Married to a cause
Mark Jimenez and Beau Chandler just wanted a marriage license in time for their wedding. Instead they got arrested and helped launch a movement, but on Sept. 13 they plan to tie the knot anyway — and everyone’s invited

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Meredith Baxter to keynote BTD

Lesbian actress and producer Meredith Baxter — perhaps best known as Elyse Keaton from Family Ties — will keynote this year’s Black Tie Dinner, organizers said Thursday, Sept. 6.

Baxter, 65, an advocate for women’s and human rights and breast cancer research, came out in 2009 on The Today Show. She signed with Broadway Books to write a memoir of her personal and professional life, Untied, which was published in 2011. On a local note, Baxter also recently narrated the documentary film Raid of the Rainbow Lounge.

“Meredith Baxter is a champion of women’s rights and devotes much of her time speaking out on issues about which she is passionate,” BTD co-chair Chris Kouvelis said. “Her life experiences reflect our theme for this year’s dinner: ‘Affair of the Heart.’ Every cause that Meredith involves herself with is an affair of her heart in every way.”

Noted for her accessible portrayals of intelligent, independent women who struggle with the challenges before them, Baxter achieved early success with a string of TV hits, including the CBS sitcom Bridget Loves Bernie; the critically acclaimed ABC drama Family, for which she received an Emmy nomination; and the perennially popular Family Ties. Following Family Ties, Baxter made a seamless transition to drama, quickly establishing herself as one of the most sought-after actors for TV movies.

In 1991, she received an Emmy nomination for her performance as the lead character in A Woman Scorned: The Betty Broderick Story. In 1994, she garnered a Daytime Emmy nomination for her role as a lesbian mother raising a young son in the CBS After School Special, Other Mothers. She also received a special award for public awareness from the National Breast Cancer Coalition for her work on the television film, My Breast (1994), a black comedy about the true story of journalist Joyce Wadler’s successful battle with breast cancer.

“In many respects, Meredith Baxter is America’s favorite mom,” BTD co-chair Mitzi Lemons said. “When she decided to come out in a very public way, she paved the way for so many people to follow in her footsteps. In Meredith, they see a friendly, accessible and non-threatening person who has made the decision to come out, and perhaps that removes some of the fear and stigma from their own coming-out process.”

Baxter has a line of skin care products and donates a portion of the profits from sales to the Meredith Baxter Fund for Breast Cancer Research, which promotes prevention and research, as well as free mammograms for low-income women. The 31st annual Black Tie Dinner will be at the Sheraton Dallas Hotel on Nov. 3. Although the event is officially sold out, anyone interested in tickets that may become available should contact Dan Godfrey at dgodfrey@blacktie.org.

— John Wright
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To many, Mark “Major” Jimenez and Beau Chandler are two local leathermen whose activism has brought them international attention. But away from the media spotlight, Jimenez and Chandler are just two men who want to legally marry. The two were arrested at the end of a marriage protest on July 5 at the Dallas County Records Building. After being denied a marriage license because Texas does not issue them to same-sex couples, they handcuffed themselves together and waited until the building closed. They were arrested for trespassing because they refused to leave.

It marked the first LGBT activism arrest in Dallas’ history. Chandler said they didn’t plan to get arrested but became angry when they weren’t served like the other handful of couples that walked right past them. He said building management offered to have police take them out a separate exit if they agreed to leave without being arrested. They refused.

“It didn’t work out for them because we flat out told them, ‘No, we’re here to make this statement, and we are seriously not leaving unless you take us away in cuffs because we have not yet been served,’” Chandler said.

The couple wanted a marriage license in time for their wedding, set for Thursday, Sept. 13. They will still walk down the aisle next week at a friend’s house near Bachman Lake and exchange their own vows.

The intimate ceremony will be followed by a reception at the Dallas Eagle. Instead of wedding presents, the couple has asked guests to tip the entertainers at the reception. Proceeds will go to Youth First Texas and 89.3 KNON’s Lambda Weekly and the Sonic Assembly Hour programs.

“We like giving back to the community, and as far as wedding gifts, we already have the toaster oven and the microwave and all that good stuff,” Chandler said. “We just combined two households. So, it’s better that everybody have a good time and we give something back to the people that love us and that we love.”

Jimenez and Chandler said they met a year ago at a fundraiser. They became friends but weren’t in a good place in their lives to start dating. Fate brought them together earlier this year at another fundraiser and the whirlwind romance began.

“We were getting our lives in order, and I guess it was the perfect storm earlier this year because our lives were in order and we got thrown together again, so here we are,” Jimenez said.
One morning in early May, Jiminez made Chandler a surprise breakfast of blueberry pancakes with a ring inside.

“When he got down to the ring part, I got down on my knee, I offered it to him and I asked if he would like to get married,” Jiminez said. “And he said he would.”

Chandler said the proposal caught him by surprise, but he was thrilled.

“It was a pretty sweet deal,” he said. “I thought it was just a big special breakfast, but it was way bigger than what I thought it was going to be.”

A few days later, President Barack Obama endorsed marriage equality, inspiring the couple to plan the staged sit-in.

“That’s when we decided that we would just make a personal public statement locally and go downtown and apply for a marriage license and refuse to leave without one,” Jiminez said. “We really didn’t expect it to get as crazy and widespread as it did.”

Jiminez, an activist since the late ’70s, said he’s been in protests around the country. Chandler, who is new to activism, said he always wanted to get involved in the fight for LGBT equality but didn’t have anyone with whom to be active. But now the two have each other.

They approached GetEQUAL with their marriage sit-in idea, and the organization decided to partner with them, GetEQUAL Texas state coordinator Michael Diviesti said.

Jiminez and Chandler’s protest was designed to coincide with the anniversary of the adoption of the 14th Amendment, which guarantees equal protection under the law. Diviesti said tying the protest to GetEQUAL’s national “Fight for the 14th” campaign helped bring international attention to their arrests, and sit-ins at marriage counters across the country. While Dallas is liberal, many people outside the state view it as conservative, so the idea that Dallas had a gay couple demanding a marriage license instead of a place like Austin — where such protests are expected — added fuel to the media fire.

“They started a movement. They showed people that any two people can stand up and do this,” he said, adding that eventually marriage licenses will be issued in Texas. “At some point, someone is going to break down and either break the law themselves or the law will change.”

Jiminez was arrested again Aug. 2 during another marriage sit-in after the couple’s first court date. He said the manner in which a security guard told him to leave prompted him to refuse to let someone show such animosity toward him and Chandler.

Jiminez’s bond was tripled and the court wouldn’t allow him to give money to Chandler to secure his release, so he relied on a bondsman. He said the higher bond was a message from the court.

“I think it was the court letting me know that they weren’t going to continue to allow me to do this without repercussions,” he said. “Do I want to run up there and have any more protests right at the moment at the marriage license counter? Not really, not knowing what they could possibly do to me. But that doesn’t mean that we’re going to stop voicing our opinions.”

Jiminez said he’s protested in Austin before, but this fight is at the marriage counter.

“Austin doesn’t issue marriage licenses,” he said. “The marriage license counter issues marriage licenses. So that’s exactly the place to protest.”

Chandler said people can be just as loud in their hometowns and make as much of a difference. He said he welcomes the advice from other people, but doesn’t appreciate the criticism from people who sit back and do nothing for equality.

“We’re not doing this just for us,” he said. “We’re trying to do this for everybody. You can be critical or you can stand behind us.”

Longtime Dallas lesbian activist Louise Young said she’s been following Jiminez and Chandler’s story.

She said a variety of approaches in activism help start and advance movements, though she has personally found that a combination of non-violent demonstration and behind-the-scenes work has been the most effective.

“I would be remiss as an activist to criticize their way of responding,” Young said, adding that
Calvin is a cutie! This little shepherd mix with the buffed red-gold coat and soft brown eyes is 14 weeks old. Calvin has a natural curiousness and is eager to please. He’s gentle and should be good with other dogs and with children.

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Jenkins, Garcia say they’re moving ahead with DP benefits plan

Dallas County judge says he’ll push for Commissioners Court to vote on issue despite lack of support from regional government partner agency

Dallas County Judge Clay Jenkins said this week he was finalizing a proposal for the county to offer health benefits to the same-sex partners of employees next year.

“I’m going to push for a vote when we have a plan we can put before people,” Jenkins said. “I’m very optimistic that we’ll have DP benefits for county employees effective Jan. 1, 2013.”

Jenkins said he’s working with Commissioner Elba Garcia on the plan and will present it to the Commissioners Court when it’s ready. He said he would have to get Commissioner John Wiley Price, the third member of the court’s Democratic majority, on board to pass the benefits and add them to the budget. Commissioners have already started voting on 2013 budget items, including voting to increase their salaries this week.

Dr. Garcia told Dallas Voice Thursday, Sept. 6, that the timeline for completing the DP benefits proposal is two to three weeks.

Under the plan, Dallas County would offer the benefits outside the Public Employee Benefits Cooperative, a multi-county government partner agency designed to help keep the cost of health insurance affordable. That’s because when the issue was discussed at August’s PEBCo board meeting, representatives from Tarrant and Denton counties threatened to veto a vote in favor of adding the benefits.

Jenkins said because the plan is outside the PEBCo, commissioners do not have to vote on it before Oct. 1 for open enrollment. He said they have until Jan. 1 to approve the DP benefits, but he would like to see a vote in September or October.

Commissioner Price, who cast the third and deciding vote in favor of transgender nondiscrimination protections for Dallas County employees last year, didn’t return a phone call seeking comment this week. Also not returning calls were the two Republican Dallas County commissioners,
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Dallas to celebrate its 1st Gray Pride

Group hopes to attract both young and old with event aimed at drawing attention to challenges faced by growing population of LGBT seniors

M.M. ADJARIAN | Contributing Writer
editor@dallasvoice.com

Dallas Gray Pride is one of a growing number of coalitions around the country that is working to implement programs to help LGBT elders. One in particular, the Boston LGBT Aging Project, was featured in Gen Silent.

Because it is still in its infancy, festivities at this year’s Dallas Pride celebration will consist of a single party, from 7 to 10 p.m. Friday, Sept. 14, at the Interfaith Peace Chapel.

“We’ll have a variety of music,” Hamilton says. “And there will be food and beverages. If people want to dance, [they can]. Or they [can just] chitchat and float among the crowd — it’s all about having fun.”

Gray Pride is an event intended to honor community elders and help them combat the loneliness that is too often a part of their lives. But it’s also for anyone and everyone with attachments to the elderly, especially those who are confined to wheelchairs or homebound because they lack transportation.

“We need to] reach out [to the elderly] and tell them they can get dressed up and come,” Blumer says.

Plans are also in the works for other Gray Pride events at other times of the year. And next year, organizers hope to be able to have a full presence at the 2013 Alan Ross Texas Freedom Parade.

Travis Lee Moore, special events manager for the Cathedral of Hope, says, “Gray Pride will come out next year like gangbusters!”

Hamilton adds: “We can’t allow people’s fears and prejudices to continue to oppress us and seriously harm the ability of our warriors and our foreparents. LGBT elders deserve all the dignity and respect that we can possibly acquire for them.”

Dallas Gray Pride event are, from left, the Rev. Shelley Hamilton, Oliver Blumer and Kee Holt. (John Wright/Dallas Voice)

A gray old time

Dallas Gray Pride will be from 7 to 10 p.m. Friday, Sept. 14, at the Interfaith Peace Chapel, 5910 Cedar Springs. For more info, email Oliver Blumer at olblumerdc@aol.com.

A major flashpoint for these individuals came earlier this year after the Dallas premiere of Stu Maddix’s award-winning documentary, Gen Silent. The film explores the unique — and often devastating — problems LGBT people face as they reach old age.

“Take [the case of] an individual who biologically identifies as male but appears to someone’s perception as female,” says Blumer, who serves as vice-chair of TENT. “Maybe they’ve had a stroke and maybe they have no advocates and now someone comes in to give them care and finds out that maybe all of their anatomy doesn’t align with how the person [outwardly] expresses themselves. [The sick person] could get discriminated against.”

Even if an LGBT elder manages to maintain reasonably good health in old age, though, he or she still has to contend with other social and economic challenges.

“Many older people [are alone because] their lifetime partners or family members have died,” says Hamilton. “And so they become isolated. [Moreover,] many LGBT people only have Social Security — they don’t have insurance such as Medicare or whatever supplements, if any, they’re able to afford.”

This issue is taking on especial importance in light of the fact that, according to Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius, 11,000 Americans are now turning 65 every day. Aging is the next great epidemic that will affect everyone, both gay and straight; and for LGBT people in particular, mobilizing resources to build an infrastructure to support elders is critical.

Fostering awareness among younger generations is also important. Gray Pride can progress into the future and help others only if the young understand that the movement is also for them, Blumer says. One day, they, too, will be old and in need of care.

“We want to appeal to [young] people’s hearts,” says Blumer. “They may have aging parents, or aging aunts and uncles, or grandparents. [We need to] get them to put the faces of loved ones on other elderly people and give them the outreach skills they can use to understand how they can give back to the community.”

Dallas Pride 2012 will mark a kind of coming-of-age for the LGBT community in Big D. It’s the first year that LGBT elders will have a chance to gather together at an event — christened “Gray Pride” — to pay tribute to their pioneering efforts on behalf of the LGBT community over the last 40 years and more.

Gray Pride came into being through the collaborative efforts of Oliver Blumer of the Transgender Education Network of Texas, the Rev. Shelley Hamilton of the Cathedral of Hope, and Kee Holt of Resource Center Dallas and the GLBT Aging Interest Network.

“What we’ve begun to do in partnership is to begin to try and draw all the different components of the [LGBT] community together to figure out how to build our own retirement centers, assisted-living places and long-term care centers,” explains Hamilton, congregational care pastor at CoH.

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Dallas Gray Pride event are, from left, the Rev. Shelley Hamilton, Oliver Blumer and Kee Holt. (John Wright/Dallas Voice)
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Gay band association to mark 30 years at Dallas conference

The national Lesbian and Gay Band Association will celebrate its 30th year with a conference that begins Sept. 13 in Dallas. The group will hold workshops, stage a concert and participate in the Alan Ross Texas Freedom Parade.

The main concert takes place at the Majestic Theater on Sept. 15 with about 150 musicians expected to participate. Dallas comedian Paul J. Williams will emcee. The 55-member Oak Lawn Band will be joined by members of LGBT bands from across the country, the Turtle Creek Chorale and the Texas Gay Rodeo Association Honor Guard.

LGBA General Manager Adam DeRosa said he expects about 150 musicians plus twirlers and flaggers to march in the Alan Ross Texas Freedom Parade.

Oak Lawn Band president Tim Stallman said they’ll play popular Western and Latin music in the parade, as well as the theme from the TV show Dallas.

For the concert at the Majestic, LGBA commissioned a new work called “City Trees” by composer Michael Markowsky.

Markowsky will also present a workshop for conference attendees at the Melrose Hotel on Friday.

TCC Artistic Director Trey Jacobs said his group will perform three pieces with the band at the Saturday night concert. One will be Anne Albritton’s arrangement of “Moon River.” Albritton, who was the chorale’s principal accompanist from 1991–98, died in 2006.

Jacobs called the collaboration with Oak Lawn Band and the visiting musicians a fantastic opportunity, though somewhat daunting. Music was sent to out-of-town musicians while Oak Lawn Band and TCC have rehearsed separately.

“We have one rehearsal — the day of the concert,” he said.

Oak Lawn Band member Diane Treider, who attended a previous conference, wasn’t worried about successfully blending the various groups and musicians. But she called the rehearsal schedule for the concert brutal.

“These are really great musicians,” she said. “They want to be challenged. People come prepared.”

DeRosa agreed.

“When you get such a large wind ensemble, it blends easier than you’d imagine,” he said.

He said the intonation balances but there could be volume and instrumentation problems.

“ ‘You might end up with 50 clarinets,’ he said, “but our instrumentation is quite balanced.”

Oak Lawn Band was one of the seven founding members of LGBA in 1982. The organization has grown to 38 groups.

The Dallas band, which formed in 1980, regularly performs in Pride parades in Dallas, Fort Worth, Austin and Houston. With LGBA, Oak Lawn Band has performed at the inaugurations of Presidents Bill Clinton and Barack Obama. According to Stallman, LGBA was the first LGBT organization to march in an inaugural parade.

“Celebrating our 30th anniversary, this conference is very special,” DeRosa said.

Stallman said the Oak Lawn Band usually performs in cowboy hats, T-shirts and khaki pants. For this year’s parade, the combined band will wear black and white with a red, white and blue sash.

The musicians decided on the more formal uniform because LGBA will film the marching band. That video will be submitted to the inaugural march committee.

Stallman said that no matter what the outcome of the election in November, he hopes to be in Washington in January participating in the inauguration.

LGBA conference at the Warwick Melrose Hotel, 3015 Oak Lawn Ave. Sept. 12–16. Concert at the Majestic Theater, 1925 Elm St. Sept. 15 at 7:30 p.m. Tickets at OakLawnBand.org.
Look for the insert in this week's issue!

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The members of the PEBC board are Jenkins, Garcia, Dallas County Human Resources Director Mattye Mauldin-Taylor, Tarrant County Judge Glen Whitley, Tarrant County Commissioner Roy Brooks, Tarrant County Human Resources Director Tina Glenn and Denton County Judge Mary Horn. The other two members, the North Texas Tollway Authority and Parker County, do not have seats on the board.

Horn, who chairs the PEBC board, told Dallas Voice this week that Jenkins placed DP benefits on the board’s agenda as a discussion item, not an action item. After Jenkins explained his reasoning, Horn said she questioned how domestic partners would be verified to guard against possible fraud.

“Unfortunately we all know that there are people out there that don’t tell the truth and take advantage,” Horn told the Voice. “The system is in place at this point and time to provide a marriage license and that’s pretty good proof to me. If these people [same-sex partners] want to get insurance [on their own], they can certainly do that. If Dallas County wants to pursue this, they’re welcome to do so, but not as part of PEBC.”

Jenkins has said that DP benefits are an issue of equality and that offering them would make the county more competitive. But Horn countered that verifying domestic partners would be an “administrative nightmare” and that Jenkins’ “whole argument for me just doesn’t hold water because there’s nothing to prohibit people from buying their own insurance.”

Dallas County Sheriff Lupe Valdez, an out lesbian who oversees the county’s largest department, told Dallas Voice this week she supports the county offering the benefits in 2013 and would work with the commissioners to move ahead with the plan.

“To continue offering one category of employees fewer benefits than others is unfair and makes it more difficult to attract the best possible job candidates,” she said. “We want to be fair to all of our employees and treat them with equality. Providing domestic partner benefits to county employees is an important step toward building a fair and inclusive work environment and a strong county government, and I am in favor of it.”

Gay Dallas County District Clerk Gary Fitzsimmons, who did not return calls this week, has been outspoken in his support of the county offering DP benefits. Fitzsimmons said in July that he doesn’t believe the PEBC has any control over whether Dallas County offers DP benefits.

“Dallas County can decide what it wants to cover and not cover without being subject to review by an outside agency,” Fitzsimmons told Dallas Voice. “We’re self-insured. We can do whatever we want. These are choices that are well within the purviews of the court.”

Rafael McDonnell, communications and advocacy manager at Resource Center Dallas, said he has been working with commissioners since early July to provide them with information about DP benefits. He said people should contact the commissioners to voice how important the benefits are to employees.

“I think that people need to speak up and say that this is something we want to see happen,” he said. “There’s a very tight window.”

For contact information for commissioners, go to TinyURL.com/3zw2gsr.
Chick-fil-A should remember Alamo

CEO’s meeting with college leaders a positive sign, but brand will suffer as long as company is viewed as the right’s last stand against equality

The Chick-fil-A controversy isn’t just a battle over chicken sandwiches, as some have flippantly suggested. The fast-food chain has become an international symbol of anti-gay intolerance since its CEO, Dan Cathy, expressed his views on marriage equality on The Ken Coleman Show in July.

“I think we are inviting God’s judgment on our nation when we shake our fist at Him and say, ‘We know better than you as to what constitutes a marriage,’ and I pray God’s mercy on our generation that has such a prideful, arrogant attitude to think that we have the audacity to define what marriage is about,” Cathy said.

This controversy also extended beyond Cathy’s comments and included his more than $5 million in donations to anti-gay organizations such as the Family Research Council. His Winshape Foundation has also contributed to Exodus International, which has worked in the past to help people “pray away the gay.”

We all know what followed. Some big city Yankee mayors said they didn’t want the franchise in their metropolises. This raised the ire of talk show host and former Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee, as well as reality TV star Sarah Palin. They organized Chick-fil-A Appreciation Day — where fun calories and fundamentalist Christianity converged in an orgy of high-fructose homophobia.

In this fight, the LGBT community took a beating from the often-friendly media who were agitated because they thought the majors overreached into unconstitutional territory. But Chick-fil-A also suffered from the fracas, with its Brand Index score having fallen 40 percent nationally since Cathy’s controversial statement.

The big question was what would happen after the last pickup truck and General Lee pulled away? If Chick-fil-A truly desires rejoining mainstream America, it will have to come to terms with the fact that it will let down its most ardent defenders. In an age when Ellen is a spokesperson for Cover Girl and products from Amtrak to J.C. Penney are courting LGBT consumers, the chicken joint has become a symbol of defiance.

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“Since Chick-fil-A doesn’t yet have locations in our state most Montanans were unable to participate in the national event in August. So we created Chick-fil-A Appreciation Day 2.0,” Jeff Laszloffy, president and CEO of the Montana Family Foundation, told KPAX-TV.

If Cathy budes even an inch, extremist groups are going to squawk louder than a chicken in a slaughter barn. So, Chick-fil-A might as well go all the way and renounce donations to homophobic hate groups and rein community. The alternative is an ongoing struggle to maintain brand integrity, while increasingly extreme elements embrace the company’s logo and carry out anti-gay activities in their name. For instance, at the Richard Stockton College of New Jersey, a fraternity tabling next to an on campus Chick-fil-A chanted: “We love Chick-fil-A” and then screamed “Faggot” when LGBT students passed by.

This company is simply not going to be able to control its image as long as it remains a rallying cry for hate groups and homophobes. I suppose that Chick-fil-A could defiantly stand firm and remain the right’s anti-gay Alamo. But I’m sure they are well aware of the fort’s fate.

Wayne Besen is founding executive director of Truth Wins Out, a Vermont-based nonprofit organization that fights anti-gay religious extremism. He can be reached at WBesen@TruthWinsOut.org.

Wayne Besen
Contributing columnist

A GAME OF CHICKEN

|ceptor’s meeting with college leaders a positive sign, but brand will suffer as long as company is viewed as the right’s last stand against equality |

The Chick-fil-A controversy isn’t just a battle over chicken sandwiches, as some have flippantly suggested. The fast-food chain has become an international symbol of anti-gay intolerance since its CEO, Dan Cathy, expressed his views on marriage equality on The Ken Coleman Show in July.

“I think we are inviting God’s judgment on our nation when we shake our fist at Him and say, ‘We know better than you as to what constitutes a marriage,’ and I pray God’s mercy on our generation that has such a prideful, arrogant attitude to think that we have the audacity to define what marriage is about,” Cathy said.

This controversy also extended beyond Cathy’s comments and included his more than $5 million in donations to anti-gay organizations such as the Family Research Council. His Winshape Foundation has also contributed to Exodus International, which has worked in the past to help people “pray away the gay.”

We all know what followed. Some big city Yankee mayors said they didn’t want the franchise in their metropolises. This raised the ire of talk show host and former Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee, as well as reality TV star Sarah Palin. They organized Chick-fil-A Appreciation Day — where fun calories and fundamentalist Christianity converged in an orgy of high-fructose homophobia.

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Cuckoo for Coco’s stuff

The drag storyteller serves up tales bitter and sweet at her third Dallas Pride

With her trademark “That Girl” flip and a troveled-on, Italian/tri-state-area accent, diva drag goddess Miss Coco Peru (aka Clinton Leupp) could easily coast by on biting wit and bitchy punch lines. After all, she’s already won the gay popular vote with her infamous “It burns!” semen scene in Trick, and as part of the trio of leading ladies in the (now) cult classic Girls Will Be Girls.

But Peru opts to take her drag to a different — and sometimes darker — level, peeling back the inherent candy-coated cuteness that so often accompanies wigs and heels and delving into stories and songs that address real-life moments and issues. Yet she’s still able to do this all while setting every song in this show to a Barry Manilow tune (by design, nonetheless). It’s a conundrum for sure.

How does one make drag both over-the-top and under-the-skin in the same show? Dallas will soon find out when Coco makes her third appearance for Dallas Pride with a two-night performance of Miss Coco Peru is Present. And in anticipation of unwrapping this sparkly gift, we caught up with the leggy first lady of monologues to see how the world (outside of the great state of Texas) has been treating her.

Dallas Voice: Coco, we think you may be hooked. What is it about Dallas that keeps you coming back for more? Coco Peru: I love Texas — and I’m not just saying that. For me, it was when I did my first tour around Texas, and I could not believe how really, really excited people were to see me. Every year I come back. Oh, and the fried food was good ... and the Mexican food.

Some drink to forget and others watch to remember: what’s new with this year’s show? This show is [going back to] one of the first shows I ever wrote. It’s my most personal — me telling the story of my life. It’s a history of who I am, and all the dark childhood things that make the audience go, “Should I be laughing at this or horrified?” There are really serious parts. One of the things I require of my audience is that I am willing to make you laugh, but you have to listen to the serious stuff as well.

Telling a good story is an art form unto itself; what’s one particular story you share that really resonates with audiences? That’s a hard question! The one thing I will say with my shows is that people say they forget they are watching a drag queen. To me, that is the best compliment — that the drag becomes secondary to the storytelling.

You’ve uttered some pretty quotable one-liners in your career, including the Girls Will Be Girls classic “I’ve had more children pulled out of me than a burning orphanage.” Do you get a lot of people quoting Coco-isms to you? If anyone quotes me, I am excited. They quote Trick or Girls Will Be Girls often, but if they quote my actual show then I am really excited because they’ve only seen it once most likely. Liza Minnelli used to quote my show.

Wow, the Liza stamp of approval, that’s the gayest compliment ever. Isn’t that, though?

If we stuck you on the stage of America’s Got Talent right now, what would we see? I don’t dance. Oh lord, I don’t think I would be a fit for that show. That’s the point with my shows, you have to have an attention span. You remember last year [in Dallas] a guy in the audience did not have an attention span, and he was drunk, which makes it so hard having to deal. Finally the audience turned on him — which is wonderful — and he left. Do you remember that?

We are still talking about it. He was terrible. We expect to see Coco in a lot of places: gay bars, an occasional bathroom stall and maybe even at 3 a.m.
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It’s not uncommon for stage actors to play multiple characters during the run of a show (or even a performance). But every night, Jon Riddleberger shares the same role with two other people. And that role is a horse.

Riddleberger plays The Head (there’s also The Heart and The Hind) in the national touring production of War Horse, manipulating both the lead horse, Joey, and, at alternating performances, Joey’s friend Topthorn. And while his primary function may be as a puppeteer, Riddleberger says playing one-third of a life-sized horse eight times a week is an intense exercise in acting. At least, for him.

“Puppetry is really strange: I know lots of very great actors who would never make a good puppeteer, and lots of great puppeteers who could never be good actors,” says Riddleberger, who studied experimental theater in college and trained at the Actors Theatre of Louisville. “When acting, you are understanding a character’s emotions, but you’re putting it all out there yourself; in puppeteering, there’s a medium you’re doing that through. How I feel doesn’t matter; it’s what the puppet is feeling that matters.”

What that effectively means is that Riddleberger approaches his characters with the same thoughtfulness as an actor, but finding a different way to express it.

“We’ve made lots of character choices — we’ve mapped Joey’s emotional journey,” he says. “But if we’re going through the emotions, the puppet probably isn’t.”

The “we” still sounds strange when talking about a single character, but both Joey and Topthorn are collective efforts.

“When I was being thrown into the auditions, it very quickly became apparent Head was the position that made the most sense to me,” Riddleberger recounts from San Francisco, where War Horse is currently being performed. “In rehearsals with my team, it was apparent why we

Gay actor Jon Riddleberger is the head of ‘War Horse’ ... literally
were each position we were. There are personality traits to each role — the Head tends to be a little more cerebral — I’m keeping the story of the horse clear and present. The Heart is very impulsive — that is a passionate part of the horse, very reactionary. He’s responsible for the breathing, so a lot of that emotional energy comes from him, and then the guy that plays my Heart is very good. I was telling my mom recently, ‘I’m working on breathing more with my Heart more and getting coordinated,’ and it took her a while to realize I was talking about another person,” he says.

Then there’s The Hind, and Riddleberger’s teammate is the only female adult puppeteer in the entire War Horse family. Just don’t make any “horse’s ass” jokes.

“She’s a powerhouse,” he says. “She’s all about pushing the horse forward.”

All of which means playing a huge puppet takes tons of communication. (Teams always work together; they don’t mix-and-match.)

“One of the puppet directors called it ‘the woo-woo effect’: That’s when we start being able to predict each others’ actions,” he says. “I sometimes feel like I’m reading my teammates’ minds. I understand their breath patterns, their thought processes about what kind of horse Joey is and how he reacts to the world. We have figured out how to be responsive as one horse. It’s sort of a big improv game. If my Hind decides it’s time to move, it’s my job to move. My teammates will do things I wouldn’t do. Risking, not knowing where it’s going. I trust my teammates enormously.”

Riddleberger and his teammates swap out characters every few days because the physical demands of the horses can prove taxing and it allows certain muscles to relax. But it always means they are switching up characters as well.

“They are two different horses … well, two different puppets,” he says. “Joey is a hunter horse — half Thoroughbred and half draught horse; Topthorn is a full Thoroughbred, and he has to be so much longer, so I get on my tiptoes a lot.” Still, he enjoys the challenges that come with playing two different animals.

“Joey makes more sense to me as a character just in relation to my own personality, but I enjoy playing Topthorn and being this big, strong military horse,” as if he’s able to play against type, says Riddleberger.

A horse isn’t just a horse, of course, of course.
T he epigram “from small acorns mighty oaks grow,” could hardly be a more apt metaphor for the fine dining restaurant Oak. Almost everything about this bastion of new American cuisine is as solid as its namesake: The décor, the cocktail program, the service and of course chef Jason Maddy’s creative food.

Located in the Design District, the city’s up-and-coming destination neighborhood, it opened earlier this year in the cold of January across from the Meddlesome Moth. (Who would do that? Not open in winter, but put an oak across from a meddlesome moth? That’s begging for defoliation. But I digress.) Since then, the menu has changed regularly, even if it only means adding seasonal accents (a Hatch chile consommé is on the menu now, but probably not for long). But even with new items, Oak has been consistently engaging and creative.

“Always order the strangest combination on the menu,” my well-traveled foodie companion counsels on every fine-dining escapade. “If it’s not the best thing they make, then all of it will be bad.” A homeopathic diagnosis of dining health, to be sure, but over the years, a reliable one. At Oak, that meant gravitating toward the appetizer of Moroccan octopus and pork jowls with ají panca ($14). The jowls — fatty cubes of meat brushed with a crusty dressing of ají (a spicy dried chile of South America), paired with the greenish tendrils of tender octopus. The octo was without a hint of toughness; the pork itself melted on the tongue as the chile danced alongside the fragrant bite of cilantro and radish. Not only was it great, the dish may be the most satisfying indulgent I’ve tasted in Dallas all year.

From there, there’d be nowhere to go but down, though Oak maintains a high level throughout the menu. A composed melon terrine ($13) balanced the soothing, pastel flavors of honeydew and cantaloupe with more savory creaminess of chevre and salt from thin slices of Serrano ham. We were taken aback when the heirloom gazpacho arrived: Rather than pink or even yellow, it came as a clear jolt, and the filling ciabatta-roll bacon-gruyère burger puts most sandwiches to shame. At lunch and dinner, the Brussels sprouts — perfectly braised and dusted in panko and garlic — are a must-have.

Desserts ($8) overall are exceptional, and unexpected. Grains and starches make sense on main courses, but Oak inserts them healthily on the postres menu. There’s corn ice cream alongside their version of a financier, stuffed with a caramel glaze. Its layers are thin and crunchy; a treat that might be cause I knew he was right.

Attention to detail is evident at lunch as well, where the slight hint of licorice from the fennel in the fritto misto gives the texture a pleasant jolt, and the filling ciabatta-roll bacon-gruyère burger puts most sandwiches to shame. At lunch and dinner, the Brussels sprouts — perfectly braised and dusted in panko and garlic — are a must-have.

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Not really a bridesmaid

Dump ‘Bachelorette,’ a crass girlie rom-com

2012 is shaping up to be the summer when the movies embraced male strippers, first with Magic Mike and now, Bachelorette. We’re not complaining. Though, come to think about it, we kinda are.

Sure, we liked seeing Andrew Rannells (just days before his debut in The New Normal) shake his moneymaker for a few titillating moments in this wedding eve comedy, but that’s poor reason to endure this humorless stab at capitalizing on the girls-can-be-just-as-gross-as-boys Bridesmaids.

That had Kristen Wiig and Melissa McCarthy; this one has Kirstin Dunst and the comedic hand of Sen. Joe McCarthy. ‘Nuff said.

Aside from its misguided title (it’s not the sappy reality TV show — not by a long shot), the major problem with Bachelorette is that it never affects a truly light-hearted and silly tone. The things that go wrong — like the stripper accidentally calling the zaftig bride “Pig Face,” the sobriquet her frenemies stuck her with in high school, or the girls drunkenly ripping her wedding dress to shreds — come off less as humiliating missteps and more like genuine meanness. This is a comedy without a sense of comic timing. If ever someone deserved to get jilted at the chapel, it’s this Bachelorette.

— Arnold Wayne Jones

FRIENDS: A LOVE STORY | The bridesmaids (Isla Fisher, Kirstin Dunst, Lizzy Caplan) to this ‘Bachelorette’ would be better named ‘Mean Girls.’

COCO
From Page 18

ing a Moons Over My Hammy at Denny’s. We did not, however, expect to see — or rather hear — you as the voice of a Mamma Hippo in the Disney flick The Wild. How did that happen? I know the girl that did auditions for voiceovers and another guy who worked at Disney was a fan. As a goof, really, they had me audition and the director liked me and wanted me to do the voice of this hippo. I only had like two lines, but it was very exciting. I had done work for Disney before. You know the movie Tangled? Well, before it was Tangled, Disney has actors who are not known come in and do the voiceover of the characters and the artists draw to that. And then celebrities come in to do the voice. I was the voice of the evil queen, and then it changed to Tangled. But I got to work with the guy who drew and created the Little Mermaid, which is one of my favorite movies.

You had a similar behind-the-scenes moment with Rent, right? Yes, Jonathan Larson was a friend from college. And then I ran into him randomly in New York one night as I was trying to remember a song of his. It was one of those crazy moments. I was thinking, “God I wonder how I could get back in touch with John,” and then I look in a restaurant and there he was. So that weekend he came to see my show, he told me he was working on a musical and asked me to be in it. And I said, “Sure, why not?” It turned out to be Rent, and I was the first person to play Angel. And that was a great experience.

Between Rent and Tangled, you’re like the backbone of blockbusters. [Laughs] Yes, and then I get dropped.
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Saturday, October 27
HALLOWEEN 2012
THE STREET PARTY
Friday 09.07

Theatre Arlington pays its ‘Rent’

Jonathan Larson’s Pulitzer Prize-winning musical Rent has been a lightning rod for controversy, with its bisexual, gay, drug-addicted HIV-positive heroes — all of which really resonates with gay audiences. So we were pleased Theatre Arlington decided to mount a full-out production of it, with Andy Baldwin, one of our favorite comic actors, directing a show all about celebrating our seasons of love.


Saturday 09.08

GDMAF benefit returns to The Brick

For nearly 20 years, David Hearn has honored his late partner, Greg Dollgener — whom he lost to AIDS in 1994 — with a benefit called the PlanoBar Party. It outgrew Hearn’s home, so it returns to The Brick, with a theme based on the new Dallas TV show. Turn out in your best Bobby, J.R. or Sue Ellen costume and enjoy dancers, food, music and M.C. Patti La Piae Safe, pictured.

DEETS: The Brick, 2525 Wycliffe Ave. 7 p.m. $20 donation requested. GDMAF.org.

Thursday 09.13

City Performance Hall opens with gala weekend

It arrives three years after its brothers the Wyly and the Winspear, but the Dallas city-owned Performance Hall is finally, officially open, after $40 million and a lot of planning. The entire weekend is a celebratory gala, with four days of free and ticketed events, starting with the Thursday morning ribbon cutting and architecture tours, followed Friday through Sunday with music, a play by Cara Mia Theatre and much more.

DEETS: City Performance Hall, 2100 Ross Ave. Sept. 13–16. For a complete schedule of events, visit DallasCulture.org/CityPerformanceHall.asp.
MY TWO DADS | Out actor Andrew Rannells, left, and Justin Bartha play a gay couple who hire a surrogate mother in the hot new series “The New Normal,” which premieres Tuesday.

FRIDAY 09.07

THEATER
Dallas Pride Performing Arts Festival. Uptown Players’ second annual theater fest, with seven shows playing over eight days in repertory. Kalita Humphreys Theater, 3636 Turtle Creek Blvd. Visit UptownPlayers.org for complete schedule.


FINE ART


COMMUNITY


FUSE drop-in weekdays for gay and bi guys up to 29. Resource Center Dallas, 2701 Reagan St. Tuesdays–Fridays at 2 p.m. DFWFuse.com.

SATURDAY 09.08

COMMUNITY

Dallas FrontRunners fun run. Runners and walkers at all levels welcome. Meet on the patio of the recreation house at Sunset Bay at White Rock Lake Park. 8 a.m.

Once in a Blue Moon, women’s dance. DanceMasters Ballroom, 10675 E. Northwest Highway, Suite 2600B. 7 p.m.-midnight. $10. 972-479-0774.

Stonewall Group of Narcotics Anonymous. Meets daily at noon and 7:30 p.m. 2438 Butler Suite 108.

Youth First Texas groups for ages 14 to 22. 3918 Harry Hines Blvd. 5–10 p.m. 214-879-0400.
SUNDAY 09.09
COMMUNITY
Expressions, a free gender support group for men and women led by volunteers. Sponsored by Dallas Gender Society. Resource Center Dallas, 2701 Reagan St. 7 p.m. 214-540-4475.
Cowtown Leathermen cookout. Best Friends Club, 2820 E. Lancaster Ave., Fort Worth.

MONDAY 09.10
COMMUNITY
Leadership Lambda Toastmasters meets to improve public speaking and leadership skills. Oak Lawn Library, 4100 Cedar Springs Road. 6:30–8 p.m. 214-543-5860.
Stonewall Democrats of Tarrant County. Tommy’s Hamburger Grill, 3431 W. 7th St., Fort Worth. 7 p.m. 817-913-8743.
PFLAG Mesquite. St. Stephen United Methodist Church, 2520 Oates Drive, Mesquite. 7 p.m. 972-279-3112.

TUESDAY 09.11
COMMUNITY
Late Bloomers, social support group for women who came out later in life. La Madeleine, 3906 Lemmon Ave. 6 p.m. 903-778-4446.
Youth First Texas groups for ages 14 to 22. 3918 Harry Hines Blvd. 4–9 p.m. 214-879-0400.

BROADCAST
The New Normal. The hottest new series of the year is Ryan Murphy’s (Glee, American Horror Story) sitcom about a gay couple who hire a surrogate. Premieres on Ch. 5 at 8:30 p.m.

WEDNESDAY 09.12
THEATER
War Horse. The Tony Award-winning play, presented with life-sized puppet horses, tells the story of World War I from the perspective of the innocent animals who fought in it. Winspear Opera House, 2403 Flora St. Sept. 12–23. ATTPAC.org.

ONLINE
The Variants. The locally produced web series The Variants, set at gay-owned Zeus Comics, launches a new episode every Wednesday for its third season. TheVariants.com.

THURSDAY 09.13
THEATER
City Performance Hall. The gala opening of the new city-owned arts venue includes numerous functions throughout the weekend, including free concerts and architecture tours. 2100 Ross Ave. Sept. 13–16.

COMEDY
Miss Coco Peru is Present. The famed drag queen performs at the Rose Room. Station 4, 3911 Cedar Springs Road. Doors open at 6:30 p.m.; curtain at 7:30 p.m. $25–$40. Caven.com.

COMMUNITY
PFLAG Dallas. Northaven United Methodist Church, 12101 Preston Road. 7 p.m. 972-77PFLAG.

Friday 09.14
COMMUNITY
American Veterans for Equal Rights North Texas Chapter. Gay and Lesbian Community Center, 2701 Reagan, 7 p.m.
American Veterans for Equal Rights Lone Star Veterans Chapter. LGBT veterans group meets in Fort Worth. 7:30 p.m. Info at LSVCpres@aol.com.

BROADCAST
Lambda Weekly. LGBT radio for North Texas. This week’s guest is Fahari Institute’s Harold Steward. 89.3 KNON-FM at 7 a.m. LambdaWeekly.com.

Saturday 09.15
COMMUNITY
Late Bloomers, social support group for women who came out later in life. La Madeleine, 3906 Lemmon Ave. 6 p.m. 903-778-4446.
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BROADCAST
The New Normal. The hottest new series of the year is Ryan Murphy’s (Glee, American Horror Story) sitcom about a gay couple who hire a surrogate. Premieres on Ch. 5 at 8:30 p.m.

Sunday 09.16
COMMUNITY
American Veterans for Equal Rights North Texas Chapter. Gay and Lesbian Community Center, 2701 Reagan, 7 p.m.
American Veterans for Equal Rights Lone Star Veterans Chapter. LGBT veterans group meets in Fort Worth. 7:30 p.m. Info at LSVCpres@aol.com.

BROADCAST
Lambda Weekly. LGBT radio for North Texas. This week’s guest is Fahari Institute’s Harold Steward. 89.3 KNON-FM at 7 a.m. LambdaWeekly.com.

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09.07.12 • dallasvoice 29
CELEBRITY BIRTHDAY

Evan Rachel Wood turns 25 on Friday. Starting as a child actress on TV and movies, she has grown into a popular star of film (Across the Universe) and television (True Blood). In 2008 she played a lesbian in the film The Wrestler, and later came out as bisexual.

VIRGO Aug 23-Sep 22
Trust your creative and erotic instincts. Some rational discernment is necessary, but you should know quickly whether you are hearing the call of passionate brilliance or a siren’s song.

LIBRA Sep 23-Oct 22
Even without malicious intent, gossip can be damaging. Your friends mean well, but do you need blabbermouths complicating your life? Trust a partner’s advice on who your friends really are.

SCORPIO Oct 23-Nov 21
Challenges at work can bring out your best. It will take hard work, creativity and shrewd thinking. Your instincts are good, but it’ll take persuasion to get others to go along.

SAGITTARIUS Nov 22-Dec 20
Kindness and charity take considerable effort. Some poor, annoying fool probably has no idea that he is hitting your sensitive points. You don’t have to put up with it, but take the high road.

CAPRICORN Dec 21-Jan 19
As in a bad romantic comedy, a misunderstanding could lead to a passionate affair — though probably not more than that. Still, it could change your life. New ideas at work need some polish.

AQUARIUS Jan 20-Feb 18
News from your partner could knock you for a loop and change the relationship. If you think of it as a battle, you will lose the war. Pay attention and adapt. Necessary changes won’t be easy but will make things a lot better in the long run.

PISCES Feb 19-Mar 19
Confusion can lead you to friends for advice. Listen, but consider carefully how their suggestions conflict with your own values. From that clash of ideas will come something useful.

ARIES Mar 20-Apr 19
When people disagree with you, it’s not about you! That can be hard to remember at work especially. Efforts to charm will probably backfire. Just keep your nose to the grindstone.

TAURUS Apr 20-May 20
You want to make big changes at home, but consider others. Surprises will not be appreciated; sew recipes are a safer bet. There are no failures, only lessons.

GEMINI May 21-Jun 20
Glib charm will not go down well. Make your words matter. Use your charm to convey challenging notions. Being nice helps get the message across, but by itself it’s no message at all.

CANCER Jun 21-Jul 22
You need to take care of yourself and get back to basics. Reconsider your recent accomplishments and talk them over with a friend. A new moon on the 15th will bring new ideas to explore.

LEO Jul 23-Aug 22
No matter how much charm you pour on others, they may not be appreciated. Self-improvement is always a worthwhile effort. Working on yourself can open opportunities to play with others.

THIS WEEK

Mercury is lord of the zodiac now, but he’s in bad aspect. Reign in ego and criticism. Venus in Leo aspecting the outer planets is challenging us all to innovative change. Heed your intuition and keep it sweet.
Across
1 Man, as a cruising goal
5 Homo leader?
9 Skelton’s Kadiddlehopper
13 Parsey supporter
14 Willy Wonka creator
15 “___ want is a room somewhere…”
16 Start of the title of a memoir by 2-Down
19 Where G. Keillor began
20 Bit from Michael Musto
21 Rolling Stones ballad
22 David ___ Pierce
24 Sentence enders
26 Bathhouse feature
28 Working hard
31 Jane Saphir’s title
32 “Oscar wiled away the time,” for example
33 Endora, to Samantha
35 Queens tennis stadium
39 Like Indians
41 More of the title
42 Tennessee city named for a foil
43 Not now
44 ABC’s
46 ___ Pinafore
47 Augsburg article
48 State, to Cocteau
50 Like Kopay, from MLB
51 Robert Goulet musical
55 “See ya!”
57 Scary Movie Cheri
58 Bump from office
61 Sound from a small pussy
63 End of the title
66 On top of that
67 Baltic Sea tributary
68 Personal-ad stats
69 British carbine
70 Where to bet your bottom dollar
71 Left to pirates

Down
1 Novel ID
2 With 36-Down, lesbian writer with Tourette’s syndrome
3 Rescue Me star
4 Down wearer down under
5 Cut
6 Colette’s coffee
7 Sucker
8 Conduit bend
9 Rio festival
10 Hispanic family org.
11 Spanish hero
12 Sound system hookups
13 Connect with
18 It may be hard or soft
23 Rhett Butler’s final word
25 Go wrong
26 Petty quarrel
27 Instruction on a door
29 Culture Club’s “___ Miracle”
30 Items on hand
31 Newt, to Candace
32 Where to find lots of pricks
33 RBED of Eden director Kazan
34 Some like it hot
35 Reagan’s Attorney General Ed
36 Where to find lots of pricks
37 Where you can’t go again
38 Toward the sunrise
39 Hans Christian of fairy tales
40 Vino venue
44 Newt, to Candace
45 Where to find lots of pricks
48 East of Eden director Kazan
51 Brown bubbly beverages
52 Not straight
53 Reagan’s Attorney General Ed
54 Some like it hot
56 Kahlo’s cohort
59 Brings into play
60 “Oh, what the hell”
62 Toward the sunset
64 No to Rimbaud
65 Top off

Solution on page 29
Lots of entertainment as Pride Weekend approaches. ... Coco Peru appears in the Rose Room on Sept. 13 and 14 at 7:30 p.m. ... Comedian Suzanne Westenhoefer performs in the Vixen Lounge at Sue Ellen's on Sept. 14 at 10 p.m. Get your tickets now. ... Uptown Players begins its second annual Dallas Pride Performing Arts Festival at the Kalita Humphreys Theater. ... Mr. Dallas Eagle meet and greet begins at 5 p.m. on Sept. 7 at the Dallas Eagle. The Mr. Dallas Eagle contest begins at 5 p.m. on Sept. 8 followed by the Black & Blue Fetish Ball. ... The Party Raid Variety Show takes place at Sue Ellen's on Sept. 7. The Lauren Alexander Band performs on Sept. 8. ... Buddy Shanahan accompanies Anton Shaw on Sept. 12 at 9:30 p.m. at Alexandre's. The Andrea Dawson Band performs on Sept. 8 beginning at 10 p.m. ... Spencer West is at Woody's Sports and Video Bar on Sept. 7 at 7 p.m. On Sept. 8 it's Mi Diva Loca on Woody's back patio. Then the PSSA draft party takes place Sept. 9 from 3-7 p.m. Registration ends at 4:30 p.m. Register for Fall Ball for $30 online, $45 at the party or $60 on the field. Play begins Sept. 23. ... JR's Bar & Grill presents a Bob Mould CD release party on Sept. 10. Silver Age is the brand new rock album from the former Husker Du and Sugar frontman and includes the single "The Descent." Win free albums while supplies last starting at 11 p.m.
Amy, Chad and Justin at Dallas Eagle.

Friends' night out at Station 4.

Omar and Jeff at Reflections.

Mark and Steve at Alexandre's.

Jackie and Nadie at Sue Ellen's.

Bobby, James and Bunnie at the Rainbow Lounge. Friends' night out at BJ's NXS!

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Photo by Gregory Hayes

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AIDS Arms, Inc. is looking for an accounting and grants compliance analyst. This position assists the CFO in all aspects of the grant process and responsible for day-to-day accounting functions. A Bachelor’s degree in accounting is required with knowledge and experience in the principles of not-for-profit accounting and grants compliance. Interested candidates should forward resumes to careers@aidsarms.org.

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