing Planning Committee, hosted the Inside the Chamber Podcast and chaired the Business Spotlight Soiree, which celebrated local businesses for their adaptability through the COVID-19 pandemic.

Marion-Burton said he owes much of his own success to the chamber, and he wants to pass that on to others. As part of that effort, one of his first goals as president is to create a Black, indigenous and people of color (BIPOC) affinity group for business owners.

"I started my business with \$3,000 in my bank account and a handful of connections and we've grown to almost a quarter of a million dollar

firm in three years," he said. "It's because of the chamber, from the people I've met to the connections I've made, to the coffees I've gone to. I wouldn't be sitting here today if it weren't for this organization."

He also said he's ready to dive into some of the challenges facing businesses, including the lasting effects of COVID-19 on small businesses and the retention problems that much of the workforce is facing.

People have stayed incredibly resilient through these issues, but he said he wants the chamber to provide further support for the community. So he also plans to create an employee-sharing program and workplace development program.

"So many times that we've looked at employee and employer relations, it's kind of this 'us versus them' mentality," he said. "We need to create something that's balanced for everybody."

As he plans out his goals and prepares for the role, Marion-Burton said he's been surprised by the number of people telling him how much he's inspired them. But he also realizes the significance of being elected.

Even something as simple as being himself can break boundaries. Marion-Burton recalled one time where someone made a comment about his painted nails, which he said he was able to shut down pretty quickly. These small interactions can sometimes create a big impact—and he hopes to continue to have these conversations and create progress as president.

"Being the youngest, the blackest and the gayest president has really opened my eyes to the change that I'm making by simply existing and bringing all my identities to the table," he said. "I think that being able to have that experience, being young and living in a business I just started three years ago, is going to allow me to take a unique lens."



AIDS Garden Chicago supporters, CDPH official commemorate World AIDS Day with event

BY CARRIE MAXWELL

AIDS Garden Chicago supporters and the Chicago Department of Public Health (CDPH) commemorated the 34th annual World AIDS Day on Dec. 1 at the Belmont Yacht Club with a sneak preview. The 2.5-acre AIDS Garden Chicago is located adjacent to the Belmont Yacht Club and is set to open in next spring. This site was previously occupied by the now-defunct historic LGBTQ gathering spot Belmont Rocks.

According to a press release announcing this event, AIDS Garden Chicago's mission is to "remember the more than 35 million people who have died of HIV/AIDS since 1986, acknowledge those who continue to live with the virus, celebrate what a community can achieve when it unites and acts up against a common threat, highlight the fact that the battle against the disease continues and commit to Getting to Zero new HIV infections."

Two years ago, a 30-foot Keith Haring sculpture, "Self Portrait," was unveiled as the garden's anchor piece. The site will also have areas dedicated to reflection (Ginko Reflection Grove), education, honor and pride. Additionally, the Chicago

Parks Foundation has recently launched the AIDS Garden Story Archive portal on the organization's website.

Speakers included Chicago Department of Public Health and LGBTQ Health & Outreach Liaison Antonio King; Chicago Ald. Tom Tunney; AIDS Foundation President/CEO John Peller; former state Rep. and current AIDS Garden Chicago Board Chair Yoni Pizer; Chicago Parks Foundation Executive Director Willa Lang; and Design Workshop landscape architect and AIDS Garden designer Manisha Kaul.

Tunney recognized the fellow elected leaders—state Sen. Sara Feigenholtz, state House Majority Leader Rep. Greg Harris and state Rep. Margaret Croke—who are supporting the garden. He also spoke about the 15 year effort to make this garden a reality.

Peller spoke about the Getting to Zero Illinois initiative to end the HIV epidemic by 2030 and the fact that HIV cases are going down overall, however, more work needs to be done to reduce the number of cases among Black and Latinx Chicagoans. He added that having the federal government "back at the table" with the Biden administration's commitment to end the HIV/AIDS

epidemic by 2030 is helping with these efforts.

King asked for a moment of silence for all the lives that have been lost to HIV/AIDS since the epidemic began. He spoke about the origins of the Getting to Zero Illinois initiative that started in 2016 and what the CDPH has been doing to especially help the community during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

Pizer recognized the community partners and how exciting it is to see this garden come to fruition.

During the garden tour, Kaul spoke about how the design layout will help "everyone come together [to] reflect, heal and celebrate" in this soon-to-be dedicated space. She also outlined where each section will be located, including the two entrances to the garden.

Lang outlined some of the features of the garden including the Ginko Grove of Reflection, Unity Garden, Sunrise Garden of Healing, donor wall at the main entrance and Celebration Plaza where Haring's sculpture is located.

AIDS Garden Chicago's community partners include Tunney's office, Chicago Parks Foundation, Chicago Park District, AIDS Foundation Chicago, Alphawood Foundation Chicago, Beaumier Donor Advised Family Fund, Center on Halsted, Design Workshop, The Elizabeth Morse Trust, Friends of the Park, Howard Brown Health, Keith Haring Foundation, The Legacy Project, Mariano's, The Moth, Outspoken, Rosenthal Fine Art, Inc., TAWANI Foundation, Walgreens, U.S. Rep. Mike Quigley, Feigenholtz, Harris, Croke and Pizer.

See aidsgardenchicago.org/.

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As the world continues to grapple with the lasting effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, some BI-POC LGBTQ+-led bars and community-building organizations have adapted by implementing increased safety protocols and strengthening their commitments to mutual aid.

Nobody's Darling:

Nobody's Darling, an LGBTQ+ bar owned by two Black women, Angela Barnes and Renauda Riddle, opened in May amid the pandemic. This means the owners have always had to grapple with safety protocols to mitigate the spread of COVID-19.

"We have to listen to the CDC, we have to listen to our state and local leaders, and be responsible," Barnes said.

Nobody's Darling requires people to wear masks to enter and when moving around the bar, but people are allowed to remove them while drinking. Vaccinations are required among the bar's staff, and they also wear masks while working. The space is cleaned frequently, and extra masks and hand sanitizer are available. People who have symptoms of any illness are encouraged to stay home.

"If there are members of our community, meaning the LGBTQ+ community, who are more at risk and there's something we can do to support equity in terms of keeping them safe, then certainly those spaces we're providing for our community should be supportive," Barnes said.

Although Nobody's Darling requires its staff to be vaccinated, the bar doesn't require guests to provide proof of vaccination (unlike some other LGBTQ+ spots), so as to avoid creating a false sense of security.

"I'm not qualified, and our staff isn't either, to determine whether or not a vaccine card is legitimate," Barnes explained. "We're relying on people to take some ownership and not be around people if they're not feeling well, but to create a situation where we say, 'okay, we checked your card, now everyone in the bar is safe, I just don't think that makes a lot of sense.'"

But Barnes is keeping an eye on COVID-19 trends and would consider hiring a separate company to check vaccine cards if positivity rates rise or if it's recommended by officials.

Nobody's Darling hasn't taken part in promoting mutual aid because specific needs haven't been brought to their attention, Barnes said.

"I mean, we've only been open since May, but say one of our regulars or someone in the community brought up something where we could show support, we'd be open to doing that," she added. "Those types of things are important because we are a gathering place."

For more information about Nobody's Darling: <https://www.nobodysdarlingbar.com/>

Molasses:

Molasses is an organization dedicated to creating "community and opportunity for Black trans and gender-variant people and queer people of color through cultural work, coalition-building, and linkage to (self)care," according to its website.

In the past, Molasses planned in-person events, but the collective has stopped planning in-person gatherings due to safety concerns



SAVING SPACE

BY KAYLEIGH PADAR

BIPOC LGBTQ+-led orgs and spaces adapt to continued effects of COVID-19

brought on by the pandemic.

Organizer Choya Webb said the few events Molasses has hosted since March 2020 were outside and guests wore personal protective equipment, adding that organizers have tried to prioritize their own well-being and rest as they too continue to endure the effects of the pandemic.

Molasses has nevertheless increased its work around providing material resources to the BIPOC LGBTQ+ community, including care packages, defense tools and monetary aid.

"Organizers were reactivated around mutual aid and racial justice in April and May of 2020 due to state violence layered with an ongoing pandemic, so a lot of our work moved into more material resources of care and mutual aid for Black and brown trans and queer folk," Webb said.

The organization also worked with Howard Brown to create some public health public service announcements addressing vaccine hesitancy.

Webb explained there have "always been layers" of mutual aid and activism in Molasses' work. The group's projects have simply shifted in response to the pandemic's effects on people's lives.

"Our mode of creating joyful spaces for Black trans folk, and by extension, many other communities, is event planning—but that in itself was in service to mutual aid and activism," Webb said. "Our intention is to ensure Black trans people have their needs met while also showcasing the talent and power of Black trans artistry."

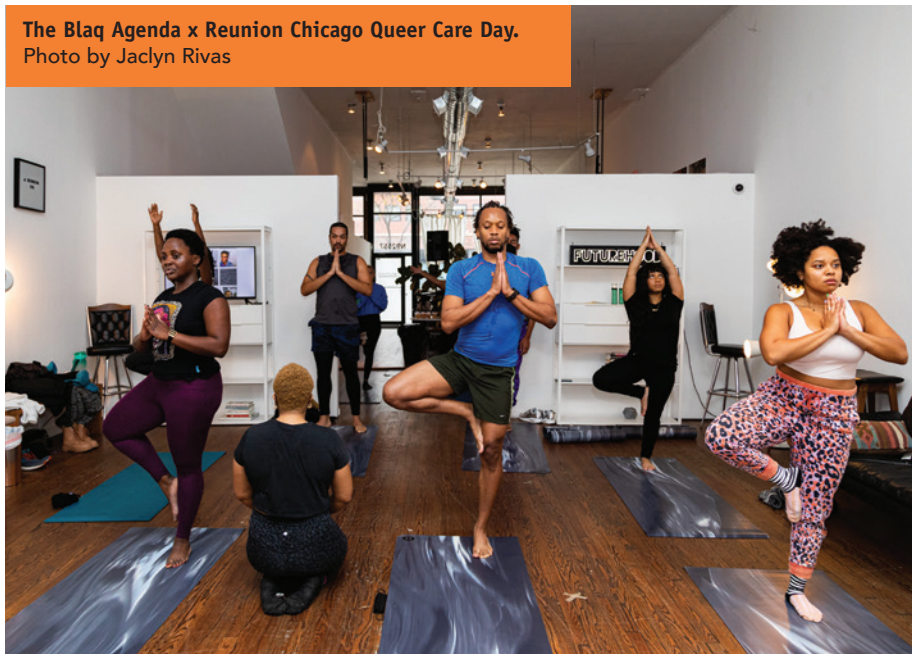
For more information about Molasses, visit <https://www.molasseschicago.com/>

The Blaq Agenda:

The Blaq Agenda is a "social experiment indexing Black queerness" that hosts events and releases content created by Black LGBTQ+ people about their experiences, according to its website.

Member Elijah McKinnon said COVID-19 has made those in the organization "even more intentional about the gatherings we host."

The Blaq Agenda recently planned a series of



events called “Queer Care Day” where attendees can attend a yoga class then explore a market full of queer BIPOC creators offering nail art, tarot card readings and haircuts, among other things.

Before committing to any event, The Blaq Agenda “extensively discusses” wellness and protection plans specific to the venue and type of gathering, McKinnon explained, adding,

“Each initiative is different, so we take a custom approach to developing wellness and protection plans that keep our communities feeling brave and cared for while we share space.”

These precautions include requiring proof of vaccination or negative COVID-19 test results upon entry, providing COVID-19 surveys for contact tracing and reducing event capacities. The Blaq Agenda also provides masks and hand sanitizers for event guests.

Like Molasses, the Blaq Agenda has always been involved in activism and providing aid to those in the BIPOC LGBTQ+ community. These efforts are constantly changing as the group works to “amplify the direct needs of the communities we serve,” McKinnon said. She noted that the organization sees mutual aid as “just one way to “create equitable opportunities for the communities that we serve. ... It is important for us to build in coalition with organizations and initiatives that believe in alternative ways to provide a continuum of care for Black, queer and gender expansive people.”

For more information about The Blaq Agenda: <https://www.theblaqagenda.com/>

Nobody's Darling.
Photo by Carrie Maxwell



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