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—WATERMARK OWNER, PUBLISHER AND EDITOR RICK CLAGGETT
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<th>Event</th>
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<tr>
<td>BoDeans</td>
<td>Sep 15</td>
<td>$24.50-$39.50</td>
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<td>Billy Cobham feat. Randy Brecker</td>
<td>Sep 21</td>
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<td>ZOSO - Led Zeppelin Tribute</td>
<td>Sep 28</td>
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<td>Curtain Up! A Broadway Musical Revue</td>
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<td>The Music Man</td>
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<td>The Official Blues Brothers Revue</td>
<td>Nov 21</td>
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<td>A Celtic Christmas</td>
<td>Dec 15</td>
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<td>Elf The Musical Jr.</td>
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WITH THIS ISSUE WATERMARK celebrates 25 years of publishing, 25 years of sharing information and helping to build a community. I am beyond proud to be a part of this organization.

As I sat down to write this column, I visited the words of Founder and Guiding Light Tom Dyer as he shared his thoughts on the 20th Anniversary of Watermark. It’s funny to see how much has changed, and how little has changed. We still operate with a small, dedicated staff who are as passionate about their work as they are talented. Watermark still focuses on local community news in its pages, offering a voice to stories other publications will not; and at times we still walk the fine line between financial gain and commitment to community partnerships.

The main difference, however, is how we get the job done. Tom referenced the changing times in his last “Publisher’s Perspective” with Watermark. The internet created a need for immediate information, a task difficult for a bi-weekly publication. Watermark adapted and with the help of then Art Director Jake Stevens created a website to bring breaking news to the community as it unraveled. Our partnership with the National LGBT Media Association and the Associated Press helped provide us the resources for that content, navigated by our Bureau Chiefs Jeremy Williams and Ryan Williams-Jent. Of course this change in times may double the work load, but it doesn’t distract us from our core purpose.

Watermark made a conscious decision to enter the rat race of news. Where we would like to be the first to break stories, and in some cases we should, Watermark would rather tell the full story. We have the opportunity to document the history of our community, to tell our stories from our perspective. We made it our goal to tell the stories that affect the nation, but to do it through the eyes of our local community. That is what sets us apart from everyone else. We can take the time to write about local artists and community leaders. We have the pages to talk about what smaller organizations are doing, what fundraising events they are hosting and provide them the advertising space to do that. We do not have an agenda other than reporting facts and sharing information to make our community stronger.

Watermark is your LGBTQ life, wherever you fall on the spectrum. Watermark is the voice of the LGBTQ community and that is vital. This makes Watermark more important than any one person. It’s bigger than its founder; it’s bigger than me or anyone who has graced its pages. It’s a collective, it’s all of you. That’s why it’s important for you to be active in it. If you have news you think we should report, tell us. If you have a compelling story you think the community needs to hear; tell us: call us or send us an e-mail. Social media is a great way to air your thoughts, but it’s easily missed in a busy feed. Reach out directly. I also encourage you to support our advertisers. Even if you like to read our articles on your phone, pick up an issue or flip through it on our website. Our advertisers are how we keep our voice alive; supporting them is the only way to ensure that voice is always here.

Watermark is currently at a staff of nine, split between two major areas: Central Florida and Tampa Bay. I’d like to thank them for their hard work. 25 years ago, there was a finite number of events and organizations to cover. Today our team attends events and covers stories for an ever growing list of organizations and celebrates with all of you at an ever growing calendar of events.

Thank you Jeremy Williams, our Central Florida Bureau Chief and only editorial staff member for the area. The tragic attack at Pulse has put a spotlight on Orlando and Jeremy has not skipped a beat in covering the evolution of the community. Thank you to my Tampa Bay counterpart, Ryan Williams-Jent. Ryan has been instrumental in improving our voice within the Tampa Bay community. Thank you to our sole Creative employee, Dylan Todd, who has not only stepped up to fill every big shoes, but has added his photography talents to our list of services we offer. Thank you to our Senior Account Managers Sam Callahan and Russ Martin, and Account Manager Brianna Rockmore whose hard work keeps the lights on and the doors open. Thank you to Sales Director Danny Garcia for being a true team player within the walls of Watermark. Thank you to Kathleen Sadler, our Business Manager, for literally everything. Nothing happens at Watermark without Kathleen and her work is much appreciated. Thank you to Tom Dyer whose advice and guidance are still very much part of Watermark. Finally, thank you to our readers and community for giving us purpose.

We strive to bring you a variety of stories, your stories. I hope you enjoy this look back on 25 years of Watermark.
**ORANGE COUNTY MAYOR NAMES NEW LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY LIAISON**

Jeremy Williams

**ORLANDO** | Chief of Staff to Orange County Mayor Jerry Demings, Roseann Harrington, announced Marc Espeso as special assistant to Demings during the One Orlando Alliance quarterly meeting held on Aug. 14. Espeso will act as the LGBTQ+ community liaison for Demings.

Espeso, who is currently Orange County’s digital communications editor, will expand his responsibilities to include the new position.

As the LGBTQ+ community liaison, Espeso will be responsible for coordinating various community engagement activities and services. The position will also create outreach programs to educate the public on services associated with Orange County Government, as well as represent Orange County at related community events.

“I’m pleased to make this key staff member appointment, and I have the utmost confidence in Marc’s abilities to represent Orange County,” said Demings in a statement. “As someone who is dedicated to the welfare of each county resident, he will be an enormous asset to both the leadership of Orange County Government and the LGBTQ+ community.”

According to Orange County, Espeso—along with the rest of the Orange County Communications team—is currently responsible for the public dissemination of information on digital platforms to Orange County’s more than 1.4 million residents and 75 million annual guests. On social media, he works to foster meaningful connections between residents and industries for the county’s departments, divisions and the mayor’s office. He has helped create award-winning communications plans for public safety, environmental and community initiatives.

Along with his work with Orange County, Espeso has volunteered with Come Out With Pride for the last three years and currently serves on its Pride board as communications director.

“I am honored and eager to help enhance the relationship between the LGBTQ+ community and Orange County Government,” Espeso said in a statement. “I look forward to working with residents and businesses to help Mayor Demings create a community that works for everyone.”

The One Orlando Alliance quarterly meeting was also attended by Orlando Mayor Buddy Dyer and City Commissioner Patty Sheehan. Dyer stated during the meeting that the City of Orlando has “no stronger relationship with Orange County than we do today” and said that “collaboration is on the way.”

Jennifer Foster, the executive director of the One Orlando Alliance, congratulated Espeso on his new responsibilities in a press release.

“The Alliance is proud to see the Mayor’s message of inclusiveness include representation from the LGBTQ+ community in our region,” she said. “Marc has demonstrated his positive work ethic through various projects with the Alliance and other local groups. I look forward to our continued partnership, as well as growing and collaborating with Orange County Government.”

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**God Complexity**

Pulse survivors to hold ‘ex-gay’ march same week leaders look to ban conversion therapy in Orange County

Jeremy Williams

**ORLANDO** | As LGBTQ leaders and community supporters gathered Aug. 15 at Stonewall Bar in Orlando to hold a rally to ban conversion therapy in Orange County, two Pulse shooting survivors appeared on a Christian podcast to discuss an ex-gay march they plan to hold at Lake Eola next month.

Luis J. Ruiz and Angel Colon—both survivors of the June 12, 2016 mass shooting at Pulse—are advising they are no longer gay and want to spread their message of “ex-gay” conversion by holding a march at Lake Eola Park in Orlando, less than two miles from Pulse, on Sept. 14.

Ruiz and Colon, under the name of Fearless Identity, plan to host the event in conjunction with Freedom March, a group of former LGBTQ people who march in major U.S. cities, proclaiming freedom in Christ.

Fearless Identity is a ministry founded by Ruiz and Colon—who also listed as the group’s CEOs—that "brings hope and understanding to the LGBTQ community and the church through education, biblical clarity and support in a judgment-free environment for those seeking the option to change.”

Ruiz and Colon spoke with conservative radio host Julie Roys on her Christian podcast Aug. 15 about their “Freedom March” and how finding God helped them to become “ex-gay.”

"It’s not a gay to straight thing. It’s a lost to saved thing,” Ruiz said of his conversion during the podcast.

Colon echoed the sentiments, saying "after I started testifying to the world, after I shared to the world that he is my God, that change is possible, that I left the homosexual lifestyle ... we became these men, these soldiers, these generals that aren’t scared anymore to share wherever they go the gospel of God.”

While Ruiz and Colon state that changing one’s sexual orientation is possible, that claim has been discredited by every mainstream medical organization in the U.S. and has even been shown to be deadly to LGBTQ youth.

According to statistics supplied by Equality Florida, LGBTQ youth who are forced to undergo conversion or reparative therapy are eight times more likely to attempt suicide, six times more likely to experience depression and three times more likely to abuse drugs.

These statistics were center stage during the Convert To Love rally at Stonewall Orlando. The event was emceed by LGBTQ activist Eric Rollings and featured speakers from Equality Florida, One Orlando Alliance, The Trevor Project, Thrive LGBTQ+, Orlando Youth Alliance and Zebra Coalition, as well as a conversion therapy survivor, State Sen. Linda Stewart and the former president of the reparative therapy organization Exodus International.

The online petition calling for the Orange County ban currently has more than 5,500 signatures. The Convert To Love coalition will be going before the Orange County commissioners and Orange County Mayor Jerry Demings on Sept. 10 at 9:30 a.m. to present the signatures and to ask them to ban the dangerous practice. The meeting is just four days before the “ex-gay” Freedom March.

A similar Freedom March, which was attended by Ruiz, was held in Washington, D.C. in May 2018 at the National Sylvan Theater. According to news outlets, the event was attended by about 36 people.

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Jeremy Williams
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**Metro, Can Break Ground on Tampa Expansion**

Ryan Williams-Jent

**Tampa |** Metro Inclusive Health, CAN Community Health and Alliant Partners began the restoration of Tampa’s German American Club for their Tampa expansion Aug. 15.

The partners announced their plans for their Tampa expansion in April after acquiring the historic venue, located at 2105 N. Nebraska Ave.

During the groundbreaking ceremony, they unveiled renderings of the restoration and their plans for a capital campaign to raise $2.5 million to assist in transforming the building into a state-of-the-art health center. They were joined by Tampa Mayor Jane Castor, a number of elected officials and LGBTQ community allies and advocates from throughout Tampa Bay.

“Without Alliant and the Capitano family, this effort would not be possible,” Metro CEO Lorraine Langlois says. “They have been some of our biggest cheerleaders and insisted on helping us stay and grow in Ybor.”

With community assistance, Metro and CAN completed the renovation of their 47,000 square foot facility in St. Petersburg in Dec. 2018. Once operational, the Tampa health center will join the St. Petersburg campus in offering technology that connect patients directly to their provider for real time access to essential services.

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**Sarasota Pride Skips 2019, Announces 2020 Celebration**

Ryan Williams-Jent

**Sarasota |** Sarasota Pride, Inc. announced Aug. 15 that its next PrideFest will be held Jan. 25, 2020 rather than in 2019, a departure from their traditional October celebrations.

Sarasota Pride aims to promote visibility and self-esteem among the LGBTQ community in Sarasota and throughout Florida. Chairman Cindy Barnes led the organization into its 29th year on Oct. 20, 2018 at J.D. Hamel Park.

“The park is hosting Oktoberfest Oct. 18-20,” Barnes confirmed to Watermark ahead of the announcement. “The city only allows so many events per date within the city limits.”

She added that while Oct. 12 was available, which could have allowed an Oct. 2019 outing, it conflicted with two other Prides in Florida. “Pulling from the same resources just makes a successful event almost impossible. With time to get on the city books and less Prides to complete with, [January] looks like our best option,” she advised.

Sarasota Pride’s official announcement came via social media. “We are hoping for cooler weather,” Barnes notes. “It will be season so we’re hoping to draw people here for the week events of Pride.”

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**Diversity Decision**

**Tampa recognizes LGBT-certified businesses by executive order**

Ryan Williams-Jent

**Tampa |** The city of Tampa will formally recognize LGBT-certified businesses in contracting and procurement opportunities, Mayor Jane Castor announced Aug. 14 during the National LGBT Chamber of Commerce (NLGCC) International Business & Leadership Conference.

The conference, held at the Tampa Convention Center Aug. 13-16, is the largest gathering of LGBTQ business leaders and allies in the world. Castor, Tampa’s 59th and first openly LGBTQ mayor, detailed her executive order directing the city to formally recognize LGBT businesses during a luncheon interview with NLGCC President Justin G. Nelson.

The NLGCC is the nation’s only organization dedicated to expanding economic opportunities for the LGBTQ business community. In addition to working with its 15 affiliate chambers—including the Tampa Bay Diversity Chamber of Commerce (TBDCC)—it also serves as the exclusive certification body for LGBT-owned businesses, granting them their LGBT Businesses Enterprise (LGBTBE) designation.

The NLGCC notes that by becoming an LGBTBE, businesses are able to build relationships with America’s leading corporations, generate clients and team with one another for contracting opportunities. They add that certification allows LGBT-owned businesses to differentiate themselves from competitors as corporate America becomes more inclusive.

Following the news, Castor shared via social media that she was honored to announce her executive order at the conference, making Tampa the second city in Florida to do so. Orlando became the first in April. Similarly, St. Petersburg added LGBT-owned businesses to its small business program in June.

“Thanks to the collaboration between NLGCC and our local affiliate chamber, the TBDDC, LGBT entrepreneurs in one of Florida’s largest and most inclusive cities will now have the opportunity to create jobs and develop innovations that benefit all who live there,” Nelson released in a statement. “Mayor Castor has declared Tampa as ‘open for business’ with all diverse communities, and has affirmed that ‘if you can buy it, a certified LGBT-owned business can supply it’.” We are excited to see LGBTBEs in every field from construction to catering and everything in between help grow the economy of Tampa and beyond.”

“Florida has always had one of the strongest networks of NLGCC certified LGBTBEs and LGBT-owned companies, and Mayor Castor’s policy will bring Tampa to the forefront of economic opportunity statewide,” NLGCC CEO Chance Mitchell added. “We know this policy in Tampa will encourage more mayors and city councils to proactively include the LGBT community for the optimum social and economic health of their cities.”

“LGBT-owned businesses contribute to the $1.7 trillion dollars that the LGBT business community puts into the national economy,” he continued. “Progressive and inclusive leadership as we are seeing in Tampa and across the country will ensure greater access to the American dream for every American.”

TBDCC President Justice Gennari also celebrated the news. “I couldn’t be more proud of this historic moment for Tampa to now recognize certified LGBT-owned Businesses, and as only the third city in the south to do so,” he shared. “We are eager for our members to take advantage of new opportunities with the NLGCC and TBDCC, which offer many programs, business development trainings, and networking opportunities to further support LGBTBEs in Tampa.”

The NLGCC will announce the opening of its Tampa LGBTBE supplier portal by Sept. 2019 and you can visit WatermarkOnline.com to watch video of Castor’s historic announcement. For more information about the NLGCC, visit NLGCC.org. For more information about the TBDCC, visit DiversityTampaBay.org.
Log Cabin Republicans Endorse Trump for 2020

Ryan Williams-Jent

TALLAHASSEE, FLA. | Rep. Michael Grieco (D-Miami Beach) filed House Bill 41 (HB41) for the second year Aug. 9, which aims to prohibit the discredited practice of conversion therapy throughout Florida.

Conversion therapy purports to change a child’s sexual orientation or gender identity using “psychological or spiritual intervention.” Florida has no statewide ban on conversion therapy, 21 of its cities, counties and municipalities have banned the practice.

HB41 defines conversion therapy as “any practice or treatment performed on an individual with the goal of changing the individual’s sexual orientation, including, but not limited to, efforts to change behavior, gender identity or gender expression, or efforts to reduce or eliminate sexual or romantic attraction or feelings toward an individual of the same gender.”

The Florida Democratic Office noted, in a press release, “Examples of this pseudo-scientific therapy can include shaming or emotionally traumatic or physically painful stimuli, with the hope that the victim will associate those stimuli with their identities.” They added that “Over 700,000 members of the LGBTQ community have been subjected to this practice with an expectation that tens of thousands more LGBTQ youth will also fall victim.”

Conversion therapy is widely opposed by prominent health associations including the American Medical Association, the American Academy of Pediatrics and the American Psychological Association. Studies have shown that the practice can lead to depression, anxiety, self-destructive behavior including suicide and fractured families.

“LGBTQ Floridians deserve to have their rights protected like every other person in this state,” Grieco advised in the same release. “Conversion therapy is a dangerous, desplicable and non-scientific practice that only harms people it is supposedly meant to ‘help.’”

Grieco continued, “The idea that it is still legal to subject our youth to this aggressive and hurtful ‘treatment’ is unconscionable. Treating sexual orientation as a mental illness is demeaning and conversion therapy can lead to many unintended but harmful effects. This isn’t the first time the bill has been carried by me and if it’s something near and dear to my heart. If passed, the bill would take effect July 1, 2020. Florida would become one of 19 states to ban conversion therapy and practitioners in violation would be subject to disciplinary proceedings.

Log Cabin Republicans Endorse Trump for 2020

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

In a turnabout from 2016, the National Log Cabin Republicans has endorsed Trump for re-election, asserting he “met his commitments” to LGBT people.

Robert Kabel and Jill Holman—who both are gay and serve as chair and vice chair of Log Cabin, respectively—announced the endorsement Aug. 15 in an op-ed for the Washington Post.

“Be treated equally, fairly and justly under the law is our goal, and we know that ‘Inclusion Wins’ is a mantra we share with the president,” they write. “The Log Cabin Republicans endorse Donald Trump for re-election as president.”

The endorsement is a surprise for numerous reasons. For starters, critics have said the Trump administration is overwhelmingly hostile to LGBT rights.

The long list of grievances includes the transgender military ban, the exclusion of LGBT people from the enforcement of civil rights laws and actions undermining LGBT rights in the name of “religious freedom.”

The same week, the Department of Labor announced a proposed rule that would undermine President Obama’s 2014 executive order against anti-LGBT workplace discrimination, allowing federal contractors to fire and refuse to hire LGBT employees by citing a religious objection.

Downplaying all that, the Log Cabin op-ed cites the Trump administration’s plan to beat the HIV epidemic by 2030, the global initiative to decriminalize homosexuality and the appointment of Richard Grenell, who’s gay, as U.S. ambassador to Germany.

“The is the party that Trump has helped make possible by moving past the culture wars that dominated the 1990s and early 2000s, in particular by removing gay rights as a wedge issue from the old Republican playbook,” Kabel and Holman write.

In conclusion, the op-ed acknowledges Log Cabin “does not agree with every policy” of the Trump administration, making a reference to the transgender military ban.

“We are committed to letting all qualified Americans serve in the military, and Log Cabin Republicans was a leader in the legal fight to end the ‘Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell’ policy,” the op-ed says. “We oppose the transgender service restriction and will continue to press the administration to reverse it.”

Log Cabin declined in 2016 to endorse Trump. The Republican presidential nominee never met with the LGBT group, which at time was a criterion for its support. (Log Cabin endorsed McCain in 2008 and Romney in 2012 after the candidates met with the organization.)

The announcement also comes as a surprise because Log Cabin usually waits until the Republican National Convention to make an endorsement decision. With the convention in Charlotte, N.C., more than a year away, Log Cabin makes a drastic departure from its usual practice.

Absent from the op-ed is the name or signature of Jerri Ann Homan, who serves as executive director of Log Cabin.

Bill to Ban Conversion Therapy Refiled in House

Ryan Williams-Jent

MIA M | Safeguarding American Values for Everyone (SAVE) is seeking its next executive director. Established in 1993, SAVE has fought for marriage equality, the banning of conversion therapy and Miami-Dade’s Human Rights Ordinance.

Tony Lima, SAVE’s former executive director, was removed from the position after four men charged with hate crimes in an anti-LGBTQ attack attended the group’s gala in June. SAVE’s founding chair Damian Pando was named interim executive director July 11.

SAVE is looking for “a dynamic leader with extensive, in-depth knowledge of LGBTQ issues, experience in fundraising, understanding of the South Florida media landscape (English/Spanish; Creole is a plus) and digital communications strategies.” Responsibilities include representing SAVE in the community with a focus on the organization’s mission, partnering with legislators and advocates, managing a cohesive team and more.

For more information, visit SAVELGBT/ExecutiveDirector.

Palestinian Police Ban LGBT Group from Holding Events in West Bank

Michael K. Lavers of The Washington Blade, Courtesy of the National LGBT Media Association

PALESTINIAN AUTHORITIES have banned an LGBT advocacy group from holding events in the West Bank.

AlQaws for Sexual and Gender Diversity in Palestinian Society stated Louay Arzeikat, a spokesperson for the Palestinian Civil Police Force, said authorities “would prohibit any event organized or held by AlQaws for Gender and Sexual Diversity in Palestinian Society.”

AlQaws earlier this month announced it held a meeting in the West Bank city of Nablus. Israeli media reported the group was also planning to hold a second gathering at the end of this month. AlQaws began in Jerusalem in 2001. It currently has four offices in the West Bank and Israel.

“AlQaws has always aimed to work with and across our whole society, despite occupation and apartheid policies that fragment Palestinian society into groups living under different forms of Israeli control and domination and in different socio-political contexts,” reads alQaws’ website. “AlQaws creates local youth leadership across four main locations, as well as builds a unified national Palestinian LGBTQ leadership that practices self-determination and strives toward a de-colonized Palestine.”
I even have a onesie at home—ironically, hanging in my closet. Again, the design is in public domain: Gilbert Baker did not see a percentage of the proceeds. I am not an estate collecting residuals from sales.

When Gilbert was told flag designs are in public domain, he was unphased and immediately at peace that the rainbow flag belongs to everyone for them to do with as they wish. Over his life, he would ruminate on this phenomenon as he would design major installations which involved flags of various nations including our own—most notably for the 1984 Democratic convention where Gilbert used the Stars and Stripes as a work of art filled with impotent wishes that a miracle would happen and Mondale/Ferraro would rise victorious over the charismatic juggernaut Reagan.

Gilbert’s flag was there for me when I was coming out of the closet, which was mom like wading through a vat of Jell-O than dramatically bursting through the door as many of my friends did. I bought a thin stripe rainbow cling in Orlando’s since-gone ViMi District and I put it in the back window of my shitty Nissan. Primarily it was a way of letting the boys know I was on their team, but gained a deeper meaning in the wake of Matthew Shepard’s death. In fear for her son’s life, Mom asked me to remove it. I refused and an activist heart was stoked; a tender activist, mind, but an activist nonetheless. Around that same time, a friend was asked by a homophobic relative about his rainbow license plate. He said he had it because he liked rainbows. It was the ’90s, we chose our educational moments carefully, but Gilbert’s flag was there coaxing those discussions. I’m fairly sure the relative absorbed my friend’s answer with skepticism and probably never stopped thinking about it.

Corporate America has used Gilbert’s flag to get to our wallets through our hearts and sometimes doing so to deflect from missteps. When we see Target’s giant display of rainbow items at the front of their store each June, we don’t bother to remember how recently they were backing homophobic candidates for “business reasons.”

Remember Bayard Rustin when you slip on that temporary tattoo. Remember Harvey Milk when you wave his flag. Remember Christine Jorgensen when you wave the June 12, 2016 massacre and, at times, I have wondered if that is such a good thing. Does coloring everything rainbow give us armor against dealing with the larger harder issue of gun violence and violence in general? Our local governments have colored crosswalks and business tax receipts rainbow knowing they are impotent to do anything real in the face of the legislature the powerful gun lobby has craftily put in place. Ironic that we have hidden behind a symbol that was intended to make us more visible.

“Who owns an idea? Who owns a vision?” Gilbert asks when recalling how Cleve Jones would claim full credit for The Names Project – AIDS Memorial Quilt. Among the many achievements in a remarkable life, Gilbert sewed the first real panel of that quilt. “Ideas are the properties of those who make them realities,” Gilbert asserts. I would add that those ideas become the responsibility of those who inherit them. Learn about the history that has brought us to this moment and honor it as best you can. Yes, by all means, wear your rainbow-striped speedo proudly, but remember Gilbert [Baker] when you do.

By all means, wear your rainbow-striped speedo proudly, but remember Gilbert [Baker] when you do.

THE TENDER ACTIVIST

The Commodification and Bastardization of Pride

AS I WRITE THIS, I’M midway through “Rainbow Warrior: My Life in Color,” the autobiography of Gilbert Baker which was published posthumously. Gilbert, you may or may not know, is the creator of the now ubiquitous rainbow flag. In addition to giving the fascinating details of the birth of our community’s flag, the book is an invaluable look into queer history from San Francisco’s point of view, from just prior to Harvey Milk becoming a city supervisor on.

Harvey was among several voices who encouraged Gilbert to come up with a symbol for the queer community that was positive, unlike the rosa winkel from the Holocaust. The pink triangle that branded gay men in Hitler’s Germany served solely as the symbol for those ideas become the realities,” Gilbert asserts.

I would add that those ideas become the responsibility of those who inherit them. Learn about the history that has brought us to this moment and honor it as best you can. Yes, by all means, wear your rainbow-striped speedo proudly, but remember Gilbert when you do.
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FOR 25 YEARS, IN NEARLY 700 issues, Watermark has been telling the stories of Central Florida and Tampa Bay’s LGBTQ communities.

First premiering in Orlando in 1994, and then expanding into Tampa Bay in 1995, Watermark now covers more than a dozen counties across the state. We can be found in many Florida cities including Daytona Beach, Orlando, Tampa, St. Petersburg, Clearwater and Sarasota—and thanks to WatermarkOnline.com, we have developed an international audience which relies on us for news, politics, sports, arts and entertainment as it pertains to the LGBTQ community.

Watermark has covered the gamut of the ever-changing sexual orientation and gender identify alphabet as it has evolved over the last quarter century, something you will see in the subsequent pages. We have devoted a page to each year Watermark has been in publication to highlight just some of the LGBTQ history we have covered over the last 25 years.

Watermark has reported on the events that have shaped this community, but as we are also a part of this community; we have been there to celebrate, mourn and fight with you. We have been here to let you know what is happening to the community in the U.S. and around the world, but most importantly we have been in your neighborhoods, your community organizations and your LGBTQ safe spaces to share your local stories.

Thank you for bringing us into your homes for the last 25 years, and thank you for your support as we continue to bring you your stories for years to come.

We strive to bring you a variety of stories, your stories. We hope you enjoy our look back at 25 years of Watermark.
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Watermark Your LGBTQ Life. AUGUST 22 - SEPTEMBER 4, 2019 // ISSUE 26.17 WATERMARKONLINE.COM
I moved back to Orlando in 2008. It was my first time living in Central Florida as an adult. I was born in Colorado and, as a kid, the family moved to Florida where we lived up and down I-4—settling in Orlando then St. Petersburg and eventually Plant City where I attended high school. Sometime after graduation, life led the family to southern Georgia and from there I joined the Air Force and travelled all over the world.

I tell you that quick trek through my past because in my 40 years I have lived in many places, but no place has ever felt more like home to me than living in Orlando right now, and a good part of that feeling is due to Watermark.

When I moved back nearly 11 years ago, it felt a bit overwhelming. I was living in a small country town in Georgia and prior to that I was serving in the military under the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy with George W. Bush at the helm as my commander-in-chief. This was the first time in my life that I was going to be able to spread my wings and be as gay as I wanted to be.

My first night in a new town, I met a guy on MySpace. Yes, MySpace. It was the latest issue of Watermark. Where I was from, I didn't have publications dedicated to news and information for the LGBTQ community. What happened in that newsroom is what has happened in Central Florida and Tampa Bay for 25 years now. The stories in the pages of Watermark that make up this community not only serve to inform and educate the community but also open the hearts and minds of those who may not have given the LGBTQ people another thought.

I am so proud to be a part of this Watermark family and to help continue the tradition of telling my community’s stories. Congratulations to the entire staff of Watermark, both current and past, for the hard work and dedication over the past quarter century in bringing the community’s stories to the world.

I don’t say that solely as a journalist who loves his job; I also say it as someone who loves the community Watermark serves, of which I’m proudly a part. Watermark’s expansion magnified Tampa Bay’s LGBTQ population and our allies in remarkable ways, detailing the triumphs and tragedies facing our community as only members of our community could. Our stories matter and deserve to be told. Watermark told them.

I was first introduced to the newspaper in 2011, when I discovered a copy inside of St. Petersburg’s former LGBTQ hotspot Georgie’s Alibi. It was the same locale where I’d eventually meet my husband and the majority of our friends-turned-family, so I’ll always be grateful for the safe space it provided in addition to its impeccable reading materials.

As an Ohio transplant, it was through Watermark that I found a community of other safe spaces in Florida. In its pages and on its website were stories by and for the LGBTQ community and its allies—news features, opinion pieces and more—all supported by advertisers who supported us. Tom’s decision to head to Tampa Bay had a profound impact on me, all those years later.

While I’ve never worked directly with him, I’ve been lucky enough to interact with Tom throughout my time here. It’s an honor to play even a small role in cultivating what he created—and as you’ll see in this commemorative 25th anniversary issue, his presence is always welcome and felt in our pages past and present. To many in Tampa Bay and Central Florida, and to this newspaper, he is a guiding light.

Rick Claggett, who purchased Watermark in 2016, is one of mine. As our current owner, publisher and editor, he hired me in 2017—allowing me to serve this community in ways I never knew were possible and proving he makes excellent decisions in the process. I say that last part jokingly, but he really does; Watermark’s staff is a family dedicated to this community.

That dedication starts with Rick and as you’ll see in this commemorative 25th anniversary issue, his presence is always welcome and felt in our pages past and present. To many in Tampa Bay and Central Florida, and to this newspaper, he is a guiding light.

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The dedication starts with Rick and I can’t imagine Watermark without his leadership.

We live in a time when both journalism and the LGBTQ community are under constant assault from Washington, D.C., frequently via Twitter tantrums at 280 characters at a time. In this age of alternative facts, journalists are the enemies of the people and members of the LGBTQ community are unfit to serve, but we will not be silenced and we will not be erased.

For 25 years, Watermark has been dedicated to showcasing your LGBTQ life and that remains the case today. Your truth matters and deserves to be told. Watermark will tell it.
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warscraps Your LGBTQ life. AUGUST 22 - SEPTEMBER 4, 2019 // ISSUE 26.17 WATERMARKONLINE.COM
FIT FOR PRINT

**Times change, but Watermark’s mission remains the same**

As a child of the 1980s and 90s, I struggled to understand what it meant to be gay. I had heard the perspective of my church, of course, but that message was not exactly positive.

There was no Google search and there weren’t any websites for me to turn to for advice, opinions or factual information about who gay people were. So like many of those from my generation, I relied on the books on my parents’ shelves and the resources at the local library. And when I would read those I felt as though I was in a spy novel, sneaking out whatever information I could in short bursts before my curiosity was discovered.

While I was able to learn a little, those resources only focused on the sexual acts of gay people and psychological studies. There was never any social context.

As I grew older I found some newspapers in mid-America that offered at least a few pages to the gay community. Remember “LGBTQ” wasn’t even in use then. In college I would always pick up a copy of community papers to read about people with similar life paths as mine. That’s when I finally realized I wasn’t alone.

I wasn’t totally out at the time and reading those publications made me feel connected to other gay people, both men and women, at a time when I was still navigating my own path to self-acceptance. For a long time I was a silent member of a community that had its own history, traditions and perspective that was foreign to me.

Even when I decided on a career in journalism in my sophomore year of college, I never expected to be one of our community’s many voices.

When fate let me to Tampa Bay and gave me an opportunity to become a writer with Watermark in 2004, I always saw the job as way more than “just a job.” It was a passion and one that I enjoyed and fully invested my life in for more than 10 years.

As Watermark celebrates its impressive 25 years in an era of targeted discrimination that we haven’t seen in more than a decade, we should celebrate that a quality, local newspaper that gives a voice directly to the LGBTQ community still exists.

Times have certainly changed in many ways since the first issue was published in 1994. The paper had an entirely different staff, a different layout and a very different feel. But its mission then is the same as it is now, to provide a perspective into Florida’s LGBTQ community that can’t be found anywhere else.

It’s true that our community has “mainstreamed” in recent years. Television shows are dedicated to the drag community and episodes of dramas and comedies on network, cable and streaming TV have regular LGBTQ characters. Even mainstream publications now cover our Pride parades, our openly LGBTQ elected officials and document same-sex weddings and adoption issues.

But nothing can compare to the unique perspective that an LGBTQ-focused publication can provide. Am I biased? Probably so.

During my decade with Watermark I had a unique opportunity to meet and work with a variety of people who keep the engine that is the LGBTQ community running. From board members of local organizations to bar owners who always provided a safe space for our community to gather, I was able to capture a part of the story that many may never get a chance to see.

There was plenty of drama, of course. When a major disagreement between a promoter and a performer went public, it was the duty of the newspaper to report it to the community in a way that was neutral in voice. When government entities would try to silence us by banning Gay Pride (little “g”), little friends and colleagues to this day, even though I am no longer employed by this remarkable publication.

As the LGBTQ community continues to make strides toward equality, even in an incredibly difficult and sometimes dark journey through the current political climate, I challenge its readers to stay with the paper and its dedicated staff of writers, photographers and advertisers. Without local LGBTQ publications and websites, a perspective would be lost that larger media companies just can’t provide.

Without local LGBTQ publications and websites, a perspective would be lost that larger media companies just can’t provide.

I am always proud to tell people that I was once the editor of Watermark and have often bragged about some of the paper’s accomplishments, even if I was not directly involved.

Thank you to Tom Dyer, who started this paper, and those who have kept the paper running since I left in 2015. If I could offer just one piece of advice to those working at and writing for Watermark, it would be this: Even though technology has changed the way in which many people consume the news, remember that the mission of what you do is still as important as it was 25 years ago.

Somewhere there is a person who can’t be as connected as he or she would like to be with the LGBTQ community and the only outlet they may have is through the product you create. Continue to provide the best product you can to embrace those you may not even be able to see.

Congratulations on 25 years, Watermark! ✨

Steve Blanchard was the former editor of Watermark and currently works in public relations. He lives in Tampa with his husband and their two dogs.
DAM RIPPON - Adam Rippon became the first openly gay man to compete for the U.S. in the Winter Olympics in 2018. Rippon went on to win a bronze medal as part of the U.S. male figure skating team in Pyeongchang, making him the first openly gay U.S. athlete to win a medal at the Winter Olympics.

BROKEBACK MOUNTAIN - Brokeback Mountain, a same-sex love story between two male cowboys, is released by a major motion picture studio in 2005 and becomes a game changer in LGBTQ cinema. The film is nominated for nine Academy Awards—including Best Picture—winning three. Unfortunately, it loses the top prize to the film "Crash."

COX, LAVERNE - Laverne Cox brings transgender issues into the mainstream around the world when she came out as a lesbian, in real life and on her network sitcom, in April 1997. "The Puppy Episode," which saw DeGeneres’ character also named Ellen come out, was watched by 42 million people and won two Emmy Awards. DeGeneres would go on to host one of the most successful daytime talk shows of the 2000s and is one of the most recognizable faces in Hollywood.

FRANK OCEAN - R&B artist Frank Ocean writes in an open letter posted to his Tumblr page in 2012 that his first true love was a man. Members of the hip hop industry mostly responded positively to Ocean’s declaration of love. While Ocean has not specifically labeled himself bisexual, he has stated that he has loved both men and women in the past.

GLEE - The musical TV series “Glee” premieres on FOX in 2009. The show, which focuses on a high school glee club in Ohio, becomes an instant hit and makes openly gay series creator Ryan Murphy a household name. Murphy goes on to create some of the most talked about TV shows of the last 10 years, including “American Horror Story,” “American Crime Story,” “Feud” and “Pose.”

HEDWIG AND THE ANGRY INCH - John Cameron Mitchell writes and stars in a rock musical Off-Broadway (1998) and then in a film version (2001) of “Hedwig.” The musical follows a transgender rockstar who travels the country performing and looking for the ex-lover who stole her lyrics.

KEA - Bea runs an ad on TV showing two men shopping for furniture together in 1994. It is the first TV commercial to feature a gay couple. Over the next 25 years, ads selling everything from soup and medicine to cars and banking services will feature same-sex couples doing the same day-to-day shopping that straight couples do.

JONATHAN LARSON - Jonathan Larson writes the musical "RENT," which opens on Broadway in 1996, changing the face of Broadway, musicals and how we see people living with AIDS. "RENT" becomes a cultural phenomenon, earning four Tony Awards, a Pulitzer Prize and a Grammy among its honors. Unfortunately, Larson doesn’t get to see any of its success as he unexpectedly dies at the age of 35 on Jan. 25, 1996, the day "RENT" began its Off-Broadway preview.

KING, BILLIE JEAN - One of the greatest to ever play the game of tennis, Billie Jean King is honored with the Smithsonian’s “Greatest Americans” medal in 2018. She is one of only five Americans to receive this honor to date and the only LGBTQ person.

LADY GAGA - Lady Gaga made it clear that it’s okay for members of the LGBTQ community to be themselves from the day she broke into the pop music scene with “The Fame” in 2008, but her hit single “Born This Way” became an LGBTQ anthem in 2011 and secured her spot in the equality history books.

MOONLIGHT - “Moonlight” wins the Best Picture Oscar at the 89th annual Academy Awards in Feb. 2017. “Moonlight” was announced the victor after presenters Warren Beatty and Faye Dunaway incorrectly name “La La Land” the winner. “Moonlight” becomes the first LGBTQ-themed movie and the first film with an all black cast to win The Academy’s top prize.

NEIL PATRICK HARRIS - Neil Patrick Harris comes out as gay in 2006. Harris, best known up to that point as playing the titular character in the TV series “Doogie Howser, M.D.,” begins playing the straight, womanizing Barney Stinson on the hit sitcom “How I Met Your Mother.” Harris becomes one of Hollywood’s “go-to” emcees for award season, hosting the Tony Awards four times, the Emmy Awards twice and the Academy Awards once.

OBAMA, BARACK - President Barack Obama becomes the first sitting president to support marriage equality when, in a 2012 interview with ABC News, he says “I think same-sex couples should be able to get married.” Three years later, when the Supreme Court ruled in favor of same-sex marriage, Obama has The White House lit up in rainbow colors.

Pop culture has always been ahead of the game when it comes to opening the hearts and minds of society. Long before the majority of the U.S. supported marriage equality, believed LGBTQ rights were human rights and accepted that we were born this way, the LGBTQ community was being acknowledged in movies, music, TV shows, books and more.

We have gathered the ABC’s of LGBTQ pop culture moments from over the last quarter century to remind you of a few of those times that made us feel like we were being seen.

OP CULTURE HAS ALWAYS BEEN AHEAD
POSE - Ryan Murphy’s drama series about the ballroom culture scene in 1980’s New York City, “Pose” premieres on FX in June 2018. The series features the largest transgender cast for any scripted TV show in history. “Pose” is a critical and commercial hit, earning several Emmy and Golden Globe nominations.

QUEER EYE FOR THE STRAIGHT GUY - “Queer Eye for the Straight Guy” premieres on cable TV network Bravo in July 2003. The reality show introduces a team of gay men known as the “Fab Five”—chef Ted Allen, hairstylist Ryan Douglas, interior designer Thom Filicia, fashionista Carson Kressley and pop culture expert Jai Rodriguez—to straight guys “in need of a makeover.” The show is an instant hit and runs for five seasons. The series gets a reboot from Netflix in 2018 with an all-new Fab Five.

RUPAUL’S DRAG RACE - Legendary drag queen RuPaul launches “Drag Race,” a reality competition series on the LGBTQ network Logo, in 2009. The show features RuPaul and a panel of judges selecting America’s next drag superstar. The show becomes a pop culture sensation and brings drag from LGBTQ bars to mainstream America, making the queens that appear on the show full-fledged royalty.

SHOWTIME - The paid cable channel Showtime sets itself apart from competitors HBO and Cinemax by giving audiences two of the first LGBTQ dramas on TV with “Queer as Folk” (QaF) in 2000 and “The L Word” in 2004. “QaF”—which runs for five seasons—looks at the lives of five gay men and a lesbian couple in Pittsburgh. “The L Word”—which runs for six seasons—follows a group of lesbian friends living in West Hollywood. Both shows develop dedicated fan bases.

TRANSPARENT - “Transparent,” a dramedy series about a family coming to terms with their father coming out as transgender, debuts on Amazon Prime in 2014. Series creator Jill Soloway, who identifies as nonbinary and gender non-conforming, created the show after being inspired by their parent who came out as trans. The series ran for four seasons.

UNIVERSAL PICTURES - Universal Pictures releases “To Wong Foo, Thanks for Everything! Julie Newmar” in 1995, starring mainstream Hollywood stars Wesley Snipes, Patrick Swayze and John Leguizamo as drag queens. The movie opened no. 1 at the U.S. box office.

VAN NESS, JONATHAN - Jonathan Van Ness, Antoni Porowski, Tan France, Karamo Brown and Bobby Berk are named the new Fab Five as Netflix reboots “Queer Eye” (dropping “For The Straight Guy” from the title) in 2018 for a new generation. The series moves out of the New York setting of the original and takes the makeovers to Atlanta and Kansas City.

WILL & GRACE - “Will & Grace” premieres on NBC in Sept. 1998, bringing LGBTQ characters, lives and storylines into primetime. The show is credited for educating Americans on LGBTQ issues and is said to be responsible for opening doors to more LGBTQ-themed programming in the 2000s. The show runs for eight seasons, winning 18 Emmy Awards, and is rebooted with the original cast for three more seasons starting in 2017.

LIL NAS - Lil Nas X and his song “Old Town Road” take the radio by storm in 2019. The remix of the part country-part rap song featuring Billy Ray Cyrus tops the Billboard Hot 100 for a record-breaking 19 weeks. In June 2019, Lil Nas X comes out as gay on Twitter and, in doing so, becomes the first artist to do so while having a no. 1 hit song.

yas! - The word “yas,” which is actually much older than 25 years, makes its way into mainstream pop culture in the 2010s thanks to shows like “Drag Race,” “Broad City” and “Pose.” Yas—either by itself or grouped with words like “kween” or “bish”—become the chants of queens as their subjects clack their fans.

ZAMORA, PEDRO - Pedro Zamora is one of the first openly gay men with AIDS to be portrayed in popular media. Zamora brought international attention to HIV/AIDS as well as LGBTQ issues and prejudices through his appearance on MTV’s reality television series, “The Real World: San Francisco” in 1994. Zamora dies on Nov. 11, 1994, hours after the final episode of “The Real World: San Francisco” airs on MTV.
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**watermark Your LGBTQ life. AUGUST 22 • SEPTEMBER 4, 2019 // ISSUE 26.17 WATERMARKONLINE.COM**
Looking Back

With a staff of just three—me, layout editor April Gustetter and account executive Keith Peterson—we worked 36-hours straight to get the first issue out on time, waxing the backs of photos and ads to place them on 24 black-and-white pages... and boy were we proud of them.

The timing was right for an ambitious local LGBT newspaper and talented contributors came out of the woodwork. Many like David Almeida, Keith Baber, Mike Klugaro, Tod Maine, Nan Schultz, Patty Sheehan and Sara Singhaus, were already friends and their unconditional support back then still touches me. Others like Jim Creseitelli, Ken Kundis, Jill Porter, Rosanna Sloan, Dimitri Toscas, Greg Triggs and Diane Wilde, quickly became part of a growing family.

But writers and photographers weren't the only saviors. More than 40 businesses advertised in that first issue, including three that have been with us ever since: Don Reid Ford, attorney Jeffrey Miller (Seifert & Miller), and Barber & Latto, PAs.

It's sobering to note how many ads in 1994 were related to HIV/AIDS... still mostly a death sentence back then. Vuitnica—an industry that bought the life insurance policies of financially needy AIDS sufferers—took up several pages alongside mostly deluting medical news and a relentless string of obituaries. And with the adoption of "Don't Ask. Don't Tell" by the once-sympathetic Clinton administration, LGBT equality seemed farther away than ever.


Watermark also noted the emergence of prominent "gayborhoods" near downtown Orlando. And for Christmas I interviewed either Paul Wegman or his iconic drag creation "P"—I'm not sure who was answering my questions.

By the end of the year, Watermark had grown to 32 pages. We must've been doing something right.

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Photo Captions

1. The improvisations comedy troupe featured clockwise from top left: David Almeida, John Geer, Rob L' умеaux, Martin Kehr, Troy Tinker and Catherine Goodwin (not pictured).

2. Watermark kicks its first charity event with the fabulous Lily Tomlin, pictured with her friend Russell Scott at Century's Red Ribbon Ball.

3. Tom Woodard (left) was profiled five years after his groundbreaking legal battle to be reinstated by the Orange County Sheriff's office after he admitted under questioning to having sex with a man. His attorney, at right, was still there.


5. Bruce Grod and at Out & About Books in 1994, one of the fastest growing gay businesses in the nation.

6. Doug Beasner and Kathy Seney starred in a production of Larry Kramer's The Destiny of Me.

7. The founder of the Hope and Help Center of Central Florida, Chuck Hammer, died of AIDS on September 19, 1994. Hope and Help moved into its current Winter Park offices the same month.

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Most Popular Song
"The Sign" by Ace of Base

Best Selling Album
Grace by Jeff Buckley

Most Popular TV Show
Friends

Fan Favorite Film
The Shawshank Redemption

Highest Grossing Film
The Lion King

Best Picture Oscar
Schindler's List

Price of Gas
$1.11 per gallon

Celebrities Who Came Out
Olympic swimmer Greg Louganis

Out Elected Officials
U.S. Rep. Gerry Studds (D-MA),
U.S. Rep. Barney Frank (D-MA),
U.S. Rep. Steve Gunderson (R-WI)

Number of States with Marriage Equality
0
1995

ON THE COVER

In honor of Watermark’s anniversary, publisher Tom Dyer looked back at 20 years in local and national LGBT history—one remarkable year at a time. This is one of his favorite covers from 1995.

VOLUME 2, ISSUE 20

WATERMARK COVERED

Tampa Bay almost immediately and in 1995 we made it official, hiring Todd Simons as Tampa Bay editor. We joined two respected Bay Area monthlies: The Gazette and Stonewall.

George Alvan began “AIDS Chronic”, his touching serial about living with HIV. (He’s still with us and feeling great.) And Jim Crescitali introduced “Watercress,” his slice-of-gay-life column that was a beloved staple of the newspaper for the next 15 years.

In Tampa David Caton’s American Family Association succeeded in placing an “Amendment One” referendum legalizing discrimination on the city ballot, but a legal team led by Keith Roberts got the referendum thrown out. Caton then talked the Hillsborough county commission into repealing discrimination protections for gays and lesbians. But Tampa’s LGBT community mobilized, planting the seeds for what is now Equality Florida.

In Orlando, Mayor Glenda Hood announced at an MBA meeting that citywide non-discrimination protections were simply unattainable. In a groundbreaking Watermark interview, County Chair Linda Chapin was more open-minded but equally pessimistic.

The City of Orlando doublebooked the Lake Eola bandshell, moving Orlando Regional Pride to City Hall. Disney extended benefits to the domestic partners of employees. Peter Thorson opened Rainbow City in the VMU District. And Patty Sheehan announced that she would run for city council.

While the nation was diverted by the O.J. Simpson trial, AIDS deaths reached their all-time high: 41,699. Three days after a gay man shared a crush on The Jenny Jones Show, the object of his affection shot and killed him. President Bill Clinton alienated gays by defending “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell,” but he also declassified homosexuals as security risks.

In Europe, Sweden joined Denmark and Norway as the third Nordic country to legalize same-sex marriage.

To Wong Foo, Thanks for Everything Julie Newmar—featuring Patrick Swayze and Wesley Snipes in drag—was a surprise hit. And Melrose Place, NYPD Blues and All My Children introduced gay characters.

At the end of the year I wrote: “In 1995 our collective attitude has changed—from fear, to hope, to expectation.”
LIKE DOROTHY LANDING

In Oz, Watermark exploded into full color in 1996. We added a nightlife ‘Waterfront’ pullout section, and our full time staff grew from four to seven. By the end of the year, the newspaper had grown to 64 pages.

In Orlando, Paty Sheehan missed a runoff for city commission by just 75 votes. In Seminole County, anti-gay conservative State Rep. Marvin Couch was arrested for getting a blow job from a prostitute in his car.

Gay Day got big, attracting 40,000 to the Magic Kingdom. Navy Lt. Keith Meinhold was guest of honor at the Spectrum Awards and then Orlando Regional Pride. After the Atlanta Olympics, Watermark scored an interview with diver Patrick Jeffrey, who came out. And Orlando’s first gay restaurant—Union—opened on Shine Ave.

In Tampa, Gala Festival V became the biggest convention in the city’s history. Maya Angelou and Harvey Fierstein opened the quadrennial gathering of international gay and lesbian choruses. In October, John Waters attended the 7th Pride Film Festival, by then one of the largest gay film showcases in the nation.

Tampa Bay editor Todd Simmons wrote touchingly about the loss of his partner, Nivaldo Gonzales Obregan, to AIDS. Tampa AIDS Network’s ‘Art for Life’ raised $20,000, and AIDS Walk Tampa Bay kicked in another $75,000. But in Pinellas, a county official leaked a confidential list of HIV-positive persons... after using it to screen dates.

Six new bars opened: Solar, Oasis, Impulse, Metropolis, Wet Spot and Flavours. Gay-owned businesses like MC Film Festival on Kennedy helped define the city. Nationally, the Supreme Court ruled Colorado’s ban on anti-discrimination ordinances unconstitutional. Simmons called Romer v. Evans, “the most important development to date in the gay civil rights movement.” And the Hawaii Supreme Court supported the rights of gays and lesbians to marry, igniting a flurry of state initiatives—mostly to prevent such marriages.

Studies showed that a combination of drugs could dramatically reduce levels of HIV in blood. AIDS deaths dropped 29%, to just over 31,000 nationwide.

On TV, there were a whopping 26 gay characters—a single reality show today. And there were rumors about Ellen... 😱

ON THE COVER.

In honor of Watermark’s anniversary, publisher Tom Dyer looked back at 20 years in local and national LGBTQ history—one remarkable year at a time. This is one of his favorite covers from 1996.

1996

PHOTO CAPTIONS

1- Amy Mandel with Harvey Fierstein at the opening ceremonies for Gala Festival V in Tampa.

2- Olympic diver Patrick Jeffrey came out in an exclusive interview with Watermark after the games in Atlanta. PHOTO BY BILL HOLT.

3- John Waters signs an autograph for Sterling Powell and friend at the 7th Tampa Pride Film Festival. PHOTO BY CHERYL E. REVILLES.

4- Back in 1996, being out at work made you bold enough for Watermark’s cover (clockwise from lower left): Chris Alexander, Dennis LaHaye, Madeline Abing, Ted Malone, Doug Prine, Connie Hinkle and Fred Butcher.

5- Bill Kammo’s Tromes & Treasures was an essential component of Tampa Bay’s LGBT scene.


7- Orlando’s Todd ‘Tasha Dione’ James, a popular performer at the Parliament House, succumbed to AIDS in May.

8- Orlando’s Carol Bartleson received HRC’s ‘David J. Hawkstoot Award’ from Chaunti Bonz at a star-studded event in Chicago.

MOST POPULAR SONG

“Macarena” by Los Del Rio

MOST POPULAR ALBUM

Jagged Little Pill by Alanis Morissette

MOST POPULAR TV SHOW

ER

HIGHEST GROSSING FILM

Independence Day

BEST PICTURE OSCAR

The English Patient

PRICE OF GAS

$1.99 per gallon

CELEBRITIES WHO CAME OUT

Chad Allen (Dr. Quinn, Medicine Woman)

OUT Elected OFFICIALS

U.S. Rep. Barney Frank (D-MA)

U.S. Rep. Gerry Studds (D-MA)

U.S. Rep. Steve Gunderson (R-WI)


NUMBER OF STATES WITH MARRIAGE EQUALITY

0

NUMBER OF AIDS DEATHS

31,130 in U.S.

362,004 in world

watermark Your LGBTQ life. AUGUST 22 - SEPTEMBER 4, 2019 // ISSUE 26.17 WATERMARKONLINE.COM
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on their 25th Anniversary!
Ready to step away from the stress of city life? This home can be your ticket to peaceful living. As you enter the subdivision you will see the pride of ownership in this neighborhood.

The home is located on a lot tucked in the back to maximize the lake frontage. The landscape is beautiful; the home: peaceful and quiet.

As you enter the foyer, you will see the soaring ceilings, huge rooms and GORGEOUS VIEWS of LAKE INWOOD. The family room is quite large and opens to the patio, pool and lake. The kitchen opens to the family room and the dining room, so the family chef can visit with folks while preparing a gourmet meal.

The Master is open, bright and again has wonderful views, and a huge master closet with extra storage. The master bathroom is well planned and very convenient for those early starts.

The 3 extra bedrooms and full bath are opposite the Master to allow for extra privacy for family or guests.

This home was designed by the current owner and put his heart into every upgrade and flow of this home.

The pool area has a porch for relaxing and watching the beautiful wildlife on the lake, but also has a huge deck for parties and entertaining. The sunsets from the family room, or pool area are spectacular. GREAT SCHOOLS. Shenandoah, Conway and Boone High.

4 Bedroom, 3 Bathroom 2,675 Sq Ft Features: Screened Pool; Lake Views; Large Lot; Garage; Split Floorplan; Fireplace.
PHOTO CAPTIONS

1. In its first year, Watermark's Beach Ball attracted 3,000 to Disney's Typhoon Lagoon. Along with One Mighty Party, Beach Ball changed Gay Day at the Magic Kingdom into a weekend destination event. Tickets were a whopping $25.50.

2. The story of the year was Elites coming out—an event on the cover of Time magazine. Being gay hadn't been the same since.

3. When USF invited HIV-positive Olympian Greg Louganis to speak, St. Pete. Grt. Threatened to pull funding, saying the event "represents moral decadence and is an embarrassment to the university community." Louganis is pictured here with Watermark editor Todd Simmons. PHOTO BY CHRISTINE E. REYNOLDS

4. Bedros, a popular gay bar on St. Pete Beach with unique Mediterranean architecture and a view of the Gulf of Mexico, closed.

5. International pop star Roxy with Denise Willette and Carol Ann Hailey at Tampa AIDS Network's Art for Life fundraiser. PHOTO BY CHRISTINE E. REYNOLDS

6. Dr. Jeff Goldberg (right) was the respected physician at the forefront of early HIV treatment in Orlando.

7. After Gianni Versace was murdered on Miami Beach in May, there was a national movement for his killer, Andrew Cunanan.

8. Hope 64 Help found all sorts of ways to raise money at their Roadshow Ball, which by 1997 had grown into one of the highlights of the Orange Belt social season.

MOST POPULAR SONG
"Candle in the Wind" by Elton John

MOST POPULAR ALBUM
Spice by the Spice Girls

MOST POPULAR TV SHOW
Buffy the Vampire Slayer

HIGHEST GROSSING FILM
Titanic

BEST PICTURE OSCAR
Titanic

PRICE OF GAS
$1.22 per gallon

CELEBRITIES
WHO CAME OUT
Ellen DeGeneres

OUT ELECTED OFFICIALS
U.S. Rep. Barney Frank (D-MA)
U.S. Rep. Gerry Studds (D-MA)
U.S. Rep. Steve Gunderson (R-WI)

STATES WITH MARRIAGE EQUALITY
None

NUMBER OF AIDS DEATHS
16,685 in U.S. (half the number in 1996)
390,692 in World (30,000 more than in 1996)

ON THE COVER
In honor of Watermark's anniversary, publisher Tom Dyer looked back at 20 years in local and national LGBT history—one remarkable year at a time. This is one of his favorite covers from 1997.

VOLUME 4, ISSUE 21

LOOKING BACK

OUR TAMPA BAY
editor, Todd Simmons, summed it up best: “When we look back at 1997, we’ll remember it for two public figures: one celebrated in life, the other mourned in death. But the impact of Ellen DeGeneres and Gianni Versace made this a year unlike any other.”

Ellen’s Time magazine cover—“Yep, I’m Gay”—appeared days before her sitcom character, Ellen Morgan, came out on April 30. The avalanche of publicity resulted in an unprecedented nationwide conversation about what it means to be gay that continues to this day.

A few months later, the search for the murder of fashion superstar Gianni Versace uncovered lurid details about the wasted, murderous life of Andrew Cunanan.

In November, Bill Clinton spoke to the Human Rights Campaign, becoming the first sitting president to address an LGBT organization. Gay pop superstar Elton John’s tribute to the late Princess Diana, “Goodbye England’s Rose,” was the fastest selling single in history.

In Tampa Bay, a standing-room-only appearance by Greg Louganis at USF exposed the irrational homophobia of the far right, who claimed he was coming to “promote homosexuality.” When radio shock jock Mark Larson announced that he would attend an Ellen viewing party at The Cherokee Club—which he called “the tuna can”—300 showed up and showed him the door.

In Orlando, TV star Mitchell Anderson and Martina E-Judy Nelson emceed The Spectrum Awards. But when the check to Church Street Station bounced, it was a harbinger of bad news for GLCS. Treasurer Tim Hooper-Elliot later filed with $38,000 of the organization’s money. When it turned out he was a convicted felon, much of the GLCS board resigned. My coverage won Watermark a national journalism award.

Many of us watched the Ellen episode at Patty Sheehan’s where extension cords ran to a half-dozen portable TVs.

Attendance at Gay Day at the Magic Kingdom surged again, fueled by two new nighttime events—Watermark’s Beach Ball and Jeffery Sanker’s One Mighty Party. And with eight teams, the Central Florida Softball League launched in the fall.
OCTOBER 7, A SLIGHT, 21-year-old University of Wyoming student was found tied to a wooden fence, bleeding and barely conscious. Matthew Shepard died five days later, igniting outrage and a heated national discussion about persistent violence against gays and lesbians. President Bill Clinton urged passage of federal hate crimes legislation. The Republican-controlled Congress was unmoved.

But Tammy Baldwin (D-WI) became the first openly gay person elected to federal office. Nationwide, 29 openly gay office seekers prevailed. And while Ellen’s sitcom was canceled, an equally groundbreaking—and better—show was a surprise hit on NBC, Will & Grace picked up the baton, bringing likeable gay/lesbian/friendly characters into living rooms for the next eight years. Movies also raised awareness, with hits like In & Out, As Good as it Gets, My Best Friend’s Wedding, and... Mulan? Madonna released Ray of Light... nuff said.

In Orlando, Watermark’s Keith Peterson got city approval to fly rainbow flags downtown during June, but when the religious right objected, it led to an unforgettable parade of homophobes at City Hall. The flags flew, gloriously, even though televangelist Pat Robertson predicted God’s wrath. Gay Day broke attendance records and, with increasingly fabulous nighttime events, gained a coveted spot on the international gay party circuit. Respected community activist Chris Alexander was hired to direct beleaguered GLCC—renamed GLBCC.

In Tampa Bay, two game-changing resorts opened. St. Pete’s Suncoast Resort debuted in July, with six bars and 30 gay-owned businesses, including MC Film Festival. Owners Tom Kiple and Lester Wolf were our Tampa Bay “Persons of the Year.”

And to the east, some visionaries took over a dilapidated country campground and turned it into the Sawmill Resort. The Human Rights Task Force changed its name to Equality Florida and launched its first Lobby Day in Tallahassee. Bill Kanoutt’s Times & Treasures moved to S. Howard Ave. and began an ambitious expansion.

And we launched watermarked online.

1. I posed with my friend, Bruce Bound, after his Out & About photo was named one of the most successful LGBT bookstores in the nation.

2. A conservatively dressed Carrie West announced her candidacy for Tampa City Council. The MC Film Festival co-owner would barely miss making a runoff. PHOTO BY RHEA MANGUAL

3. (L-R) Amy Mandel, Dorothy Abbott and Christine E. Reynolds appeared on our cover about Tampa Bay’s vibrant women’s community. PHOTO BY CHRISTINE E. REYNOLDS


5. Tampa Bay editor Todd Simmons began a column about the pomp and politics of his pending marriage to Sue Martinez-Pastora. They’re still together, living in Nashville with two beautiful boys. PHOTO BY CHRISTINE E. REYNOLDS

6. Watermark obtained funding and approval to fly rainbow flags throughout downtown Orlando, but not before bitter public hearings at City Hall that made national news.

7. Matthew Shepard was found beaten and dead to a fence in rural Wyoming on October 7, 1998. His death five days later was a vivid reminder that despite political progress, violence toward gays and lesbians remains epidemic.

8. When Orange County Teacher of the Year Mike McGuire came out in Watermark, I led to mainstream news coverage... and support from students, and school administrators.

9. Tampa Bay Trichinie Joe Hodges won a Gold Medal at Gay Games 1998 in Amsterdam. PHOTO BY CHRISTINE E. REYNOLDS

MOST POPULAR SONG
“Too Close” by Next

MOST POPULAR ALBUM
Titanic soundtrack

MOST POPULAR TV SHOW
Seinfeld

BEST PICTURE OSCAR
Shakespeare in Love

CELEBRITIES WHO CAME OUT
George Michael, Alan Cumming, Rob Halford (Judas Priest)

QUOTE OF THE YEAR
“I did not have sexual relations with that woman... Ms. Lewinsky,” President Bill Clinton

STATES WITH MARRIAGE EQUALITY
None

NUMBER OF AIDS DEATHS
16,403 in U.S. (slight decrease since 1997)
410,800 in World (20,000 more than in 1997)
1999

ON THE COVER
In honor of Watermark's anniversary, publisher Tom Dyer looked back at 20 years in local and national LGBT history—one remarkable year at a time. This is one of his favorite covers from 1999.

VOLUME 6, ISSUE 12

S PRECURSOR TO Y2K, 1999 was like a glorious gay holding pattern. But in the "post-Ellen" world, there were notable events.

With the trial of Matthew Shepard's murderers looming, Alabaman Billy Jack Gaither's throat was slit and his skull cracked open before his body was incinerated on a pile of tires. His attacker claimed Gaither had made a pass at him. James Hormel was named ambassador to Luxembourg, becoming the first openly gay U.S. ambassador. And before Christmas, the Vermont Supreme Court ruled that committed same-sex couples must be afforded the same benefits and protections as opposite-sex married couples.

Will & Grace became a hit, but gays were largely relegated to subplots in movies like American Beauty, Election and The Talented Mr. Ripley. Cher was reborn as a gay icon with her auto-tune hit "Believe."

Significant progress was made in Tampa Bay schools. The Pinellas School Board passed a ban on anti-gay discrimination against students and employees. Hillsborough relented and allowed a gay-straight alliance to form at Blake High School, a magnet school for the arts. And Hillsborough Community College became the first in the state to offer domestic partner benefits.

Carrie Underwood lost her bid in District 6, but District 2 elected Rose Ferlita to a mostly progressive Tampa City Council. The biggest Tampa Bay Pride to date included a raucous downtown parade and business expo. With films like Jeffrey and Better Than Chocolate, the 10th TIGLFF also broke records.

In Orlando, Patty Sheehan announced a second run for City Council. New GLBBC board president Barry Miller and executive director Chris Alexander-Manley shared ambitious plans for new headquarters on Mills Ave. But for the first time in 10 years there was no Pride Parade.

Attendance at Gay Days parties continued to burst. Watermark's Beach Ball filled Typhoon Lagoon to capacity. First-time events for women and families were also successful. Hope & Help's Headress Ball marked 10 successful years. New owners Don Granstein and Susan Unger undertook a major remodel of the iconic Parliament House Resort.

Finally, Watermark moved into new headquarters in South Colonnialtown to celebrate five years.

LOOKING BACK

MOST POPULAR SONG
"Believe" by Cher

MOST POPULAR ALBUM
Millennium by Backstreet Boys

MOST POPULAR TV SHOW
Who Wants To Be A Millionaire

HIGHEST GROSSING FILM
Star Wars: Episode 1 – The Phantom Menace

BEST PICTURE OSCAR
American Beauty

CELEBRITIES WHO CAME OUT
Nathan Lane, former Major League Baseball player Billy Bean

STATES WITH MARRIAGE EQUALITY
None

NUMBER OF AIDS DEATHS
16,762 in U.S. (level since 1997)
429,825 in World (20,000 more than in 1998)
LOOKING BACK

THERE WAS A HISTORIC presidential election and a Millennium March on Washington for Equality that drew 500,000. But the biggest local story of 2000 was Patty Sheehan—the first openly gay person elected to a major public office in the area.

Sheehan’s runoff win over incumbent Bill Bagley put a gay face on Orlando’s City Council, and marked a sea change for local politics. Within months the city had passed harassment and non-discrimination protections for gay employees.

Orlando’s GLBCC also had a good year, raising $200,000 and moving into a remodeled building in the heart of what was then the UMI District, and what is now Mills/SD. And the Pride Parade returned, this time in the evening.

Universal joined Disney in offering domestic partner benefits. And police threatened the Opes Guys with closure because their Fringe show, The Naked Guy, featured full frontal. It was a hit. So was Michael Wamie’s Trucker Trash Tabloid.

Finge was officially gay.

In Tampa Bay, several beloved HIV physicians left the area in 2000, including Drs. Darce Norris, Susan Weir and Robert J. Wallace. And the Center of Tampa Bay closed when a $4,500 monthly shortfall was revealed. Protectors forced local media outlets to drop “Tired of being gay?” ads promoting Focus on Family’s conversion therapy seminars. But the Hillsborough County Commission voted against rights protections for gays—“an embarrassment,” said Commissioner Pat Frank.

TIGLFF maintained record attendance with hits like Psycho Beach Party and The Broken Hearts Club. In St. Pete, Suncoast lured the huge International Mr. Drummer Contest from San Francisco.

Area activists area protested the new Dr. Laura talk show. Host Dr. Laura Schlesinger had labeled gays as “biological errors.”

Nationally, Matthew Shepard’s murderers were convicted. Ellen and Anne Heche broke up. And Showtime stretched limits with the sexy Queer As Folk.

Florida Secretary of State Katherine Harris—remember the makeup?—joined with the Supreme Court of the United States to give us President George W. Bush.

ON THE COVER

In honor of Watermark’s anniversary, publisher Tom Dyer looked back to 20 years in local and national LGBT history—one remarkable year at a time. This is one of his favorite covers from 2000.

VOLUME 7, ISSUE 12

ALL GROWN UP

The New Maturity of Gay Day Weekend

I saw this beautiful couple on Main Street and felt that they captured the theme for our 10th anniversary coverage of what by 2000 had become the biggest annual LGBT event in the nation. We called it “The New Maturity of Gay Day Weekend.”

PHOTO CAPTIONS

1. Chi Chi LaRue (pictured with Starting Powell) was the headline on at expanded PrideFest 2000, which included a parade, stage at TECO PAC and Wet Party at the Florida Aquarium. PHOTO BY CHRISTINE E. REYNOLDS

2. Mary Cheney (left with sister Liz Cheney) became one of the nation’s highest profile lesbians when her dad, Dick Cheney became vice president.

3. Rep. John Galler and a contingent from King of Prussia mall were among the half million who attended the Millennium March on Washington for Equality. They were joined by K.D. Lang, Melissa Etheridge and George Michael.

4. Remember Richard Helm, the manipulative evil genius who won the first season of Survivor? He was openly gay... and often naked.

5. The Tampa Bay Business Guild named Bill Korsch (Citizen of the Year) and he donated it. PHOTO BY CHRISTINE E. REYNOLDS

6. Sparked by art visionaries like Phil Rampa, Barry Miller and Steve Koch, development in neighborhoods surrounding Lake Eola brought a hip, cosmopolitan feel to downtown Orlando. Rampa was chosen Person of the Year by Orlando magazine.

7. On her second try for Orlando City Council, Patty Sheehan defeated incumbent Bill Bagley in a runoff, and things haven’t been the same since.

8. Center director Chris Alexander-Manley was arrested at a Soulforce demonstration at the Southern Baptist Convention at the Orange County Convention Center. 2000 was a banner year for GLBCC, which raised funds and moved into the high-profile Mills Ave. building where it remains.

9. Hillary Swank won a Best Actress Oscar for her heartbreaking performance in Boys Don’t Cry playing Brandon Teena, a transgender murder victim.

MOST POPULAR SONG

“Breathe” by Faith Hill

MOST POPULAR ALBUM

No Strings

Attached by *NSYNC

MOST POPULAR TV SHOW

Survivor: The Australian Outback

HIGHEST GROSSING FILM

Mission: Impossible II

BEST PICTURE OSCAR

Gladiator

QUOTE OF THE YEAR

“They misestimated me.”—George W. Bush after the 2000 election

STATES WITH MARRIAGE EQUALITY

None

NUMBER OF AIDS DEATHS

14,499 in U.S. (down 2,000 since 1999)

448,060 in World (20,000 more than in 1999)
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Tell your healthcare provider if you:

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Keep a list that includes all prescription and over-the-counter medicines, antacids, laxatives, vitamins, and herbal supplements, and show it to your healthcare provider and pharmacist.

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2001

ON THE COVER
In honor of Watermark's 20th anniversary, publisher Tom Dyer looked back at 20 years in local and national LGBTQ history—one remarkable year at a time. This is one of his favorite covers from 2001.

MOST POPULAR SONG
"Hanging by a Moment" by Lighthouse

MOST POPULAR ALBUM
Hybrid Theory by Linkin Park

MOST POPULAR TV SHOW
Friends

HIGHEST GROSSING FILM
Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone

BEST PICTURE OSCAR
A Beautiful Mind

CELEBRITIES WHO CAME OUT
Michael Stipe (R.E.M.)

QUOTE OF THE YEAR
"I just want one day off where I can go swimming and eat ice cream and look at rainbows."
—MARIA CAREY BEFORE ENTERING REHAB

STATES WITH MARRIAGE EQUALITY
None

2001

T HE EVENTS OF SEPT. 11 dominated 2001. But Tampa Bay's LGBT community suffered a personal tragedy. In Orlando, homophobia wore a particularly ugly mask.

The year began with the inauguration of President George W. Bush. Progressives feared the worst, but he nominated gay men to head AIDS policy and serve as ambassador to Romania.

Gay mayors were elected in Paris and Berlin. Stateside, an attempt to overturn Vermont's groundbreaking domestic partner legislation failed.

Gay rugby player Mark Bingham helped thwart a fourth jetliner hijacking on 9-11. That didn't stop televangelists Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson from blaming the terrorist attack on gays.

On July 6, Tampa police Officer Lois Marrero was gunned down by a robber. Heartbreak turned to outrage when Marrero's partner of 10 years, Mickie Mashburn, was denied pension benefits. PrideFest persevered with a rain parade and splashy events at TRPAC and the Florida Aquarium that mixed politicians with porn stars and entertainers with evangelists.

Tampa Bay and Pinellas County business guilds merged. Bears, on the other hand, split into two packs. Rev. Karen Decham resigned after 14 years at Tampa MCC. St. Pete's Affinity Books closed. Ted Koppel took Nightline to the Palms of Manasota.

During Equality Florida's Youth Lobby Day in April, Orlando State Rep. Allen Trovillion lisset into 17-year-old Chris Vazquez. "You are going to cause the downfall of this country," Trovillion told the Edgewater High senior. "God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, and he is going to destroy you." Vazquez left in tears. Trovillion never apologized.

Conservative donors forced Heart of Florida United Way to cut donations to the anti-gay Boy Scouts. GLBCC struggled after the resignations of executive director Chris Alexander-Manley and board president Barry Miller; an interim director had a criminal record. The closing of Out & About Books and Mad-Lynn's Coconut Cafe changed the VIMI District. And a successful business expo hosted by GayDays.com suggested future developments.

2001
2002

002 WAS A WATERSHED, as non-discrimination ordinances passed in St. Petersburg, Sarasota and Orlando.

The January vote in St. Pete was unanimous. Despite lobbying by Equality Florida, the City Council refused to include protections based on gender identity.

Ric Rollins formed a church for LGBT African Americans: Breath of Life Fellowship. The Krewe of Cavaliers was bootstrapped from the St. Yago Knight Parade after being accused of inappropriate float playfulness.

The owners of the Suncoast Resort ventured across the Hillsborough River to open the Tampa Eagle, but it failed after two months.

Tampa Bay Arts ceded ownership of TIGLFF to the Friends of the Festival. Sunny Hall resigned, but Crescendo performed with the Tampa Bay Gay Men’s Chorus at Carnegie Hall. Later, a splinter group of men formed Una Voca.

Steeled in controversy, PrideFest found more when they accused travel agent Jim Garcia of hoarding profits from the Pillage & Plunder cruises. But TIGLFF continued its successful run, with 14,000 attendees.

In November, Sarasota voters overwhelmingly extended citywide non-discrimination protections to gays and lesbians.

In Orlando, the same protections proved more difficult. Pushed by OADO, the process started with the city’s Human Relations Board in January. Hearings turned ugly, with hundreds testifying both for and against. In December, protections passed the City Council 4-3, with Mayor Gloria Hood voting against. She was rewarded when Gov. Jeb Bush appointed her Secretary of State.

Downtown progressives were torn when Republicans ran openly gay Patrick Howell for State Rep. When Democrat chair Doug Head equated a gay vote for Howell to a jujitsu voting for Hitler, it made national news. Howell still lost in the heavily blue district.

In April, the Orlando Sentinel published an award-winning series on the city’s thriving LGBT community. But lesbians were disappointed when the WNBA Miracle announced they would move to Connecticut.


ON THE COVER

In honor of Watermark’s anniversary, publisher Tom Dyer looked back 20 years in local and national LGBT history—one remarkable year at a time. This is one of his favorite covers from 2002.

VOLUME 9, ISSUE 15

PHOTO CAPTIONS

1 - DragFest at Raymond James Stadium featured Pat Benatar, Jaija Fennham (pictured), Jennifer Holliday, Halsey—and a lot of empty seats. PrideFest never recovered from the huge financial loss.

2 - In October, Esera Tuaolo became the first former NFL football player to come out.

3 - Redistricting made Florida House District 36 heavily Democratic—and gay—so Republicans recruited respected and able attorney Patrick Howell to run against untested Democrat Sheri Mahville.

4 - Television personality Rosie O’Donnell came out in an April interview with Diane Sawyer.

5 - Uganda, as we know it, and Michael Mantle (second from right) joined Marie and Jim Phillips on The Phillips Phil, the popular afternoon drive time show on Real Radio 104.1.

6 - Exclusive International, the largest gay ministry in the nation, moved to Orlando in February. Executive director Allen Chambers has since apologized for the pain his prejudice had caused.

7 - Viewers of Court TV watched a Pinellas child custody case involving Michael Kantaris, a male-to-male transgender person.

8 - Orlando Anti-Discrimination Ordinance (OADO) founding members (from top) Michael Storymaker, Sam O’Donnell, Debbie Simmons and Carl Johnson were our ‘Persons of the Year’ for Central Florida.

9 - Hedwig and the Angry Inch is currently the hottest ticket on Broadway, but in 2002 David Lee starred in a compelling production at The Parliament House.

10 - Tampa Robinson High School student Niko Youngblood sued when the school insisted she wear a purple neck brace for her yearbook picture. Her school attorney, Karen Gearing, was our Tampa Bay ‘Person of the Year.’

MOST POPULAR SONG

“How You Remind Me” by Nickelback

MOST POPULAR ALBUM

The Eminem Show by Eminem

MOST POPULAR TV SHOW

Cst: Crime Scene Investigation

HIGHEST GROSSING FILM

The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers

BEST PICTURE OSCAR

Chicago

QUOTE OF THE YEAR

“I make too much money to ever smoke crack. Let’s get that straight, okay? We don’t do crack. Crack is whack.”

—WHITNEY HOUSTON

STATES WITH MARRIAGE EQUALITY

None
PHOTO CAPTIONS

1. Queer Eye for the Straight Guy was a surprise hit on Bravo. Flamboyant Carson Kressley was the breakout star.

2. Forty-seven-year-old Martina Navratilova nabbed her 57th and 58th major titles in 2003, winning mixed doubles at the Australian Open and then again at Wimbledon.

3. Brett Lashier, founder of Central Stage Theatre, died in February. Prideful Trevor Koller picked up the slack with ambitious productions at Suncoast Theatre.

4. Iconic Daytons drag performer Billie Beets died in September at the age of 71. Scottie Campbell presided over the event.


6. Steve Kooloel was one of a handful of local developers who drove a real estate boom in downtown Orlando.

7. Buddy Dyer was elected as mayor of Orlando after Glennda Hood left office to become Secretary of State. Orlando has become one of the most welcoming cities to LGBTs in the nation.

8. Pam Taris was elected to her first of two terms as mayor of Tampa, ushering in unprecedented and unconditional support of the local LGBT community.

9. LGBT fans celebrated when the Tampa Bay Buccaneers defeated the Oakland Raiders to win Super Bowl XXXVIII in San Diego.

10. Bruce Vilanch was grand marshal for the 2003 Central Florida Pride Parade. He’s pictured here with parade organizer Debbie Frizzell.


ON THE COVER

In honor of Watermark’s 20th anniversary, publisher Tom Dyer looked back at 20 years in local and national LGBT history—one remarkable year at a time. This is one of his favorite covers from 2003.

VOLUME 10, ISSUE 14

2003

LOOKING BACK

Our post-pride cover announced 2003 as ‘A Great Time to be Gay’. Key court rulings laid the groundwork for progress that’s still unfolding.

Just in time for June Pride, the U.S. Supreme Court overturned a Texas anti-sodomy law, in effect legalizing homosexual sex in 13 states including Florida. “Gay people are entitled to respect for their lives,” wrote Justice Anthony Kennedy. “The state cannot demean their existence or control their destiny by making their private sexual conduct a crime.”

Earlier in the month, the Ontario Court of Appeals upheld lower court rulings in Canada legalizing same-sex marriages. And in November, the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court surprised everyone by mandating same-sex marriage within the state.

Next door in New Hampshire, the Episcopal Diocese of New Hampshire set off shock waves when it elected openly gay Gene Robinson as their next Bishop. Queer Eye for the Straight Guy was a surprise hit, as was Ellen’s new talk show. The Amazing Race introduced hunky Reichen and Chip to American homes. And with a gay producer, director and writer, Chicago was named Best Picture.

Locally, gay-friendly mayors took over in Tampa and Orlando. And after relentless prodding from activists like Orlando Person of the Year Michael Slaymaker, Orange County forbid discrimination against gay employees. Bruce Vilanch was grand marshal at a very wet Central Florida Pride Parade.

And after eight years, Rev. Carol Trissell left Joy MCC for St. Louis. In Tampa Bay, St. Pete’s Patricia Pettijohn and Lauri Ryan were among the first 10 American couples married in Canada. The St. Petersburg Times began printing same-sex wedding announcements. Revelations surfaced about financial mismanagement at Pridestfest Tampa Bay, which folded. But St. Pete Pride attracted 10,000 to its back-to-basics parade and street festival. Pridestfest Sarasota drew 3,000. And Bud Browell attracted several hundred to a Gay Days Tampa Bay at Busch Gardens.

There were unsettling gay bashings in Tarpon Springs and Largo. By the end of the year there were five splintered LGBT choruses. St. Pete’s Bright Books and South Tampa’s Metro Flex closed. In Sarasota our Person of the Year, Rev. Nancy Wilson, oversaw the expansion of Trinity MCC.
2004 was the year marriage happened, as thousands flocked to Massachusetts and Canada to make their unions legal. But progress was tempered by a backlash: 13 states approved constitutional bans on marriage equality. And with a campaign that exploited this wedge issue in key states, George W. Bush won a second term over Democrat John Kerry. Even Log Cabin Republicans refused to endorse Bush.

Three years after the death of Tampa police officer Lois Marrero, Mayor Pam Iorio signed an executive order extending domestic partner benefits to city employees. Iorio also became the first Tampa mayor to open TIGLFLF, which turned 15. And in just its second year, attendance at St. Pete Pride doubled to 20,000.

The Tampa Bay Men's Chorus disbanded. Popular gay restaurant Tropics closed in South Tampa. The Metro Center opened new headquarters in St. Pete. And Martha Wash helped draw 3,500 to Sarasota PrideFest, which moved to May. Our Tampa Bay Person of the Year was Curtis Watson, who along with his partner fostered six children.

Orlando City Commissioner Pat Sheehan easily won reelection to a second term in 2004.

Orlando Person of the Year Debbie Fritts endured obstacles and weather to ensure that there would be a 2004 Central Florida Pride Parade in June. August was dominated by Hurricanes Charley, Frances and Jeanne. Jeanne hit town just hours after Watermark's outdoor 10th anniversary party.

VIM! Lynx QP Rainbow City closed in 2004. Two classy gay bars—Pulse and Savoy—opened. And we mourned the loss of the beloved Paul Wegman, creator of "Miss P" and for many the complex heart and soul of Orlando's LGBT community.

On the Cover
In honor of Watermark's anniversary, publisher Tom Dyer looked back at 20 years in local and national LGBT history—one remarkable year at a time. This is one of his favorite covers from 2003.

Volume 11, Issue 15

Photo Captions
1. 2004 started on a chilling note in Tampa when two young men who disappeared on Dec. 20 remained missing. Michael Wachsmuth (right) was found dead on Jan. 6, wrapped in a cloth in his SUV. The whereabouts of Jason Gatehouse (left) remained a mystery for months.

2. After months of investigation, Tampa police arrested Steve Lanzone in November for a series of drug-assisted sexual assaults, including the murder of Gatehouse and Wachsmuth.

3. On Aug. 24, Orlando entertainer Paul Wegman died at the age of 60 of complications from AIDS. As Miss P, Wegman emceed drag shows at the Parliament House for 25 years. Wegman was also an accomplished actor and director.


5. Brawling 95-degree heat, more than 20,000 showed in St. Pete Pride.

6. Ron Legler, the Florida Theatrical Association director, was elected chairman of the Downtown Arts District Board and he opened Pulse, a gay nightclub in south Orlando.

7. Under the leadership of Marnith Kennedy (left) and Victoria Jangeman, TIGLFLF posted record numbers.

8. NJ Governor Jim McGreevey made a stunning announcement: Married at the time, he announced an affair with a man and resigned from office.


10. Rice Reilltes (left) and Lorenzo Robertsson produced the fourth Central Florida Black Pride in May.
PHI PHI O’HARA

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PHOTO CAPTIONS

1 - The grizzly trial of Steve Lorenzo unearths an unlikely accomplice. Former Orlando resident Scott Schweickert was also convicted of multiple charges.

2 - In 2005, the much-anticipated opening of Brickyard Mountain hit the slopes. The mountain resort opened with the support of Health Ledger (left) and John Witherspoon.

3 - Fred Berliner is the co-founder of the Orlando Gay Chorus. He's also advertised in every issue of Watermark. In 2005, he was part of the newly revamped Come Out With Pride celebration in October.

4 - In April, the opportunity to interview, Fort Lauderdale, and cultural icon Bobbi Smith. She wrote about her experiences and received a standing ovation.

5 - In its 15th year, Gay Days Weekend proved it could weather just about anything. The Magic Kingdom remained the big draw on the first Saturday in June.

6 - Bunny Boys owners Michael Fried (left) and Nick Mowbray reestablished as party's Pet Outpost and Retreat.

7 - In just its third year, attendance at St. Pete Pride once again doubled to 40,000.

8 - The Parliament House celebrated its 30th anniversary by breaking ground on the nation's first three-hotel resort for the LGBT community. Owner Dee Grimmett envisioned a Wilton Manors-style revitalization of the neighborhood.

9 - Posing for a photo, David Biancchi joined our staff in 2005 as the first full-time staff writer for our Tampa Bay bureau. He became editor in 2009.

10 - The Seminole Heights bungalow housed a dungeon that was the site of date rapes, torture and murder. It's owner, Steve Lorenzo, is currently serving a life sentence in prison.

11 - A small display about gay author at a Hillsborough County library was dropped by county Commissioner Ronda Stroms. She made the case to lose it, but it was the only item from a fellow commissioner's suggestion to pass an ordinance banning the display.

12 - Local chapters of the Human Rights Campaign thrived in Orlando, Tampa Bay and Sarasota. Pictured (L to R) are HRC field organizer Shadia Shafiey, Orlando chapter president John Butler and HRC president Joe Solmonese.

ON THE COVER

In honor of Watermark's anniversary, publisher Tom Dyer looked back at 20 years in local and national LGBT history—one remarkable year at a time. This is one of his favorite covers from 2002.

VOLUME 12, ISSUE 13


A jury took just three hours to convict Lorenzo of conspiring with Scott Schweickert to distribute date rape drugs. Years later, Schweickert was the murder of the 22-year-old in a car in an affluent neighborhood.

And in central Hillsborough, commissioner Ronda Storms succeeded in banning recognition of LGBT Pride by the county. Protestors stormed downtown Tampa, but Storms wasn't done yet. In September, she derided reconsideration of the county's human rights ordinance and called for a super majority on future votes.

We hate her.

In Pinellas County, Gulfport led the way for adding sexual orientation and gender identity to its human rights ordinance. And Ken Stilin won a City Council seat in Sarasota.

Two stories also dominated news in Orlando. New Orleans-based party promoter Johnny Chisholm bought Mark Baker's production company and took control of an impressive slate of circuit events associated with Gay Days Weekend—by 2005 easily the largest annual gathering of gay events in the nation.

And Pride received a major reboot when MBA and UCF's GLBT student group moved the parade to October, rerouted it to Lake Eola and dubbed it 'Come Out With Pride.'

A late-night attack on artist Paul Horan in the gay-friendly VMI (now Mills/50) District resulted in a Valentines Day "Love Not Hate March Against Violence" led by City Commissioner Patty Sheehan.

Outside Florida, the Supreme Court turned rightward with the confirmations of Chief Justice John Roberts and Associate Justice Samuel Alito. The ongoing war in Iraq saw a steady drumbeat of brave service soldiers being killed and the confirmation of the first Mediterranean nation to legalize same-sex marriage.

Elton John and David Furnish got married. And those mourning the loss of Queer as Folk turned their dials to ABC's campy Desperate Housewives.
2006

ON THE COVER

In honor of Watermark's anniversary, publisher Tom Dyer looked back at 20 years in local and national LGBT history—one remarkable year at a time. This is one of his favorite covers from 2006.

VOLUME 13, ISSUE 15

PHOTO CAPTIONS

1 - If you like scandal, the ruling of Evangelical Rev. Ted Haggard as a crystal meth user and kleptomaniac was your cup of tea. Watermark scored a scoop with Kirk Hammett's interview of the then newly released Haggard, who we're glad to see is now anonymous in the desert.

2 - Pop star George Michael was once again arrested for performing a sexual act in a public restroom. This time the superstar was less apologetic, saying he's been anonymous for a long time.

3 - For the 2006 Fringe Festival, Michael Keesee performed a Disney classic classic with his show The Lion King and the Naked Go-Go Club.

4 - The fact that Rep. Mark Foley (R-Florida) is gay was the least kept secret in Washington, D.C., but when he sent text messages with a former congressional page were exposed he was forced to apologize... then resign... then go to rehab.

5 - Waterspark's third reader, Dave Whittey, died on October 15, the victim of an aggressive brain tumor. He was smart, humorous and intellectually voracious. The popular politician had a lengthy standing ovation.

6 - TBBF president Marrieth Kennedy welcomed Tampa Mayor Pam Iorio and Hillsborough County Commissioner Kathy Castor to opening night ceremonies. The popular politician received a lengthy standing ovation.

7 - Tampa wanted its Pride back, as organizers produced Winter Pride Tampa Bay at Lowry Park in February. First-year attendance was promising, but bad weather scuttled the celebration in 2007. Here's the scene at the 2006 event.

8 - With 50,000 attendees in its fifth year, St. Pete Pride secured its place as the largest LGBT Pride celebration in the state.

9 - After an almost spontaneous run for Orlando mayor in 2006, the Orlando Weekly converted Billy Meier's freelancing into a full-time staff reporter gig. Since then, Meier has become one of the most recognizable media voices in the state and a respected voice for progressive politics.

10 - Comician Jim J. Bullock was the grand marshal at the second Come Out With Pride celebration in October. Bullock is pictured with TACT's activist Michael Storymayer.

MOST POPULAR SONG

Bad Day by Daniel Powter

MOST POPULAR ALBUM

High School Musical Soundtrack

MOST POPULAR TV SHOW

American Idol

HIGHEST GROSSING FILM

Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest

BEST PICTURE OSCAR

The Departed

OUT CELEBRITIES

Neil Patrick Harris (How I Met Your Mother), T.R. Knight (Grey's Anatomy), Lance Bass (N Sync), Darren Hayes (Savage Garden)

STATES WITH MARRIAGE EQUALITY

Massachusetts

LOOKING BACK

In 2006, Massachusetts remained the only state to legalize same-sex marriage, but the battle played out elsewhere. Connecticut, New York, New Jersey and Washington settled on civil unions, with court approval.

Across the Atlantic, South Africa became the first African nation—and the fifth worldwide—to approve same-sex marriage.


Vice-President Dick Cheney's family announced that daughter Mary was pregnant and planning to co-parent with her partner, Heather Poe. Rosic O'Donnell's debut as host of The View caused ratings to skyrocket. Logo, MTV/ Viacom's 24-hour LGBT channel, debuted on Bright House in Orlando and Tampa Bay. Ang Lee won a directing Oscar, but Brokeback Mountain was robbed in the Best Picture category. (Does anyone remember The Departed?)

In Central Florida, Orlando became the fifth county in Florida to include sexual orientation in fair housing laws. In Orlando, gay candidates Jeff Hord and John Raffier joined Robert Stuart in an attempt to unseat unfriendly Commissioner Vicki Vargo.

Stuart prevailed. And in Volusia County, Commissioner Bill Long lost his seat after embarrassing public altercations with exes, including country singer Michael James Hoffman.

Gay Days Weekend blossomed with steady fertilizer from GayDay5.com and extravagant circuit parties produced by Johnny Chisholm. In its second year, the rebooted Come Out With Pride attracted 15,000 to a parade and rally in front of the Orange County Regional History Center. And The Gardens, a timeshare resort next to the Parliament House, opened with ambitious plans for a lakeside pool area.

In Tampa Bay, date-rape murderer Steve Lorenzo was sentenced to 200 years in prison. Across the bay, St. Pete Pride hit 50,000 in attendance and claimed bragging rights as the biggest Pride event in the state.

Hoping to reclaim a piece of the Pride pie, organizers launched the first Tampa Winter Pride at Lowry Park and attracted 4,000. But a proposed Pride event in Brandon never materialized. In Sarasota, Trinity MCC celebrated its 25th anniversary.

I love this photo of Orlando's Blue Star on the cover of our 2006 Fall Arts Guide. The DJ, dancer, singer, actor, entrepreneur and all-around Rebel is one of those people that create culture in Central Florida. From her Lesbo-a-go-go revues to her productions at The Venue to her wildly popular Vareto extravaganzas at Palace, she explodes with creative energy...and always with that wonderful twinkle in her eye.

watermark Your LGBTQ life. AUGUST 22 - SEPTEMBER 4, 2019 // ISSUE 26.17 WATERMARKONLINE.COM 43
PHOTO CAPTIONS

1. Conservative Sen. Larry Craig (R-Idaho) was arrested in June for soliciting sex from a police officer in a Minneapolis airport. For the rest of the year, he didn’t leave his house without holding his with his hand.

2. During an interview, Harry Potter creator J.K. Rowling casually mentioned that she’d always envisioned admirable Hogwarts headmaster Albus Dumbledore as a gay man. For fans of the series, it made sense.

3. Stupefying Largo received national media attention when it hired 7-year-old city manager Steve Stanton, EQFL executive director Matti Brown’s arrest for handing out a “Don’t Discriminate” flyer and forcibly thrusting to the floor. Charges were dropped.

4. The much-loved Suncoast Resort held its final Y-Dance on June 18 — just a week shy of its tenth anniversary in St. Pete. The nine-acre resort was home to live bars and lots of memories.

5. In a public hearing in Largo concerning the future of transitioning city manager Steve Stanton. EFOU executive director Matti Brown was arrested for handing out a “Don’t Discriminate” flyer and forcibly thrusting to the floor. Charges were dropped.

6. Tampa’s All Hallo’s Ball continued to attract the best Halloween costumes in Tampa Bay, as demonstrated by these zombie piles.

7. Former Orlando Magic player John Amaestas became the first NBA player to come out during the year. The announcement became a respected voice for LGBT equality, including at Orlando’s Come Out with Pride.

8. In its 18th year, Headless Ball proved that it had lost none of its drama and luster. By 2007, the fundraiser for Hope & Help Center had also become a key fixture in Orlando’s fall social season.

ON THE COVER

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VOLUME 14, ISSUE 11

MOST POPULAR SONG
Irreplaceable by Beyoncé

MOST POPULAR ALBUM
Noel by Josh Groban

HIGHEST GROSSING FILM
Pirates of the Caribbean: At World’s End

BEST PICTURE OSCAR
No Country for Old Men

OUT CELEBRITIES
Suze Orman, David Hyde Pierce, NBA basketball player John Amaestas

STATES WITH MARRIAGE EQUALITY
Massachusetts

LOOKING BACK

WITH BRUTALITY reminiscent of Matthew Shepard, 25-year-old Winter Haven resident Ryan Keith Skipper was murdered in March.

The perpetrators, two locals, stabbed him 20 times and left his body at the side of the road. William David Brown and Joseph Bearden were sentenced to life in prison. Throughout 2008, the LGBT communities in Orlando and Tampa Bay grieved with Skipper’s parents, Lynn and Pat Mulder. A documentary by filmmakers Vicki Kanta and Mary Meeks was released in 2008 and was shown at TIGLFF.

Statewide, supporters of a statewide constitutional ban on same-sex marriage gathered signatures to place the measure on the 2008 ballot. Fairness for All Families and Florida Red & Blue formed to battle the ban. In Tampa Bay, activists rallied behind Largo city manager Steve Stanton, who was fired when he announced that he was transitioning to life as a female. Susan Stanton’s battle became national news, shedding light on transgender rights. St. Pete’s Suncoast Resort closed in June, and focus shifted to Ybor City. More than 40 businesses joined the GaThor Coalition.

St. Pete Pride’s growth continued when it attracted 50,000. Four protesters with were arrested. To the south, Sarasota PrideFest was canceled for the first time in 20 years. TIGLFF rebranded as the Clip Film Festival. And activist Joe Redner ran unsuccessfully for Tampa City Council.

In Orlando, GLBBC appointed Michael Vance executive director and resurrected the Spectrum Awards. Come Out With Pride brought 30,000 to Lake Eola Park. Orlando City Commissioner Patty Sheehan announced for a second term, and ran unopposed. And State Rep. Bob Allen (R-Merritt Island) was found guilty of soliciting sex from an undercover officer at a Titusville park.

Elsewhere, HRC and GLOF sponsored a historic debate between Democratic presidential candidates. Washington, Oregon and New Hampshire legalized civil unions. Rosie O’Donnell resigned from The View. Iran’s President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad told a New York audience that, “We don’t have homosexuals…”

And we said goodbye to Tammy Faye Bakker Messner, Rev. Jerry Falwell, Charles Nelson Reilly and Merv Griffin.
2008 will be remembered for the historic election of Barack Obama, not only the first African American President, but also the most supportive of our community. Thousands of LGBT volunteers helped Obama carry Florida—including Orange, Hillsborough and Pinellas Counties.

Congress also lifted the ban on HIV-positive travelers. California became the third state to legalize same-sex marriage by court order. In California, voters stripped same-sex couples of their marriage rights. Likewise, Floridians overwhelmingly approved a constitutional amendment banning same-sex marriage.

Some pointed to unfocused campaigns by two separate and often conflicted opposing groups. Focus for All Families and Florida Red & Blue. Protests erupted throughout the state, many targeting Gov. Charlie Crist, who expressed support for the amendment prior to Election Day.

But in South Florida, a judge ruled that the state cannot prevent openly gay Martin County from adopting its foster children. And after eight years, a Safe Schools Bill passed the Florida legislature with protections based on gender identity and sexual orientation.

Orlando extended domestic partner benefits to city employees. Among those voting for the change was out Commissioner Patty Sheehan, just elected to a second term. Elsewhere in the city, there was outrage when WFTV exposed a subdivision that excluded gay renters.

Tampa celebrated the election of Kevin Becker to the Hillsborough County Commission. Across the bay, Pinellas voted to include sexual orientation—but not gender identity—in its human rights ordinance. St. Pete Pride drew a whopping 70,000, securing its position as the largest Pride event in the state. In Tampa, Winter Pride was canceled due to severe weather and never returned. Sarasota PrideFest was back, this time at Van Wezel. And the influx to GaYbor continued with the opening of restaurants and retail.

We also said goodbye to Estelle Getty (The Golden Girls), Heath Ledger (Brokenback Mountain) and designer Yves Saint Laurent.
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ON THE COVER
In honor of Watermark’s anniversary, publisher Tom Dyer looked back at 20 years in local and national LGBTQ history—one remarkable year at a time. This is one of his favorite covers from 2009.

Looking Back
GB’t’s BloSomed on television in 2009. With its positive depictions of gays, lesbians and transgendered persons, Glee was a game-changer. So were Mitch and Cam on Modern Family. Neil Patrick Harris hosted the Tony Awards—and nailed it. And RuPaul’s Drag Race was a surprise hit.

2009

There was important progress in the real world, too. The addition of Iowa and Vermont doubled the number of states where same-sex marriage is legal. The Matthew Shepard Act passed, finally, providing tougher penalties for federal hate crimes based on sexual orientation. The huge Equality March on Washington was the first in more than two decades. But raids on gay bars in Dallas and Atlanta demonstrated that homophobia still exists. Uganda took up legislation making homosexuality punishable by death.

In Tampa, out officer Jane Castor was appointed Chief of Police. Across the bay, Steve Forreall won election as St. Petersburg’s first gay city commissioner. But Commissioner Ken Shein lost his bid for re-election in Sarasota.

St. Pete Pride attracted record numbers, remaining the biggest Pride event in the state. Just prior, NBC affiliate WFLA aired an American Family Association informercial about the “evils of homosexuality,” sparking protests and an Equality Florida-led boycott. Winter Pride was canceled in Tampa, but Sarasota Pride continued to grow. Sarasota also celebrated the appointment of an openly gay rabbi at Temple Beth El. Both Dunedin and Tampa protected transgender city employees.

There was drama during Orlando’s Gay Days Weekend when party promoter Johnny Chisholm imploided due to unpaid debts. Couples seeking a marriage license were turned away at the Orange County Courthouse on Valentine’s Day. Come Out With Pride blossomed at Lake Eola. A protest at The Holy Land Experience faltered. Bear Bust split into two packs, and The Center eyed a looming balloon payment on their Mills/50 headquarters warily.

At Watermark, the tanking economy forced severe staff cuts. I took over as editor until we promoted Steve Blanchard to the position. By the end of the year we’d hired our first online editor, Jamie Hyman.
2010 MARKED THE death of two loathsome laws: ‘Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell’ and Florida’s ban on gay adoption. With fleeting majorities in both the House and Senate, Democrats voted to repeal DADT before the end of the year.

And in Florida, the path was cleared for adoption by gays and lesbians after Attorney General Bill McCollum opted not to appeal a court ruling. Maybe that’s because McCollum’s expert witness, George Reker, was busied vacationing with an escort from RentBoy.com.

New Hampshire and the District of Columbia legalized same-sex marriage. And in California, Judge Vaughn Walker’s ruling that the state’s Prop 8 ban was unconstitutional opened the possibility in the nation’s most populous state. But in an ominous development, Iowa voters ousted three state Supreme Court judges who ruled for marriage equality.

Jane Lynch won an Emmy for her memorable portrayal of the diabolical Sue Sylvester on Glee. And a gay JetBlue flight attendant became a folk hero when he stood up to an obnoxious passenger, grabbed a beer, deployed the emergency exit and slid out of the plane.

In Florida, midterm elections were dominated by Gov. Charlie Crist, who chose to run for U.S. Senate. Marco Rubio bested him in the Republican primary, and Crist was then trounced running as an Independent.

With arm-twisting from Commissioner Linda Stewart and others, Orange County voted to include sexual orientation in its human rights ordinance. And after promising to enact domestic partner benefits and a registry, Republican Terri Garcia was elected County Mayor with LGBT support.

Greg Louganis helped draw record numbers to Come Out With Pride, and Gina Duncan and Michael Audebert took over the reins. The Parliament House tangled with a foreclosure lawsuit and faced competition from Mr. Sisters—all without missing a disco beat. And Tyra Sanchez won the second season of RuPaul’s Drag Race.

Under the leadership of new director Chris Rudisill, St. Pete Pride approached 100,000 in attendance, but an August Pride on 7th event in Ybor City fell flat. Flamingo Resort regular Coco Montrese was crowned Miss Gay America in St. Louis. And Sarasota filmmaker Tom Murray died.

On the cover

In honor of Watermark’s 20th anniversary, publisher Tom Dyer looked back at 20 years in local and national LGBT history—one remarkable year at a time. This is one of his favorite covers from 2010.

Volume 15, Issue 24

Photo captions

1. For many, the high point of the 2010 Winter Olympics in Vancouver was K.D. Lang’s performance of “Hallelujah” at the Closing Ceremony.

2. Many in the Central Florida Softball League still mourn Tommy Martin, a popular—and very talented—player who died in 2010.

3. 2010 ended on a high note when Congress voted to repeal the 1993 Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell law that resulted in the removal of more than 13,500 LGBT service members.

4. A breakout star from the first season of America’s Got Talent, Prince Poppycock performed to standing audiences at The Bar and The Honey Pot in Your City.

5. A rash of suicides led writer and blogger Dan Savage to create the “It Gets Better” project. Thousands posted YouTube videos telling LGBT teens to “hang in there.”

6. Brit Humphries (center) of CWNP was the high-profile face of Mr. Sisters, an unlikely and beautiful bar and restaurant on East Colonial that survived for less than two years.

7. Greg Louganis was grand marshal of the biggest- ever Come Out With Pride. He’s pictured with City Commissioner Patty Sheehan and CWNP director David Baker-Hargrove, who stepped down from the position later in the year.

8. Robert Geller, the owner of Beach St. Busters, used his entrepreneurial talent to create Outlegs & Adventures, a recreational group for LGBTs in Tampa Bay.

9. When Michael Vance stepped down as the Center interim director Randy Stephens revamped programs and rejuvenated the board and volunteer staff. He was appointed director, and left the position in July 2014.

10. Judge Vaughn Walker declared California’s Prop 8 ban on same-sex marriage unconstitutional. Adding to the drama? Walker is gay.

11. Paule was one of the striking models for a calendar sponsored by Trans*Action in Tampa Bay.

Most popular song

Tik Tok by Ke$ha

Best selling album

Recovery by Eminem

Highest rated TV show

American Idol

Highest grossing film

Toy Story 3

Best Picture Oscar

The King’s Speech

Out celebrities

Sarah Gilbert, Sean Hayes (officially), Amber Heard, Anna Paquin, Chely Wright

States with Marriage Equality

Massachusetts, Connecticut, Iowa, Vermont, District of Columbia, New Hampshire
11-Chat Bono used his appearance on Dancing With the Stars as a platform for transgender awareness. Pared with Lassey Schimmern, Bono survived well into the competition—often with mom Cher watching.

2011

ON THE COVER
In honor of Watermark’s anniversary, publisher Tom Dyer looked back at 20 years in local and national LGBT history—one remarkable year at a time. This is one of his favorite covers from 2011.

VOLUME 18, ISSUE 9

MOST POPULAR SONG
Rolling in the Deep by Adele

BEST SELLING ALBUM
21 by Adele

HIGHEST RATED TV SHOW
American Idol

HIGHEST GROSSING FILM
Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows - Part 2

BEST PICTURE OSCAR
The Artist

OUT CELEBRITIES
Zachary Quinto (Star Trek), Guillermo Diaz (Scandal), Don Lemon (CNN anchor)

STATES WITH MARRIAGE EQUALITY
Massachusetts, Connecticut, Iowa, Vermont, New Hampshire, New York, District of Columbia

2 011 WAS THE YEAR
same-sex marriage went big-time when New York became the sixth state to embrace full equality.

The nation celebrated, and scores of locals traveled to the Big Apple to tie the knot. President Obama instructed the justice department to cease enforcement of the Defense of Marriage Act. But right-wing Republican presidential candidates like Rick Santorum, Michelle Bachman and Newt Gingrich pledged to fight marriage equality if elected.

Tampa elected Bob Buckhorn to succeed Mayor Pam Iorio, ensuring that the area’s biggest city would remain LGBT-friendly. Large elected Michael Smith as its first openly gay city commissioner. In St. Petersburg, out commissioner Steve Kornell retained his seat without opposition. And Equality Florida raised record funds, with events in Tampa Bay and Orlando each bringing in more than $100,000.

Hillsborough activists were outraged when homophbic Terry Temple was appointed to the County Human Rights Board. The Metro Center opened impressive new headquarters in St. Pete and Ybor City. Streetcar Charlie’s, a groundbreaking Gaybor restaurant and bar, closed amidst allegations of financial improprieties. St. Pete Pride attracted 85,000, but mourned the death of co-founder Carl Kattler. AIDS Walk St. Pete raised a whopping $155,000. And Sarasota Pride drew 4,000.

Orlando enacted a groundbreaking Domestic Partner Registry that would serve as the model for dozens more around the state. Orange County declined, setting the stage for drama in 2012. Use of social media by teachers became a hot topic nationwide when Mt. Dora High School teacher Jerry Baer,after being outed on Facebook, used Twitter to share that same-sex marriage made him want to “vomit.” political controversy, Baer was suspended.

7-Large elected its first openly gay city commissioner. Michael Smith won 54 percent of the vote, defeating an incumbent who made his sexuality an issue.

8- Pened by Smith Park creators Troy Parker and Matt Stone, The Book of Mormon was the biggest hit on Broadway. Andrew Rannells starred as the pucky Elder Price.

9-It was a big year for Jane Lynch. The out actress played hystorical role Sue Sylvester on Glee and hosted the Emmy Awards. And along with wife Lara Embry from Sarasota, she raised $15,000 for Palm Beach High School

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LOOKING BACK

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Looking Back

In 2012, President Barack Obama endorsed marriage equality. A couple months later he was elected to a second term, ensuring an LGBT-friendly administration for another four years.

Former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton also came out for marriage equality. And for the first time, marriage equality was enacted by ballot in three states—Maine, Maryland and Washington. Wisconsin made Tammy Baldwin the first openly gay U.S. senator in the nation’s history.

After Chick-fil-A president Dan Cathy announced his support of the “biblical definition” of family, protests erupted throughout the nation, including at franchises in Tampa Bay and Orlando. The Boy Scouts affirmed their ban on “open or avowed homosexuals.” The Supreme Court quietly announced that it would consider two groundbreaking gay marriage cases from California and New York. And 23 out athletes won 10 medals at the Summer Olympics in London.

After mounting an impressive campaign in newly created House District 49 near UCF, Joe Saunders joined David Richardson (D-Miami Beach) as the first openly gay members of Florida’s Legislature. Elsewhere throughout the state, domestic partner registries were enacted in Tampa, St. Petersburg, Clearwater, Gulfport and Sarasota.

After delays and drama, a DPR was enacted in Orange County. The process thrust Orange County Mayor Teresa Jacobs into an uncomfortable political position. Zebra House opened in the Mills/50 District, giving local LGBT youth a safe haven. The Orange County School Board voted to include gender expression in its non-discrimination policy. Gay Days Weekend continued to attract huge numbers to Orlando, and to sold out GayDays.com hotels. And Come Out With Pride continued to grow, both in numbers and events.

Politicians descended on Tampa for the Republican National Convention. Security was sobering but businesses prospered, including gay venues in Ybor City. In its 10th year, St. Pete Pride brought in Deborah Cox and cracked 100,000 in attendance. It marked the last year for popular executive director Chris Rudisill, who went to work for Metro Wellness and Community Centers.

On the Cover

In honor of Watermark’s 20th anniversary, publisher Tom Dyer looked back at 20 years in local and national LGBT history—one remarkable year at a time. This is one of his favorite covers from 2012.

Volume 19, Issue 16

Photo Captions

1- After a decision primary and strong campaign, Joe Saunders became one of the two first openly gay members of Florida’s Legislature.

2- In its 21st year, Gay Days Weekend retained its draw for tens of thousands. These two hit the Magic Kingdom.

3- Former state Democratic Party chair Bob Pee returned to Orlando—But this time as an out activist. Featured with President Obama, daughter Chili Pea and partner Ken Brown. Photo was our Most Memorable Person of 2012 for Orlando.

4- When Chick-fil-A president Dan Cathy endorsed a “biblical definition” of family, LGBT activists nationwide protested franchise locations.

5- In its 15th year, AIDS Walk Tampa drew big crowds.

6- Board member Scott Bowman (left) and executive director Dexter Hannah joined City Commissioner Patty Sheehan to celebrate the opening of Zebra House.

7- Joined by Tampa Mayor Bob Buckhorn, Mark Blas (left) and Carrie West were among the first couples to take advantage of the city’s Domestic Partner Registry.

8- Florida Entertainment Group’s Stephen Moss (photographed with Ernie’s Andy Bell) hosted home with S Dance Circuit Party in a turf year that was moderated by the Gaybor Coalition.

9- In its 10th year, St. Pete Pride easily exceeded 100,000 in attendance.

10- The Center executive director Randy Schepers and activist Mary Muñoz helped couples utilize Orange County’s Domestic Partner Registry, enacted in May.

11- After losing his leg in a motorcycle accident, Bill Kendall learned to walk again. The activist, entrepreneur, volunteer and Pride organizer was our Most Memorable Person of 2012 for Tampa Bay.

Most Popular Song

Somebody That I Used To Know by Gotye featuring Kimbra

Best Selling Album

21 by Adele

Highest Rated TV Show

NBC Sunday Night Football

Highest Grossing Film

The Avengers

Best Picture Oscar

Argo

Out Celebrities

Jim Parsons (The Big Bang Theory), Matt Bomer (White Collar), Sam Champion (Good Morning America), Anderson Cooper, Frank Ocean

States With Marriage Equality

Massachusetts, Connecticut, Iowa, Vermont, New Hampshire, New York, Washington, Maine, Maryland and District of Columbia
ON THE COVER
In honor of Watermark’s anniversary, publisher Tom Dyer looked back at 20 years in local and national LGBT history—one remarkable year at a time. This is one of his favorite covers from 2013.

VOLUME 20, ISSUE 3

JUNE 26, 2013, WAS A landmark in LGBT history. That’s when the U.S. Supreme Court struck down the Defense Of Marriage Act (DOMA), which denied federal benefits to legally married same-sex couples.

The case, based on New Yorker Edie Windsor’s fight to be treated as a widow for estate tax purposes, is now the basis for the legal dismantling of marriage bans throughout the nation, including Florida. In another case, the Supreme Court sidestepped a direct ruling on marriage equality, but let stand a court decision legalizing marriage in California. In all, eight new states began allowing same-sex marriages in 2013, bringing the total to 15 and the District of Columbia. Across the pond, both England and France legalized same-sex marriage. Down under, Australia’s High Court ruled against marriage equality. And India made homosexual acts criminal again.

In Republican-controlled Tallahassee, the Competitive Workforce Act and a statewide domestic partner registry failed to make it out of committee, despite valiant efforts by Rep. Joe Saunders (D-Orlando) and others. And Sen. Marco Rubio reinforced his anti-gay creed by blocking appointment of an openly gay judge to a federal bench. New polling indicated that 75 percent of Floridians now favor marriage equality—including Sen. Bill Nelson and former Gov. Charlie Crist.

It was one step forward, two steps back for the Hillsborough County Commission in 2013. In January, they rejected a domestic partner registry by a 4-3 vote, leading to protests throughout the region. But in June, they repealed an ordinance banning public displays of LGBT pride. Pinellas, on the other hand, approved a countywide DPR and elected a second and third openly gay city commissioner in St. Pete. And despite thunderstorms, St. Pete Pride drew 120,000 to the nearby Grand Central District.

In Orlando, Come Out With Pride also drew 120,000 to Lake Eola Park in October.

Dallas Buyers Club became a sensation when both Matthew McConaughy and Jared Leto won Oscars for portraying edgy AIDS sufferers. Kinky Boots, penned by Harvey Fierstein with music by Cyndi Lauper, was the Tony-winning toast of Broadway. And to absolutely no one’s surprise, Jodie Foster and Brian Boitano came out.
2014

HIGHEST GROSSING FILM

IN 2014, WATERMARK STARTED the year with a bang. Founder and Publisher Tom Dyer had an exclusive one-on-one interview with gubernatorial candidate Charlie Crist, the first time the politician sat down with LGBTQ media. The story went viral, making headlines with MSNBC and Huffington Post.

Following the death of the Defense of Marriage Act, the world turned its focus to the constitutionality of individual state laws banning marriage equality. Some states’ Attorneys General decided not to pursue their state’s ban on same-sex marriages, as was the case with Virginia and Nevada. In other states, such as Michigan, Ohio and Pennsylvania, lawsuits were filed.

Citing Amendment 2 of the Florida State Constitution, Attorney General Pam Bondi fought against marriage equality for nearly the entire year and refused to allow the issuing of marriage licenses to same-sex couples. Six couples who were denied access to a marriage license filed a lawsuit claiming the law unconstitutional. Joining the fight as a plaintiff was statewide LGBTQ advocacy group Equality Florida.

While LGBTQs were experiencing unprecedented support and media coverage in the states, Uganda enacted a law that would sentence those participating in certain gay acts to life in prison. Nigeria banned same-sex marriage and criminalized homosexuality while India refused to review its law banning sodomy.

Our allies in the UK finally issued a pardon to WWII hero Alan Turing. Following the war, Turing was arrested and convicted under the anti-LGBTQ laws of the time.

The Boy Scouts of America made a major announcement to allow gay youth in the organization, but continued its ban on LGBTQ adults.

Orlando held its Youth Empowerment Summit, the first event of its kind targeted at supporting LGBTQ Youth. The Prism Youth Initiative also celebrated a first with Manatee Pride. Mayor Rick Kriseman won his run to head the City of St. Petersburg where he was joined by newly-elected out council members Darden Rice and Amy Foster.

The Tampa Bay International Gay and Lesbian Film Festival celebrated 25 years. In other birthdays, Come Out With Pride turned 10 and Watermark hit two decades when it celebrated 20 years in business.

The world said goodbye to Westboro Baptist Church leader, Fred Phelps. Michael Sam became the first out player ever drafted to an NFL team and Lily Tomlin married her longtime partner Jane Wagner.

In 2014, Watermark founder and publisher Tom Dyer celebrated the 20th anniversary of his legacy publication by remembering each year, talking to those involved from the beginning and reflecting on the growth of Central Florida’s largest LGBTQ newspaper over the past two decades. Photo by NK PHOTOGRAPHY STUDIOS

LOOKING BACK
Rick Claggett, Publisher

MOST POPULAR SONG
“Happy” by Pharrell Williams

BEST SELLING ALBUM
“1989” by Taylor Swift

HIGHEST RATED TV SHOW
“The Big Bang Theory

HIGHEST GROSSING FILM
“American Sniper

BEST PICTURE OSCAR
Released 2014

“Birdman

OUT CELEBRITIES
Sam Smith (pop singer), Ellen Page (actress), Tim Cook (Apple CEO), Ty Herndon (country singer)

STATES WITH MARRIAGE EQUALITY
35
OCTOBER 12
LAKE EOLA PARK

JOY
LOVE
UNITY
SPIRIT
CHARITY
DANCING
MEMORIES
COMMUNITY
CELEBRATION
PERSEVERENCE

15 YEARS OF

15 YEARS OF

COME OUT with
PRIDE ORLANDO

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**Tampa Bay International Gay & Lesbian Film Festival**

**Launch Party**

We’re kicking off Tampa Bay’s 30th Annual International Film Festival at the historic Rialto Theatre in north downtown’s Tampa Heights District with a dazzling evening of friends, cocktails, and music. Be among the first to pick up your 2019 program, see trailers for this year’s Festival and purchase or pick-up your Crown Circle or Simply Fabulous Passes. Win a terrific item up for raffle, sample delicious bites by SaltBlock Hospitality, enjoy one complimentary drink with ticket and a cash bar featuring a **TIGLFF Signature Drink**. **DJ Hural Knight (The Castle, Caledonia Brewing and Mermaid Tavern)** will be spinning celebratory tunes as we launch the **30th Year of Tampa’s longest running Film Festival!**

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Co-Starring: Santiago Echeverry | Brett Cobb/Compassionate Tampa Bay | Mark O’Hara | Dr. Tom Dilling, MD

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2015

ON THE COVER
Watermark turns 25 this coming Labor Day. Owner and publisher Rick Claggett carries on the tradition of Founder and Guiding Light, Tom Dyer, by reviewing the past remarkable years. On this page, he returns to 2015.

LOOKING BACK
Rick Claggett, Publisher

2015 PROVED TO BE ANOTHER landmark year for the LGBTQ community as the Supreme Court struck down all laws banning marriage for the LGBTQ community. Florida had finally lifted its ban earlier that year, allowing marriage equality to begin Jan. 6.

On June 26, 2015 the Supreme Court delivered their final verdict on the constitutionality of marriage equality. In a life changing 5-4 decision, the land’s highest court declared same-sex couples had the constitutional right to marry.

In the wake of marriage equality nationwide, the next battleground issue began to take shape. Republican Florida State Representative Frank Artiles of Miami filed the “Single-sex Public Facilities” bill. The bill looked to bar people from using restrooms that align with their gender identity. Transgender issues continued to make headlines when India Clarke was discovered murdered at a Tampa Community Center. This upward trend in trans violence would continue to grow.

Carver Middle school lost its long battle for a Gay-Straight Alliance when a lawsuit filed on behalf of 14-year-old Bayli Silberstein was dismissed. Jacksonville continued its heated debate about adding sexual orientation to the city’s Human Rights Ordinance.

Several organizations hit milestones this year: The Orlando Gay Chorus celebrated 25 years and appointed James Rode as the new art director. Joining in the fun was Gay Day walk celebrated its 20th year in operation.

St. Pete icon Georgie’s Alibi announced it was closing its doors in September. Cindy Barnes also announced 2015 would be her last year as the head of Sarasota Pride. Heather Wilkie was named Executive Director of The Zebra Coalition and Lu Mueller-Kaul was officially installed as the President of The Metropolitan Business Association.

Orlando Mayor Buddy Dyer and Orlando’s first openly gay commissioner, Patty Sheehan, both won their re-election campaigns in November.
HE WORST YEAR EVER
headlined Watermark’s annual year in review issue for 2016. The year started off with the excitement of a new direction as the paper’s ownership changed from founder Tom Dyer to long-time employee Rick Claggett. The sale of the paper from Watermark Media to Watermark Publishing Group took place Jan. 1.

The celebration was short lived as Jan. 10 marked the death of rock icon David Bowie. It was the first celebrity death in a year that seemed to have more than its fair share. Adding to the list throughout the year would be Prince, George Michael, Carrie Fisher, Debbie Reynolds and Nancy Reagan.

Of course the year wasn’t all bad. The Metropolitan Business Association was honored by the National LGBT Chamber of Commerce for its efforts with Referral and Exchange Networking and Development program (RED). The Tampa Bay Gay and Lesbian Chamber of Commerce announced it would be changing its name to the Tampa Bay Diversity Chamber of Commerce as Ashley Brundage stepped down, making way for Eric Mathis to take over. Justin Trudeau became the first head of state to march in a pride parade and President Obama issued an order for schools to allow students the right to use the bathroom for the gender which they identified. LGBTQ rights icon Harvey Milk became the first gay man to have a naval ship named after him, the USNS Harvey Milk.

Two events occurred that would test the LGBTQ community and change us forever. On June 12, a lone gunman indiscriminately fired shots into the crowd at Pulse nightclub. Hundreds of victims were held hostage during the rampage where dozens were injured and 49 fatally wounded. Orlando reacted quickly with love. The LGBT+ Center became a hub for volunteers and donations, as did The Venue. Jennifer Foster and Carlos Carbonelle convened a group of leaders to help meet the needs of a grieving community, giving birth to what would become the One Orlando Alliance. The world worked together to show that love would win over hate.

The second blow came in November when the anti-LGBTQ ticket of Donald Trump and Mike Pence upset Hillary Clinton’s bid for the White House, bringing an end to a heated election. The LGBTQ community and their supporters knew it was time to rally in the face of adversity and prepare for the aftermath of 2016.
Las Vegas surpasses Orlando with the deadliest mass shooting in modern history, killing 59 including Cameron Robinson (R).

2 Rebecca Storzuk became the first openly transgender Orange County Sheriff’s office deputy.

3 Kate McKinnon thanks Hillary Clinton as she accepts her second Emmy for her role on “Saturday Night Live.”

4 Danica Roem, a former journalist, becomes the first openly transgender person seated in any state legislature in the country by defeating Bob Marshall in the Virginia House of Delegates Race.

5 Kevin Spacey reveals he is gay amid allegations of inappropriate sexual behavior involving an underage Anthony Rapp.

6 Edith Windsor, a lesbian activist who was a pioneer for LGBTQ rights and brought down the anti-gay Defense of Marriage Act, dies at age 88.

7 Metropolitan Business Association celebrates its 25 year anniversary at Celebrations Gardens on Nov. 30.

8 The passing of Tanisha Cassadine sparks a fight against silicone procedures and inspires a scholarship to help those wanting to transfer to do so in a safe way.

9 Milo Yiannopoulos resigns as news editor of Breitbart after coming under fire for comments made about sexual relations between men and boys.

10 Metro’s Celebrate 25 Gala raises over $65,000 for youth, seniors and transgender services.

On the Cover

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Looking Back

Rick Claggett, Publisher

If 2016 was to be the worst year in our history, then 2017 would be the year we found our footing. In the year since the tragic shooting at Pulse, the Central Florida community, and the world, came together to show that love would conquer hate.

The Orange County Regional History Center worked hard to preserve memories from the Pulse shooting while honoring those taken, and those still suffering. Flowers, candles, messages and photographs left at the site of the massacre were displayed at the History Center for the public to see at the one-year mark of the tragic shooting, along with stuffed animals, flags and works of art to commemorate those who were killed and injured.

Community organizations were solidified to bridge gaps in the LGBTQ community and those underserved; including the One Orlando Alliance, QLatinX, The Contigo Fund, The Dru Project, Pride Fund to End Gun Violence, onePulse Foundation and Pulse of Orlando to name a few.

Amid the process of healing and within a month of the one year mark of the Pulse massacre, Orlando suffered another tragedy in the sudden and unexpected loss of beloved journalist Billy Manes. Manes worked as Watermark’s editor-in-chief through the horrific events at Pulse and the year that followed. His words had become those of a grieving community that now grieved for him.

For the first time in 15 years, the St Pete Pride parade was held in downtown St. Petersburg rather than the Grand Central District. When the organization initially announced the controversial move, the Street Festival was also scheduled to move downtown. The announcement sparked backlash from Grand Central businesses, supporters and the mayor. After reconsidering, the Street Festival was to remain in the Grand Central District.

Mayor Rick Kriseman won his bid for re-election against the anti-LGBTQ policies of former Mayor Rick Baker with a turnout of over 27% of eligible voters.

Equality Florida celebrated two decades as the largest civil rights organization for Florida’s LGBTQ community. Jacksonville City Council voted to add sexual orientation and gender identity to the city’s Human Rights Ordinance.

President Donald Trump sends transgender rights activists into action when he tweets his intention to impose a trans military ban. 

The passing of Tanisha Cassadine sparks a fight against silicone procedures and inspires a scholarship to help those wanting to transfer to do so in a safe way.
2018 PROVES TO BE A YEAR OF great highs and somber lows for the LGBTQ community. Now two years into the Trump administration the country feels to be more divided than ever. With the impending midterm elections, LGBTQ advocates fight for the onslaught of a blue and rainbow wave.

October marks 20 years since the tragic attack and eventual death of Matthew Shepard. His death sparked a worldwide cry for change to U.S. hate crime laws. It would take another 11 years before the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, Jr. Hate Crime Prevention Act would be signed into law. However hate seems to be on the rise in 2018. Several LGBTQ individuals were attacked by a paintball gun at downtown Orlando’s Lake Eola while the attacker yelled homophobic slurs. In a separate incident, a 7-11 worker was accused of assaulting a customer because he is gay. In St. Pete, the LGBTQ-affirming Allendale United Methodist Church was vandalized when the church’s marquee was spray painted with the phrase “gay pastor.” Jacksonville LGBTQ advocates rallied to seek justice for an alarming number of transgender woman of color who were murdered in the city.

Attorney General Jeff Sessions announced the creation of a "religious liberty" task force designed to protect religious freedom. Oklahoma became the first state to implement the "religious freedom" bill, allowing tax-funded adoption agencies to deny adoption to LGBTQ couples. Maine’s governor vetoed a bill to ban conversion therapy, while a similar bill failed in the final days of Massachusetts’ 2018 legislative session.

The year had just as many wins. The military took in its first transgender enlistee despite President Trump’s intention to ban transgender service members. St. Pete Mayor Rick Kriseman is sworn in along with a female majority City Council. Anti-LGBTQ Tampa District 59 candidate Ronda Storms fled in her attempt to regain political office. The LGBT+ Center of Orlando expanded its resources to a new office in Kissimmee, thanks to a grant from the Contigo Fund. Under the direction of Mayor Buddy Dyer, Orlando City Hall became the first government building statewide to have an all-gender, multi-stall restroom.

The year ended strong when the rainbow WAVE came ashore. The LGBT+ Center of Orlando released its host hotel experience from the first weekend in June to August for 2019. Breast cancer survivor who had undergone a double mastectomy was confronted during Bucs game for using female restroom.

After community pressure and a meeting with Rep. Carlos Guillermo Smith, Publix began to allow coverage of PrEP for employees under their prescription benefits.

“Storm Chasers” star Joel Taylor, was found dead aboard a gay Royal Caribbean cruise ship due to an apparent drug overdose.

In a controversial move, Andrew Christian sends an e-blast to costumers featuring leaked nude photos of Olympic diver Tom Daley.

Sasha Garden became the fourth transgender woman murdered in Florida in 2018 when her body was discovered in the parking lot of an Orlando apartment complex.

Ybor’s The Honey Pot and G Bar owners open a 7,000-square-foot club in the heart of downtown St. Pete.

“Pose” was an instant hit when it premiered on FX in June of 2018. The series made history as it featured the largest LGBTQ cast of any scripted TV show ever.

The Rainbow Wave sweeps over the Florida November elections, re-electing Carlos Guillermo Smith in Florida House District 49 (C).

Jennifer Webb won her bid for Florida House District 69. Webb made history being the first out LGBTQ woman to be elected to the Florida Legislature.
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