

GENTS

MAG

THE 2017

Gentlemen's Ball

ISSUE

We are Royalty

being
julian walker



Founders Message



UPS is a proud sponsor of The 2017 Gentlemen's Ball

**“We are committed to making an impact in the community.”
~Antonio Williams, Head of Community Relations for UPS**



Antonio Williams, Head of Community Relations for UPS



WOW, The Gentlemen's Ball is 6 years old! This achievement is a testament to the resilient spirit, triumphant nature, and sheer opulence of our community. Yes, we must all celebrate the success of the past 6 years because it could not have been achieved without each and every one of you. But it is not enough to relish in the glory of past successes - we must be forward-thinking as well. That's why when the time came to determine the theme for this year's ball, we pondered where we as a community have been, where we currently are, and how those experiences contribute to our vision of the future. We wanted a theme that would embody the essence of our legendary culture; one that would serve as a reminder of our greatness and a representation of the truth in which we stand.

We. Are. Royalty.

These three words have little impact on their own, much like us as individuals. But when they are joined together to form an exclamation - We are Royalty! - a collective brilliance is achieved.

When we first started The Gentlemen's Ball in 2011, we were very intent on sending a message to the world that we were a much more dynamic community than the reductive archetypes exhibited by mainstream media: the side-kick, flamboyant, ashamed, DL - none of which

fully represented us. That is why we purposed the ball to celebrate the "True Gentleman" - one who is Confident in himself, Generous in his giving and PROUD to stand TALL in his TRUTH. We wanted to highlight those Gay, BI and Trans men of color who were out of the closet and making an impact in the community and the world! Since then, the ball has grown beyond anything we could have ever imagined and we have you to thank for that. But it isn't enough.

Over the past 6 years, we, alongside our Board of Directors, Community Advisory Board, and Members, have worked tirelessly to be the change that we hoped to see manifested in the world and to ensure that we have a seat at the table; that our voices be heard. As is to be expected, we've experience major wins and severe losses. We've triumphed over adversity, seizing each opportunity to learn, regroup, sharpen our skills, and continue on this journey. In doing so, we recognize that other segments of our community felt excluded from our efforts, much like we felt excluded from the media portrayal of the rainbow. Though this was never our intention, we regret that our work caused such discomfort. They say that great leaders are often misunderstood, but we also know that great leaders have compassion, understanding, and empathy for others. And while we are on our journey to becoming pivotal leaders like many that

have preceded us, we strive to ensure that everyone feel welcomed, comfortable, and most importantly loved.

That is a major reason why we expanded the roster of honorees to include the Queens that walk alongside us. We realize the necessity of a unified, collaborative effort to achieving the goals of community building, empowerment, and optimal wellness. We sincerely believe that when our efforts are combined and our contributions are celebrated in unison, Spirit is unleashed in remarkably royal ways that profoundly catalyze movements - mental, spiritual, and physical.

So, in the spirit of unity, we hope that you will join us on our quest to channel the royalty that exists within each of us by donating your time, money, and expertise, not only at the ball, but all year long. Whether it is through our A Gentleman + A Scholar Initiative where we award over \$10,000 in scholarships per year, our Circle of Trust Mental Health Initiative, the newly revamped mPact2InSpire mentorship initiative with our partners at NAESM, or any through one of the many social events we host, we rely on the support and guidance from folks like you to truly be the change we all desire to see.

Love you all,

STAYING POWER

by Anaré V. Holmes

I DON'T QUIT!

I found out early at 6 years old that life is not fair. When the boy up the street called me a faggot and punched me in the face, I ran home crying.

I opened the door inside the kitchen to find my mother with a stern look of disapproval on her face.

Little did I know she was sitting near the window and saw the whole situation go down. "Don't come in here crying. Go back outside and kick his ass. I don't care if you have to pick up the closest thing to you and knock him out," she said. "Don't let nobody put their hands on you."

I sat there shocked and terrified like a deer in headlights. "Go on...You heard what I said? If you don't go back out there, I'MMA beat yo' ass," she said.

I walked back out and started moving in the boy's direction. He was now riding his bike. When I got close enough, I pushed him off the bike and we started fighting.

He won and I felt and looked defeated. I came back home and my mother had a glass of cherry Kool-Aid on the table with a bag of Wise barbecue chips. "He was bigger than you. But you can't be scared of people," she said. "Sometimes a bully only understands an ass-whoopin'. You gotta learn to fight."

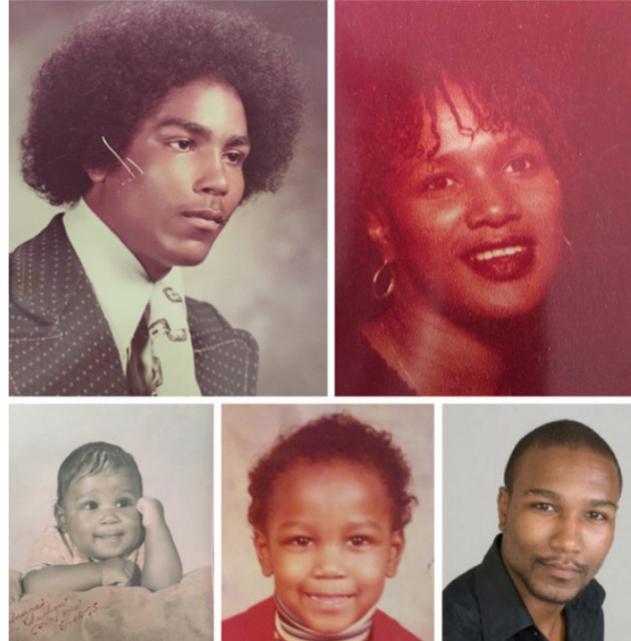
"Today, my fight is not with the bully on the block. The struggle is now an internal battle within myself."

Today, my fight is not with the bully on the block. The struggle is now an internal battle within myself.

I can be my own worst enemy or the best friend and lover ever known. The difference rests in the choices I make every day.

Do I give into stinking thinking and sink to the lowest denominator of decency when met with challenges or obstacles? Or, do I take the time to take self-inventory of the skills and resources available to me and do the heavy lifting required to move the proverbial mountain?

Most times, I choose the latter.



My father Toye Holmes (top left), pictured above me, with my mother Betty on the right. Their love gave me the tools to step into my royalty.

When the Great Recession hit its peak in 2009, I was among the nearly 14 million Americans unemployed looking for work.

For three years, I lived on a weekly unemployment check of \$320. Freelance writing and television production work supplemented the modest income when it was available.

My faith, support system and a will to succeed help me overcome tough economic times.

In my forthcoming memoir, *RescueRedemptionRecovery.com*, I chronicle my journey of self-discovery as I navigate through those years and the chaotic world of the fire rescue service. At the intersection of race, class, and sexual identity, the platform reveals the lessons learned when we fight for our dreams, face our fears and find purpose in our pain and struggle.

No one leaves Earth unscathed. We all have a story. The stories you will read about our honorees of the 6th Annual Gentlemen's Ball share a common thread. From Academy Award-winner Tarell McCraney to the accomplished community organizer Darlene Hudson, these men and women refused to give up.

I thank God, for a mother who showed me how to do the same.



PRIDE is ageless

Learn more at
aarp.org/pride

WE MAKE PRIDE A YEAR-ROUND CELEBRATION

Like anyone else, people in the LGBT community want to live longer, healthier and more fulfilling lives. AARP is committed to creating a new vision for aging—one complete with diverse stories and innovative ways for everyone to pursue their passions—equally, openly and proudly.

facebook.com/aarpgeorgia
 @AARPGA

AARP® Real Possibilities
Georgia

2017 CONTRIBUTORS



Shaun W. Allende, Esq. is the founder of the Law Office of Shaun W. Allende. Shaun's desire to become a change agent within the field of law came about when he reclaimed his power after being a victim of a violent anti-gay hate crime while he was a student at a Historically Black College and University (HBCU). Shaun resides in Atlanta where he consults with local firms on trial matters and works with other practicing attorneys in their LGBT outreach efforts.

Ryan Girley presents and offers himself as a vessel: To use his gifts, talents, and abilities to encourage, transform, challenge and uplift lives. "I believe in speaking truth to power, even when your voice or, in my case, the pencil shakes," he says. "My cup runneth over, out of my overflow I give to others and the world at large. I have dreams of using all mediums of media to tell stories that matter through written word, short films and documentaries."



Kae Goode is a poet, emerging writer and activist. Goode is currently working on receiving her bachelor's degree in English from Georgia Gwinnett College.



Matt Ford is a non-binary writer, artist and anthropologist from Detroit. They like to use creative platforms like nonfiction, print media, video and music to discuss race, gender, sex and popular culture, and their writing has been published in HuffPost and Wall Street Journal. Matt is graduating from Vassar College in December 2017 following a yearlong domestic exchange at Morehouse College. They also dabble with work as a DJ and model, and love all things Janet Jackson.



NBC News hails **Anaré V. Holmes** as a "fearless firefighter" in its inaugural NBC OUT #Pride30 list of LGBT innovators, change makers and rising stars who are making the community proud. As an Ida B. Wells Best News Story Award winner, Holmes has worked with CNN, BET News and PBS network affiliates. His public service continues as a firefighter for the City of Atlanta Fire Rescue Department. His remarkable journey to fight for his dreams, face his fears, and find purpose in his pain is chronicled on the digital platform Rescue.Redemption.Recovery.com, the title of his forthcoming memoir.



Serial entrepreneur, **Lentheus Chaney**, is the founder and principal of Urban Luxury Media and Managing Partner at Imprint Properties, LLC. Lentheus has launched several luxury products that have led to the creation of the lifestyle publication Urban Lux Magazine, where he serves as Editor-In-Chief. @urbanluxmag



Through the power of the internet, **Lonnell Williams**, established himself as an important and influential force in the world of social media. As host and producer of the popular web series 3LWTV, a vehicle created to tell untold stories. One of Lonnell's most visible relationships is with media mogul Oprah Winfrey, who he befriended via Twitter. Lonnell continues to explore new opportunities and use his life to demonstrate a tagline his supporters have come to adore, "Stand In Your Light." @3LWTV



Ish Holmes is an accomplished creative and an entrepreneur. He has over 10 years of experience, specializing in photography, brand identity, design, and marketing. He mentors a range of startup entrepreneurs, and provides consulting to experienced business owners looking to grow. He has devoted his entire life to mastering aesthetics, and he has found that he is the happiest at the intersection of business and art. @ishholmes



Juan Smalls was born and raised in South Central, LA where he developed an insatiable appetite for Mexican food: specifically, enchiladas, burritos, and tacos - in that order. His words have been consumed on the pages and screens of juanandgee.com, ebony.com, GENTS Mag, Urban Socialites Magazine, and David Magazine, to name a few. He currently resides in Atlanta, GA with his husband, son, and dog - in that order.



Ray Love is the founder of Love Creative Management, a boutique creative marketing, public relations and management agency specializing in lifestyle, indie filmmakers/artists and projects. The firm reaches and engages black millennial audiences where they work, eat and play. Clients have included: Issa Rae Presents Giants, BET's The Quad and Leap of Faith: The Journey of a Dream - A Memoir.





STAND IN YOUR LIGHT

Photo by Lentheus Chaney

It's 2017 and being an LGBTQIA person of color in America is exhausting.

From the incessant antics of one of the most undignified, unqualified, iconoclastic White Houses ever, to unfunny comedians spewing hateful ignorance towards our trans brothers and sisters, the list of assaults on our community appear insurmountable. Fatigue, hopelessness and depression seem like viable options of retreat... anything to numb the pain. That said, don't be deceived. Now more than ever it is time to check our feelings, get focused and fight. Its critical we tap into the truth of who we are, where we come from and the power we hold.

People often look at my life from the outside and think I'm so lucky. Luck has absolutely nothing to do with. I choose joy. Trust and believe that is a full-time job on top of a full-time job. For me happiness is not about the feeling of elation but more so maintaining a state of contentment...and that requires work. Relentless, unending, challenging work. Someone is always trying to steal our joy; it is our choice to let them. I'm often asked how to get to this space and my answer is each of our journeys

are different and each of us must find our unique path. There've been some specific defining moments in my life. One of the most impactful and powerful has been honoring the sacrifices of those who paved the way.

Last year I had a life changing experience on a southern plantation, of all places. I've always considered myself to have a decent grasp of the history of Africans and Native Indians in North America. I couldn't have been more clueless. While visiting Charleston, SC my bestie and I toured several historic plantations. Though I'd seen countless images of what many Africans endured through the vicious exploits of slavery, it was an entirely different level of comprehension to occupy the very same physical space where they toiled day in and day out building the extensive wealth of America—for free.

Exploring the terrain, I made my way to the sacred grounds where many ancestors were buried. I spent a lot of time just being still in that space, feeling that energy, absorbing its power. I recalled meditating, crying and thanking each soul who paved the way so that I may enjoy the life I have today. Upon exiting I realized my responsibility to be accountable for their sacrifices. My soul was lifted and empowered as I truly realized I'm entitled to every luxury America offers. I was forever changed.

Realizing I am a descendant of this kind of strength and resilience—I know I am unstoppable. You are too. Keeping us disconnected from the truth of our history is by specific design. It allows seeds of discord to metastasize and divide us. No more. We owe it to our forefathers and mothers to maximize our potential. We must realize the manifestation of bigger things than even they dreamed.

In today's divisive, racially charged climate I know it is not the time for defeat or despair. It's time for reconciliation, unity and strategy. I believe the current presidential administration is the series finale of white supremacy in this country. America, in ALL its beautiful diversity, is cancelling this long drawn out fiasco. They'll likely be a spectacular encore or two, but rest assured if we remain vigilant we will emerge victorious.

I offer you this: the next time you're feeling powerless, confused, depressed or hopeless find a way to tap into the truth of who you are and the real power of the legacy you hold. As Maya Angelou said, "I come as one but I stand as 10,000." Always honor that. You are the one. You are the 10,000. Reverence for that kind of power demonstrates just how irrepressible you are. You are not only worthy of your dreams—you are entitled to them. Don't be distracted.

Always stand in your light...and resist!

Story by Lonnell Williams @3LWTV

Taking care of your family—that's being good at life.



Visit newyorklife.com/lgbt to learn more about how we can help secure your family's future.

Insure. Invest. Retire.

Be good at life.



THE GENTLEMEN'S FOUNDATION PRESENTS

tgfb

THE 6TH ANNUAL
Gentlemen's Ball
EST. 2011

We Are Royalty



2017
H O N O R E E S



Miss Lawrence

COMMUNITY VANGUARD

01

The birth of "Miss Lawrence" came from the exploration of himself and the freedom of self-expression in the beauty industry. Identifying the thing that most attracted him to women, BEAUTY, is what propelled the lip-stick wearing, high-heel PUMPIN, and overall fashion flexible and gender non-conforming man to adhere to the image he saw at core.

When not filming scenes for his breakout performance as Miss Bruce on the hit Fox series STAR, Miss Lawrence is the personality and talent behind Atlanta's upscale, boutique salon Lawrence Washington Salon.

Having trained at the Paul Mitchell Institute, Lawrence has built a solid reputation as the go-to stylist for clients like Kenya Moore, Jennifer Holiday, Ciara, Serena Williams, Elise Neal and Angela Basset. His Pressed For Time Salon in Atlanta has become a destination for Atlanta's top executives and socialites, all who rely on Miss Lawrence and his team of experts for cutting-edge, sophisticated designs.

"I may work with lots of celebrities, but I am dedicated to all my clients to help them find their personal style," Lawrence says.

His style acumen and his snappy sense of humor brought him to the attention of Bravo network where he first appeared as confidante and hairstylist on the cult reality show, "Real Housewives of Atlanta." His popularity on the series resulted in multiple appearances, and culminated into being named co-host of "Fashion Queens," a late-night television phenomenon that is now in its third season. On "Fashion Queens," he shares the set with fellow Atlanta hairstylist Derek J and New York fashion maven and social media sensation Bevy Smith.

"Being on 'Fashion Queens' has been such an amazing growth experience," Miss Lawrence says. "It has allowed me to speak directly to fans who have found me on television and to strengthen and grow my clientele base."

Miss Lawrence has been featured in numerous media outlets, including magazines such as Paper, Upscale, Black Hair Sophisticates, Hype Hair and Modern Salon, as well as on Essence.com. His television appearances include Bravo's "Fashion Queens," CBS's "The Insider," "The Bethanny Show," BET's "Rip the Runway" and "The Steve Harvey Show."

His celebrity has afforded him the opportunity to support causes in which he believes, especially those related to eradicating homophobia and promoting a positive view of the LGBTQ community as it relates to Black lives. He has worked closely with the National Action Network where he was a panelist on the subject of LGBTQ Rights and Homophobia in the Black Community. Additionally, he has promoted the

Human Rights Campaign's effort "This is Luv," and has been a strong advocate

of the Ali Forney Center, whose focus is changing the lives of homeless LGBTQ youth.

"I am so fortunate to be able to live my dreams, but there are so many other LGBTQ people who hide in the shadows," Miss Lawrence says. "Hopefully, I help them discover that they can have full, rich lives exactly as they are."

Miss Lawrence currently divides his time between New York City and Atlanta, where he continues to oversee his successful salon.

His signature style and stilettos captivated audiences at the Bronner Brothers International Beauty Show. Ten years later, Derek Jae expands his brand into new territory in television and film with the upcoming release Gay Like Me. The provocative documentary reveals the real-life journey of African-American men embracing their own sexual identity.

You recently completed a new documentary. **Derek Jae:** I've been wanting to do a documentary for a long time. The title is Gay Like Me. It started out to be a resource for gay black men to show the variety of men that's in our culture. It has started to transform itself as a docuseries. The first part of the docuseries is called the "Masculine Man" and [this installment] has been getting great reviews. I am very proud of it.

Then, when I was a platform artist at the Bronner Brothers Hair Show for Sally's Beauty Supply I thought: I need to figure out some gimmick... some type of way to get people to the stage. I figured I'd wear them. It was a sales gimmick at first and then once I got on television, it started to become a part of my everyday life.

How do you address the criticism that the media only wants to highlight the effeminate, non-gender conforming models of gay men? **Derek Jae:** When

black people first started to show up on television, they showed up as maids, as slaves, ...as jiggaboos, some would say, and then the years went by and we were often depicted as drug dealers, crack heads and prostitutes...it's only been until recently where we see black actors have powerful positions on mainstream television.

The same thing is true with the black gay community. I look at it like we are the entry point to be able to have masculine [gay] men on television and represent that image for the community. But, we have to start somewhere first. RuPaul opened-up the door for me and Lawrence... And, we are opening doors for more masculine figures.

What are you looking forward to in the next year or five years? **Derek Jae:** I'm looking forward to the next installment of Gay Like Me. We'll be shooting at the end of the year. In the next five years, I hope to have a catalogue of documentaries and scripted television that caters to the black LGBTQ community and help tell our stories.

What are plans for Gay Like Me's distribution? **Derek Jae:** We are working on how we're going to do distribution now. This was a passion project and getting it done is an accomplishment.

How did you get into television? **Derek Jae:** Being on television was never a goal of mine. My goal was to be the best hair stylist I could possibly be...I was asked to be part of the Bronner Brother's Hair Competition for the company's 60th Anniversary [in 2007]. And, when I did that it was being filmed for Chris Rock's Good Hair documentary and, also a show called Tears, Shears and Beauty on BET J. I just went on there being my normal self and from there things started happening.

When we peel back the layers to uncover who Derek Jae is, how do you define yourself? **Derek Jae:** I live out loud. I mind my own business. I try not to speak on things that have nothing to do with me. I like being at home. I like chilling. I can dress down and be good in some yoga clothes. I am fashion flexible...but I know I'm a man.

How did the pumps and handbags come in to being? **Derek Jae:** I bought my first pair of heels for my 25th birthday because I had a pair of pants that were too long and I did not have time to get them hemmed.

"I bought my first pair of heels for my 25th birthday..."

The project shares the many faces, backgrounds and personalities of gay black men.

I recently met the former recurring member of Bravo's Real Housewives of Atlanta franchise in New Orleans. He made an appearance at this year's National Association of Black Journalist Convention, where the documentary screened. His transparency and vulnerability drew me in. He mentioned that he added the letters a and e to his Derek J moniker as a tribute to his sister's initials.

He remains accessible, accommodating and always mindful from whence he came whether operating his Atlanta-based styling emporium, The J Spot, or entertaining audiences in Oxygen's Hair Battle Spectacular, Chris Rock's Good Hair or Bravo's Fashion Queens.

Derek Jae has his feet firmly planted on the ground—no matter how high the shoes or how far his platform takes him.

Get into our courageous conversation now:

02

Derek Jae

COMMUNITY TRAILBLAZER

Story by Anaré V. Holmes



Story by Matt Ford

Sharon Lettman-Hicks

GENTLEWOMAN OF ALLIANCE

03

"To truly be free, you must give to causes greater than yourself," said Sharon Lettman-Hicks in the opening line of her brief, yet heartfelt, remarks. She was standing at the podium during the Realize the Dream March and Rally in 2013. The event commemorated the 50th anniversary of the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. She repeated words she was taught by a mentor who assisted in her development as an advocate and activist.

This year's Gentlewoman of Alliance, through her work at the National Black Justice Coalition, People for the American Way and other agencies gives her all to causes every day in her commitment to make the country safer for all people, especially black LGBT folks.

Lettman-Hicks entered her role as Executive Director and Chief Executive Officer of the NBJC in October 2009. Although David J. Johns was named the new Executive Director this year, Lettman-Hicks retains the CEO title. Steadfast in her high-profile leadership role of the civil rights organization dedicated to empowering black lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people, her desire to advocate for the oft-neglected issues impacting the African-American community, and all its members, remains strong.

NBJC's intersectional approach to social justice is the driving force behind the

organization. "We don't go just one way," said Lettman-Hicks in a prior news interview. "We take our work seriously and bring a face to the LGBT community within the African American community. We are willing to take on our mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers and the church in our quest for LGBT equality."

Regardless of her own sexual orientation as a heterosexual woman, she takes these issues personal. Seeing black issues as a family affair. She calls herself a sister rather than an ally to LGBT folks, as explained in a 2011 MetroWeekly article.

Her efforts to tackle black LGBT and family issues are evident in her writing, such as her 2014 HuffPost pieces, A Black Family Call to Action to Address the HIV/AIDS Epidemic and The State of Black LGBT People and Their Families. In the same year, President Barack Obama named her to the President's Advisory Commission on Educational Excellence for African Americans.

Her leadership in black LGBT justice should come as no surprise considering her lifelong commitment to intersectional activism. Leading up to her joining NBJC, she was selected as one of 24 progressive executive management leaders for the Rockwood Leadership Institute's 2008-09 Leading from the Inside Out Fellowship Program, designed to strengthen senior leadership in the non-profit sector. As well, she served eight years at the People

for the American Way (PFAW) Foundation where she held several positions including Executive Vice President for Leadership Programs and External Affairs and the leader of the "Homophobia in the Black Church" program through the PFAW's African American Religious Affairs division. She continues to be a fierce voice for religious freedom and LGBT acceptance in the church, leading many individuals and foundations to invest in her work. As a fully-paid life member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., FAMU National Alumni Association, and the NAACP, she sustains her commitment to her community and its leadership beyond her college years.

She currently serves as a member of the National Business Inclusion Consortium for the National Gay and Lesbian Chamber of Commerce (NGLCC); Project Advisory Committee Member of the LGBT Safe Schools Initiative for the Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network (GLSEN); the Advisory Council of Creative Coalition's Be A STAR: Show Tolerance and Respect, a national anti-bullying initiative; and the Executive Committee of the National Black Leadership Forum.

Her track record of service is a testament to the vital role allies and sister-friends play in advancing Civil and Human Rights.

Atlanta Fire Rescue Chief Joel Baker believes in an "ism-free workplace." "No sexism, no racism, no nepotism, no cronyism," he said. "What can I do to set that tone?"

The answer? Introduce diversity and inclusivity initiatives geared toward women, Hispanics and the LGBT community.

"I have not witnessed any discrimination against any member on this job, but still, as the fire chief, I have the responsibility to communicate to the members that I'm not going to tolerate any form of discrimination," Baker said.

AFRD started making strides toward inclusivity months ago. The department attended a recruitment drive for the LGBT community, launched an advertising campaign showcasing its diversity, began reaching out to the Hispanic community and started a women's leadership group. The need for various liaisons, including two for the LGBT community, developed organically from there, Baker said.

"I call it a departmental-wide, diversity inclusive program which includes the LGBT, Hispanic firefighters and women," Baker said. "We didn't do it to get recognized ... We do it to make it happen."

The roles of the liaisons include providing training across AFRD related to gender identity and expression, affirmation and support of LGBT employees and their families, community outreach and working with residents for emergency preparedness and crisis management.

"The liaisons are responsible for bridging the gap between AFRD and the

04

Chief Joel G. Baker

GENTLEMAN OF ALLIANCE

Story by Dallas Duncan, originally published in the Feb. 3, 2017 issue of Georgia Voice

LGBTQ community through community outreach and resource development," said Lt. Latia Posey, who took on the role in January 2016.

Both Posey and fellow LGBT liaison firefighter Anaré Holmes started their roles in the last year. The department produced "Narratives in Courage: Stories of LGBT Public Safety Heroes" Feb. 15th at the Center for Civil and Human Rights. During the program attendees screened the short film "Welcome Home Hero" by director Courtney Walter. The film tells the story about an openly gay Medal of Honor recipient and featured a panel discussion with local LGBT public safety professionals.

"Even if you identify as being straight, but you're an ally of the gay and lesbian community, come out and support," Baker said. "This initiative is big for us. This is our first huge, open forum where we get to interact with the community."

"Narratives in Courage: Stories of LGBT Public Safety Heroes" is the first in a series of outreach programming efforts planned to engage Atlanta's LGBT community, Holmes said.

"Narratives in Courage' expands the image of what an American hero looks like," he said. "This project defies stereotypes and presents another example of what it means to be a LGBT man or woman. It shines a light on the role we play in improving the quality of life for all people."

Atlanta received the highest rating from the Human Rights Campaign for four years, and Baker sees it part of his duty to make sure that legacy continues, and ensure that anyone who wants to be part of a fire rescue team knows there's a spot for them in the department.

He also wants to ensure AFRD continues its annual walk in the Pride parade.

"Think about it. You got a six-foot-six tall rascal in a fire chief's uniform walking that parade, shaking hands, catching beads, throwing out beads, catching candy, throwing out candy, talking to everybody," he said. "I think that's a good sign for the community, to know that the fire chief is here to protect and serve everyone regardless of what type of identification you may or may not have."

Baker said the LGBT inclusive initiatives were not reactions to former fire chief Kelvin Cochran, who was fired in 2015 because of discriminatory passages written in a book he wrote for a men's Bible study group at his church. In the book, Cochran identified himself as the fire chief for Atlanta, which some said gave the impression these views were representative of the department and made LGBT public safety employees feel uncomfortable.

"Absolutely nothing, none of it had anything to do with Kelvin Cochran," Baker said. "If you've ever been in a house fire or you ever had a cardiac arrest and you need someone to do CPR, you don't care if that person's uniform is black, white, gay or straight, pink or purple. You just want that person to save your life. I want to demonstrate that."





Tyra B

GENTLEWOMAN OF ARTISTRY

05

Tyra Bolling, better known as Tyra B, is a dedicated singer-songwriter from Petersburg, Virginia who is no stranger to the music industry. She's best known for her Top 40 R&B singles "Country Boy," "Still in Love," and "Givin' Me a Rush." She has toured and shared stages with multi-platinum selling artists including Beyoncé, Trey Songz, Chris Brown and many more.

Tyra began writing songs at the age of 9. Shortly after, Bolling created a local singing group by the name of Kraz'e (pronounced Crazy) with her sister and now cousin-in-law. While the other two singers went to college, at the age of 15, Bolling decided to pursue a career as a singer.

In 2005, her singles "Country Boy" and "Still in Love" became Top 40 hits on the Billboard Hot R&B/Hip Hop chart with no major label support. A second single "Get No Ooh Wee," co-written by Kandi Burrus, released later that year and landed her a gig as the opening act on Destiny's Child: Destiny Fulfilled World Tour.

In 2007, she released the hit single "Givin' Me a Rush" which peaked at #2 on BET's 106 & Park. It became her

biggest hit to date as she was named one of Billboard's "Artists To Watch" and accumulating over 6 million views on YouTube.

After years of creative differences and conflict over her image and sexuality, Tyra decided to leave her record label. "I was an openly gay young woman way before I was signed, but my label didn't want that image portrayed publicly, so I had to pretend to be something I wasn't. But it became extremely taxing, and I grew tired of pretending."

"Fighting for what she believes in, staying true to herself and never losing hope"

With her sexuality always being questioned from the start, Bolling had this to say, "I just want to overcome the stigma of homosexuality within the music industry, especially for black artists and help open the door for others just like me."

Currently residing in Atlanta, GA, Tyra returned to the scene as an independent artist with a Bachelor's degree in Music Business and a new single entitled "I'm

Yours." The ballad is a heartwarming, acoustically driven love song written by Tyra and produced by Chicago native, Sharod Virtuoso. Appropriately released on Valentine's Day, the single has already garnered over a half million streams on social platforms. The official video features appearances by Mimi Faust of Love & Hip Hop Atlanta and social influencer, Shod Santiago. An EP, entitled Tysexual is slated to release in Summer 2017 with production by Mike Kalombo, Sharod Virtuoso, First Kontakt, D. Clax and Kent Murphy.

2017 Gentleman of Artistry, Coriology, is an independent singer-songwriter sharing his human journey through soul music. At the corner where jazz, soul, pop & r&b intersect is where you'll find him, tickling the ivories, drawing inspiration from notable predecessors such as Raphael Saadiq, Rahsaan Patterson & many other timeless soul voices. The Honey Love singer has a deep appreciation for the classic soul

"I discovered my love for music and artistry in the '90s."

music from the '70s but would come to find his groove with the introduction of the Neo Soul era. "I discovered my love for music and artistry in the '90s. The birth of Neo Soul made my heart sing and ignited a passion to create my own music," he explains.

Once opportunity met destiny, his music began to take him on a journey that has afforded him the experiences of performing along-side legendary artists such as Kirk Franklin, Stephanie Mills, Richard Smallwood, Mariah Carey, Monica, and Avery Sunshine - to name (more than) a few.

His approach to music is all about vibe and energy and wants the music "to feel just as good as may it sound." And his latest release, Be With You, does exactly that; it sounds great and feels just a good.

06

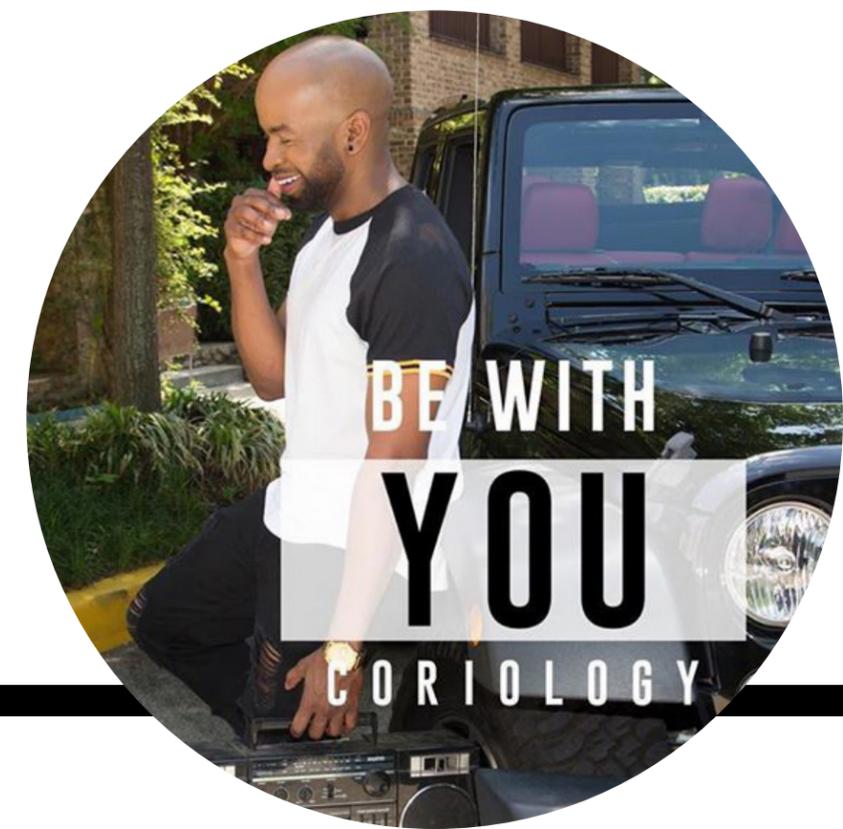
Coriology

GENTLEMAN OF ARTISTRY

Story by Juan Smalls

"One day last summer I was listening to Spotify and this song by Earth Wind & Fire's (Show Me The Way) came on it stopped me in my tracks; spoke to me, made love to my ears. I loved the feeling it gave me and thought I wanted to try and create something that felt like that. That night I wrote Be With You."

Boasting cool vocals, a catchy melody, and a groove that's out of this world, this summer love song about the butterflies you get when your crushing on someone is an instant classic.



Story by Ray Love, Jr.

Melissa Scott

GENTLEWOMAN OF EXCELLENCE

07



Affectionately known as the voice of reason on VH1's Love & Hip Hop Atlanta, Melissa "DJ M" Scott sits as cool as a cucumber amidst the chaos that surrounds her as she is just days away from her biggest weekend of the year – Atlanta Black Pride Weekend.

Though a new face to the Mona Scott Young franchise, Melissa is a staple within the LGBT society of Atlanta. As the owner of PAL's Soul Bar in downtown Atlanta and the operator of TRAXX Girls, Melissa has successfully continued in her family's deeply rooted business of nightclub owners and event promoters. Her entrepreneurial ventures don't stop there, though.

"In addition to my longstanding businesses, I am also working on opening a new club with strip club king Mike Childs who opened Magic City," begins Melissa. "I am also working on music with LA-bred rapper Renaye Diaz, launching a new website named The Colored Life that will operate as an LGBT portal for events and media, and adding a small fleet to my Party Bus Animals company to cross over into a more elite and unique transportation business," says Melissa.

A powerhouse filled with a passion for entertaining and catering to the LGBT community, Melissa is on track move to the next level. As an entrepreneur, the Paine College graduate with a bachelor's degree in Mathematics, understands the risk factor involved with her ventures. She knows that great risks often yield greater success.

"Everything I do involves major risks," explains Melissa. "I host sponsored events where we are spending thousands of corporate and personal

"I aim to constantly diversify my repertoire to avoid becoming stagnant..."

dollars hoping for a return when something as simple as a weather change or an artist missing a flight could interfere with the success of the event."

Nevertheless, the risk and ability to claim stake on being the ultimate tastemaker who the LGBT community looks to as the authority on what's hot is a fulfilling reward for Melissa, who likes to keep her hand in a variety of endeavors to keep things fresh.

"I aim to constantly diversify my repertoire to avoid becoming stagnant, repetitious or boring in this industry," says Melissa. "I like to be on the front end of trend setting. I like to be the first to do things."

Melissa continues to achieve her goal of being a trendsetter as she is our first to receive the honor as The Gentlemen's Foundation 2017 Woman of Excellence.

Jack Mizrahi's life has been filled with purpose and meaning, from his early days a photographer, announcer, and narrator for House of Revlon, to today as a house-father, judge and ball founder. His father always told Mizrahi, a first-generation Haitian born American from Queen's New York, that he did not have to dress, or carry himself like the other young boys he was going to school with.

His father encouraged him to have pride in his heritage, to be distinctive in his mannerisms, his academics, pursuit of his dreams and not to allow others to typecast him.

"The earlier you are able to find your confidence, the better. Once you have the confidence in yourself, you can be and achieve anything you desire," said Mizrahi.

Early on, he displayed talent as a skilled oratorical debater on his high school debate team. After debate team ended, he searched for a new outlet for creative expression and ended up attending Traxx on 19th street with a schoolmate, out of pure boredom, to see Andre Revlon vogue, and perform in 1992.

Revlon soon took Mizrahi under his wing, and what started out as a simple photography assignment to take pictures for the House of Mizrahi and family, morphed into becoming a narrator/announcer for many legendary ballroom awards ceremonies and events.

08

Jack Mizrahi

GENTLEMAN OF EXCELLENCE

Story by Ryan Girley

He would later create many of the categories that participants are judged by today. Supported throughout his life by mentors like Andre, R.R Chanel and others who sought nothing but his betterment, he thrived.

The ballroom scene as we know it today had its early roots from the cake walks of the slaves on southern plantations to the popping 1920s during the Harlem Renaissance. Vouging, reading and shade isn't new. The ballroom scene provided a place of identity, belonging and family. It was a place of refuge for people of color, trans-women, those in transition and others who often felt they had no voice or place of belonging. Some of our best talents, activists and role models come from ballroom. Those who may, at one time, have been deemed social outcasts, misfits, or simply rejected by their families because of their sexual orientation or preference, would re-write their narratives on the ballroom floor. Contrary to the belief of many, ballroom is not filled with people who are uneducated, uncaring, judgmental and egotistical. These brave souls have been paving the way for LGBT men and women of color to have the freedom of self-expression we experience today.

"When people hear vogue and ballroom, some don't think the kids have anything to offer," says Mizrahi. "I've laughed more than I cried, we've lost so many people due to HIV/AIDS, suicides, and murders, but the ballroom community has remained strong."

The ballroom scene has been bedrock in the LGBT community throughout the HIV & AIDS crisis and today. Many outreach campaigns around testing, prevention and life after diagnosis occur at balls.

However, today many balls now face challenges of a different nature. From a lack of funding to a lack of affordable event space, economic changes and the gentrification remodeling many urban centers have caused a loss or erosion of safe spaces for LGBT people of color in many American cities. Clubs like Traxx, Loretta's; The Sequel; 708; Fusions; The Palace; Club 91; The Pear Garden; The Mark; and others are all now relics of a bygone time.

"We need to work on community not segmentation... Many people are surprised to learn that there is a genealogy to ballroom," he says.

Jack Mizrahi eventually took over the administration of the JP Awards with Andre, his business partner. They are now the two founding parents of the House of Mizrahi. He has dreams of a huge ballroom event in Madison Square Garden, saying: "I have much more to give; I want the scene to provide for others, what it provided for me, a place of safety, security, stability and family, a place of self expression."

He is currently at work on a documentary and movie project as he continues to walk in his purpose and expand his talent and evolution as a man.





Story by Shaun Allende

Amiyah Scott

GENTLEWOMAN OF PROMISE

09

A blend of beauty, determination, and talent helped to propel Amiyah Scott from the ballroom scene to the hit Fox television series, Star.

Amiyah's story proves what is possible when we commit to building the life of our own design. Her story also makes clear why she embodies the woman The Gentlemen's Foundation (TGF) is proud to name as its first Gentlewoman of Promise honoree.

Born on January 11th 1988, Amiyah began her transition at age 15.

Amiyah shared that "her family was as supportive as they could be with the unknown," in a recent appearance on Never Before with Janet Mock. Amiyah warmly described the acceptance and support she currently enjoys with her parents regarding her transition. However, she candidly admits that was not always the case. She has gone on record to say how her parents, especially her father, struggled for a time to accept her.

When tensions with her family hit a fever pitch, Scott left her family at age 17 to fully transition into herself. Amiyah's had limited communication with her Dad between the ages of 17

to 20. Arguably, Amiyah's bold and scary decision to leave home would set the stage for her to be self-reliant and independent. She soon carved out her own lane and following as a ballroom scene entertainer.

"I was young, and displaced, and trying to survive..."

From the House of Mizrahi to the House of Chanel, she found a sense of family and stability, telling interviewers, "I was walking balls for the money! I was young, and displaced, and trying to survive," she said. Amiyah. These experiences helped her to develop the performance ability she now utilizes as a social media and TV star.

By early 2015, Amiyah achieved more than 1 million Instagram followers, which caught Hollywood's attention. Amiyah's fame was solidified on December 14, 2016 when 6.7 million viewers watched Amiyah's break-out portrayal of the trans character "Cotton Brown" on the Fox series Star. She took her place in history as the first trans woman of color to star on a primetime network television series.

Being a new TV star is a lot of work, and Amiyah gracefully carries the added burdens that come with being one of the first. Amiyah has shared, in many interviews, her vision of the future: a world where there are no glass ceilings for she, and other trans women of color, to shatter. She continues to tour schools and work with change agents to encourage the pursuit of dreams, and to help end violence against trans women.

The Gentlemen's Foundation is proud to acknowledge Amiyah Scott's continuing efforts to empower the GBT community of color by bestowing upon her the foundation's first ever Gentlewoman of Promise Award.

The ascension of Gentleman's Ball honoree Julian Walker's acting career reads more like a fairy tale than the inglorious road to stardom endured by many.

An inexperienced actor answering an open call audition for a feature film, he lands the starring role. This is not commonplace in Hollywood, but Julian is clearly not destined for a life of convention. I recently caught up with the rising star to talk about his whirlwind journey, community, and more:

Our theme this year is We Are Royalty... What does royalty mean to you? How do you celebrate it? What can offer others to assist them in embracing their own royalty, especially those who don't see their own regal value? Walker: We are all royalty; some of us just haven't realized it yet. We all have strengths that make us unique from others around us. Knowing your self-worth & self-values are key factors in understanding who you are and where you can go in life. I celebrate my royalty by embracing my body & mind. I continue to walk in my purpose knowing I am god's creation therefore I can do no wrong.

I think with the different roles I've played in the past I always want to be true to that character, because there's someone who can relate.

You've teamed up with writer/director/producer Patrik Ian Polk once again joining the cast of Being Mary Jane this season. What is your favorite part of working on BET's highest rated original series? Walker: Patrik is so amazing! I'm thankful for every opportunity I get to work with him. Being Mary Jane is such an amazing experience, I love how friendly the cast & crew were. I think my favorite part was learning new things on set from the actors. I was challenged each day on set to push harder than the day before & at times it was hard but I'm glad I had the support from the cast.

"I'm definitely blessed to do what I love while supporting LGBT rights!"

The past few years appear to be a whirlwind. Where do you find the courage to take the road less traveled? Walker: Honestly, from those around me. Their support means the world to me. They push and encourage me to do things I wouldn't normally do. They challenge me to think outside of the box.

I want others around the world to know the exact same thing; you are a perfect creation of greatness. The minute you understand that you will officially be unstoppable.

Many see you as a positive, powerful representation of the community. What does power mean to you? Walker: Power to me means strength in your given circumstances. Every day I try to remind myself that I am enough even in my lowest points. If we can all do that, every day, we will all be powerful.

With so many people vying for your attention it can be overwhelming trying to please everyone. How do you find and maintain balance in your life? Walker: I try to keep my personal life separate from everything else. I enjoy traveling to set & interviews engaging with other about acting but I'm excited to get back home to my pretty normal life. Not to sound cheesy but I really try to focus on myself so I won't get caught in the hype of things around me.

What's next for you? Walker: Currently I'm the Talent Manager/ Ambassador for a group called MOBI (Mobilizing Our Brothers Initiative). MOBI is a series of curated social connectivity events for Black gay and queer men to see their holistic self. For more information about MOBITalk & MOBIfest coming May 2018 please visit, www.mobi-nyc.com.

I'm also traveling taking different acting classes to boost my skills.

Thank you for sharing with us Julian. You are an inspirational demonstration of excellence and a true Gentleman. Congratulations, on your well-deserved honor.

You've come of age during a very visible time for LGBT rights. Talk about any pressures you feel in the acting roles you accept in regard to how you feel the public may receive them. Walker: I'm definitely blessed to do what I love while supporting LGBT rights!



10

Julian Walker

GENTLEMAN OF PROMISE

Story by Lonnell Williams @3LWTV

Story by Anaré V. Holmes



Darlene Hudson

GENTLEWOMAN OF SERVICE

11

HER STORY

She wanted the coveted first chair in her high school band.

"I practiced so hard on that baritone saxophone that my mother got tired of hearing me run through those scales," says Darlene Hudson. "But, I made first chair. I became so good that the only time I ever played second to anybody was when Art Porter, who became an acclaimed jazz musician, and I competed during state competition."

With a work-ethic just as strong as her love of people, Hudson's body of work as a public health professional, community organizer and advocate for Georgia's most vulnerable children earn her the distinction of being our 2017 Gentlewoman of Service honoree.

She's always been a go-getter, persuading others to join her for the ride.

After being selected to direct the youth choir at her home church in Pine Bluff Arkansas, Hudson convinced some of her other friends who could sing and play guitar and drums to form a mass choir that toured all over the city.

Her musical prowess earned her a full scholarship at the University of Arkansas-Conway campus. During her time in college two events would change the trajectory of her professional life.

"I joined Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc. and saw what community service actually looked like," says Hudson who started working on the sorority's national initiative to help provide resources to unwed mothers.

Upon graduation, she landed a gig in Little Rock, Arkansas as a Health Educator for Planned Parenthood.

Next, came a mysterious disease known as GRID, gay-related immune deficiency that was killing white gay men.

The Arkansas Public Health Department created a telephone hotline in its Infectious Disease division to provide information to the public about how the virus is spread and what steps people could take to protect themselves. Hudson took a job working for the hotline and made the transition to working for state government.

"After I took the job, I met a friend who became infected with the disease. He told me if I really wanted to make an impact and prevent the spread of this disease, I had to go to the source of where infections started," she says.

Her friend took her to a gay bar. The bar would prove an important resource for her later after she worked with a group of gays and lesbians to form Arkansas's first black LGBT organization called Brothers and Sisters.

"The group started out of a need to create culturally competent HIV prevention programs and services that addressed the needs of black folks," she says. "We were able to increase testing hours that made it conducive for working people and made the process more accessible and confidential."

During this time Hudson became aware of her romantic attraction to other women and entered her first same-sex relationship.

Brothas and Sistas became a national model for others to follow and Hudson found herself accepting invitations to speak at HIV prevention conferences and workshops around the country.

Hudson then took a position working at Sisterlove, serving as founder Dázon Diallo's second-in-command manager.

It would be her work to make the Atlanta Black Gay Pride celebration more inclusive and informative that others would come to know her bold and direct leadership style.

As the former executive director of In the Life Atlanta, the first 501c3 charitable organizing body

to offer Black LGBT educational and cultural programming during the annual Labor Day event, Hudson helped build a coalition of party promoters, grassroots activists, artists and HIV prevention and treatment specialist.

"Our goal was to bring all the players who wanted to come together the opportunity to get on the same page and create a celebration that was representative of the true diversity that exists among us," she says. "We have to take care of the community, otherwise there will not be anybody here to enjoy the parties."

Looking ahead to the future, Hudson and activist Craig Washington filed articles of incorporation to form the Southern Unity Movement. An outgrowth of the annual Bayard Rustin-Audre Lorde Breakfast that occurs every Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday, the purpose is to address leadership gaps that exists in the Atlanta metro area's Black LGBT population.

"We're not trying to reinvent the wheel. We want to make a difference and begin to help define what Black Queer leadership looks like."

As she charts this new path, she remains inspired by the Gospel music she sang and played during her youthful days in Arkansas. Today, the top prize is freedom.

Charles Stephens, founder and executive director of "The Counter Narrative," does the hard work of creating new narratives and tearing down destructive narratives in and amongst the LGBT community.

Stephens, an Atlanta native, was schooled in activism and the rich civil rights history of Atlanta through dinner conversations with his parents. Dinner conversations often covered topics from social justice, local community events and newspaper articles.

His parents encouraged conversations around lessons learned, how to be more present for the community and how community members could be included in formative conversations that create change.

Stephens eventually founded a Black Men's Leadership organization during his junior year of high school. He cautions those who seek to follow his path given that the work of an activist isn't for the faint of heart, nor is it for those only seeking to be well-paid. Stephens further cautions those who seek to take up the work of social justice to be prepared for the intensity of the work, and to set time aside for self-care. It is important to stay connected to the love of one's community, and the people you love.

"Activists on the ground can often feel unappreciated. Our ancestors made it possible for us to assemble, to vote, to attend coeducational intuitions of higher learning, to drive down the highway and stay at a hotel, among other hard fought rights; I do this work as a tribute to them," he said.

12

Charles Stephens

GENTLEMAN OF SERVICE

Story by Ryan Girley

The work of combating racism, social injustices and homophobia never stops, never sleeps, and never takes a day off. There will always be a need—a voice that should be heard, a life that should be reminded that it matters, but you cannot effectively pour out of an empty cup.

Started as a vehicle for political activism, he began the Counter Narrative as a vehicle for empowerment and dialogue for LGBT men of color and their allies. The project operates as a bridge builder and a safe place for often-difficult conversations amongst friends, coworkers, neighbors and family. People want to feel connected to something greater than themselves and the Counter Narrative provides opportunities for engagement in the work of social justice. The Counter Narrative believes that is important that we speak to the hearts and minds of our people, that our collective stories have the power to inspire change.

"We cannot give up on changing people's hearts and minds," he says. "We can change laws, and address systemic flaws in our justice system and other institutions of power, but people make emotional choices when voting. Dr. King did have a movement of non-violence but he also had a sense of policy as well. I am really moved by the challenges we now face though proposed policy changes on both a local and national level."

Stephens believes that black gay men and women deserve a seat at the table in mainstream media, at writing tables, at news anchor desks; and, in corporate boardrooms.

We must encourage our people to tell more of their stories. The dads, mothers, teachers, caretakers, politicians, music artists; and, our existing institutions have been heavily influenced by black gay culture. Yet have these institutions created

a narrative that isn't representative of what it means to be a black gay man or woman in present culture.

Stephens believes that corporations and community organizations have a unique opportunity now to highlight the value of creating a space at the table for our stories through fellowships, and partnerships with community organizations—which allow the emerging black gay filmmaker, singer, actor or writer a chance to shine. Our people though brilliant and resilient, often have been denied a seat at the table, based on their sexuality, political affiliation, and socioeconomic status, rather than the content of their character.

A life of service is as natural to Stephens as breathing. The work of the Counter Narrative embodies his passion and pursuits. Stephens believes that it is important for black gay men to own their own narratives.

"If we want to see change in society we must change the narrative, we must counter the negative narratives that have remained unchallenged. Every social movement or cause has used narrative as an effective part of strategy," he says.

We can march in the streets. We can show up and hold institutions of power accountable. We can get actively involved in the affairs of our cities, states and towns, but we must change the narrative.

When you own your story, you own your power.



TRACEE McDANIEL



2017
GENTLEWOMAN OF THE YEAR

ESTEEMED writer Alice Walker once said, "Models in art, in behavior, in growth of spirit and intellect—even if rejected—enrich and enlarge one's view of existence." Gentlewoman of The Year Tracee McDaniel agrees. She is inspired by the images of strong and independent trans women of color breaking through the media landscape.

"I love where the media is standing and how Laverne Cox is working it, honey. Janet Mock and Laverne are letting us have it. And, I can't wait to see trans people represented in film next." says McDaniel.

Tracee also adds how she loves how we are finally seeing more than just the Jerry Springer stereotype as a representation for transwomen. McDaniel stands alongside Janet, Laverne, Amiyah Scott, Angelica Ross, and Mya Taylor in making strides to reshape and redefine the narratives set throughout American culture of what it is to be a transwoman of color.

As the founder and executive director of Juxtaposed Center for Transformation, she and her board of directors and volunteers are hard at work. The team provides basic, necessary and fundamental services to the transgender community, such as housing and employment referrals. The center is steadily building capacity to fill a void in leadership that addresses transwomen of color issues. In addition to creating a non-profit

that will help save lives, she facilitates transgender cultural competency training programs and serves on several board of directors for community initiatives, including City of Atlanta Mayor Kasim Reed's Working Group on Prostitution.

She is a powerful and goal driven woman who has carved out her own space, while bringing visibility and representation of her trans and gender non-conforming community.

Her advocacy and contribution toward the mobility of marginalized people is necessary in times where the most vulgar voices are given a platform to showcase the lowest levels of decency and decorum.

"We have a lot of challenges being of color and being trans..."

Beyond activism, she is intentional about creating a life outside of community organizing. Many are surprised to learn she is a woman who loves nature. In fact, one of her memorable romantic dates occurred on a hiking trip and a visit to the beach in California, where she enjoyed the warm sand gliding between her toes.

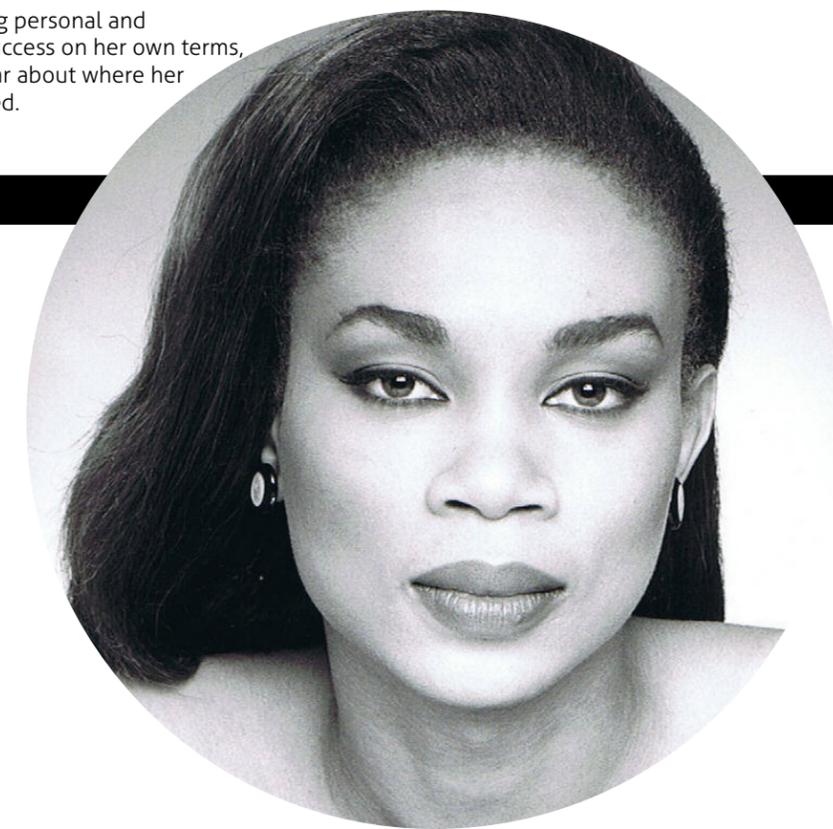
She is looking forward to one day visiting Paris, France and states like Colorado and Alaska to experience living "off the grid," she says.

Always defining personal and professional success on her own terms, she is very clear about where her future is headed.

"I want to have housing designated for trans people who may have to start over, or even a safe, soft place for trans people to be able to land," says McDaniel, who also has a word to pass on to other change agents working to expand Civil and Human Rights to the disenfranchised.

"Sometimes we get caught up in everything going on and forget to take time for ourselves. We have a lot of challenges being of color and being trans but, don't let that deter you, be careful and don't become depressed over those issues. Live life, be yourself and enjoy that." Words of wisdom from a woman who knows.

Story by Kae Goode



TARELL McCRANEY



2017
GENTLEMAN OF THE YEAR

THE road to stardom begins with a single step. Some may call it “a step out on faith” while others deem it “following your passion.” Whatever you call it, the same rule applies: take the first step! This is a tried and true rule that 2017 Gentleman of the Year, Tarell McCraney, has been following all his life. After all, he took his first step toward stardom, perhaps unknowingly, over three decades ago while growing up during the 1980’s in the anti-idyllic, crack-riddled Miami neighborhood ironically referred to as Liberty City.

The fateful step? As a child, he and other children would make up games and songs and stories as a mechanism to escape the harsh realities of their increasingly dilapidated hood where sexual abuse, teenage pregnancy, and extreme violence were the rampant norm. “We sort of found a narrative that allowed us to still have an imagination and grow within that atmosphere.” Those games and stories and songs would soon inspire McCraney to cultivate his burgeoning artistic abilities; his first play written at the ripe age of thirteen.

Through a series of fortunate events – a chance meeting here, a counselor’s introduction there – the budding artist would begin to hone his artistry, molding himself into a bona fide triple threat: as an actor (beginning in a community theatre program then studying at Chicago’s DePaul University and earning a Masters at Yale School of Drama), dancer (training in the Alvin Ailey program), and writer (penning the play that’s not really a play but more like a screenplay titled *In Moonlight Black Boys Look Blue* at the age of 22).

The MacArthur Fellow initially wrote the autobiographical piece just after his mother passed away from AIDS-related complications; the task also serving as a way to record his family history. I can’t help but assume it was also a means of cathartic release, a farewell of sorts, as I listen with a strained ear. “She’d taken with her a great amount of institutional wisdom of who I was and where we came from,” he opined, sounding more like he was delivering a speech rather than an interview. “There was so much information that I couldn’t remember, couldn’t recall. Those memories were fading. So, I put them down to make sure I always had those origin stories.”

Fast forward to 2011, the (screen)play that was written some 10 years prior, makes its way into the inbox of McCraney’s straight counterpart, writer and director Barry Jenkins. The pair made an instant connection, a match made in heaven so to speak. Though the gentlemen didn’t know each other – despite having grown up in the same neighborhood AT THE SAME TIME – their childhood experiences nearly mirrored each other; they both had mother’s that battled with addiction that ultimately led to a positive HIV diagnosis, both were shuffled from house to house during their most formative years, both experienced the pain and suffering caused by being poor, and they both desperately needed to share their story. So, the work began.

Little did they know, five years later their labor of love would become the epic film *Moonlight*, a masterpiece that peers into three defining chapters in the life of Chiron, a young black boy growing up in derelict Liberty City. It is a story about blackness, about drug addiction, about sexual identity, about bullying, about abuse, about life. My life...and the lives of so many black boys in America that grow

up feeling alone, broken-down, hopeless, and confused. Watching the film (I saw it four times in the theater), I began to weep as I realized that this was the first time that I have truly seen myself, my experience, my truth portrayed on film. Released in 2016, the critically acclaimed piece was so raw, authentic, and beautifully nuanced, it’s no wonder that it has grossed over \$65,000,000 to date and garnered 8 Oscar nods, taking home 3: Best Picture, Best Supporting Actor (Mahershala Ali), and Best Adapted Screenplay. So, you see, Tarell McCraney’s ascent to what some have deemed “overnight” stardom has been decades in the making. One. Glorious. Step. At. A. Time. On a road paved with sorrow, despair, joy, and most importantly, the hard truth.

Art is a representation of life but when profoundly told and beautifully acted, the stories can feel like the real thing. Such is the case with *Moonlight*. The re-writing, filming, and viewing process has brought back so many traumatic memories, dredged up by the type of storytelling one only hopes to achieve on a first foray into filmmaking, that continue to plague the award-winning playwright. “I was so excited to see something that looked exactly like memories to me,” he said. “Then the glee of that wore off – and I did remember feeling very depressed and very heart-broken about a lot of it. Mostly because these are not things that I have found the answers to and understand how they work. I actually ended up feeling that these are still looming questions in my life, questions about my own identity and my own self-worth that I’m still trying to figure out. I don’t know if that will ever go away but I wish like hell that it would.”

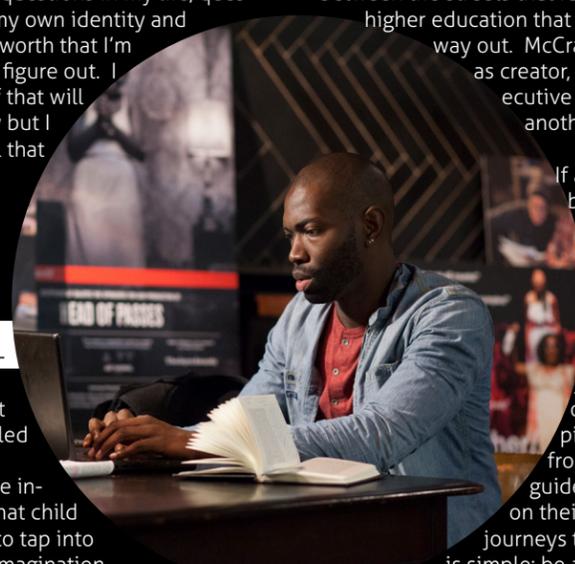
Today, as a 37-year-old man, his reflection on his upbringing in the six-square-mile labyrinth that was once called home is still laced with the innocence of that child once forced to tap into his creative imagination. “It’s the confluence of madness and urban blight,” he muses aloud. “Yet it is incredibly beautiful.” There is a sense of pride in his voice, a deeply rooted allegiance, when he reflects, “I am equivocally married to the place that I come from and [to] the idea that there are people in my community who are growing up in similar environments that I did: the way they speak, the way they love, the way they dance in the street, the way they mourn.”

But where does that unflinching honor,

held tightly, protected even, for a place that is home to so much death & despair (despite the checkered blips of joy) come from? Tarell continues realistically, “There some things in my community that are not palatable for everybody else and some things that are not palatable to me. At the same time, it is imperative that I engage my community from a place of love and a place of ownership. I have to own all aspects.” Indeed. Mr. McCraney owns his storied past, and he is owning his future as well.

So, what’s next for the talented Mr. McCraney? Tons of awesome projects. He is currently the Chair of the Playwriting Dept. at the Yale School of Drama and is readying his newest play, *Head of Passes*, for its Los Angeles debut. The piece stars everyone’s favorite TV mom, Phylicia Rashad, and explores the topics of family, acceptance, and the power of faith.

Perhaps the most exciting upcoming project (for little black boys like me that yearn to see themselves depicted in film and on TV) to come from the genius that is Tarell McCraney is the new yet-to-be-titled series recently purchased by OWN. Set in South Florida at the end of the Obama legacy, the show, inspired by events in McCraney’s own life, explores the precarious balance needed for the making of a man. Haunted by the death of his closest friend, and relied on by his hardworking mother to find a way out of poverty, a 14-year-old prodigy from the projects must choose between the streets that raised him or the higher education that may offer him a way out. McCraney will serve as creator, writer, and executive producer – yet another triple threat.



If anything is to be taken away from my conversation with the creative mogul-in-the-making, if there were just one nugget of wisdom, one piece of advice from him to help guide our youth on their personal journeys to stardom, it is simple: be authentic. He starts with an emphatic, “Please don’t ever be me. That’s not self-deprecating. There’s already a me.” Then continues with the sage wisdom of someone twice his age, “We don’t need another me. We need another whoever you are. Be who you are. If you don’t bring yourself, if we don’t see you, then we miss so much. Bringing life, or bringing art, or bringing work through your lens is the most paramount thing you can do.”

Indeed, Mr. McCraney. Indeed.

Story by Juan Smalls

Thank you to the following sponsors, partners and table captains

Thank you to the following sponsors, partners and table captains

DIAMOND SPONSOR



MEDIA SPONSORS



GOLD SPONSOR



SILVER SPONSORS



IN KIND SPONSORS

BRONZE SPONSORS



NORDSTROM



SPIRIT SPONSORS



PROMO PARTNERS



VIP RECEPTION SPONSOR



TABLE CAPTAINS

ERIC ELLEN

MICHEL BOYD

PATRICK WALKER

DARNELL L. MOORE

EUGENIO ALFONSO

ABDUR RAHIM BRIGGS

ROCKSTARS PRODUCTION

DR. CHRISTOPHER JOHNSON



OUR MISSION

The Gentlemen's Foundation, Inc.'s (TGF) mission is to promote the holistic development of Gay, Bisexual and Transgender men of color by celebrating positive, diverse images of the aforementioned gentlemen and by encouraging healthy dialogue on issues that contribute to individual wellness and growth, thereby having a residual positive impact on our communities.

@thegentlemensfoundation @gentsfoundation



#BETHECHANGE

The Gentlemen's Foundation, Inc. envisions a community where all Gay, Bisexual and Transgender men of color are empowered to demonstrate his dedication to community-building by pledging his time, efforts, and monetary giving to the wellness of self and others. We affectionately call this a "True Gentleman". He is:
CONFIDENT IN SELF + GENEROUS IN GIVING + PROUD TO STAND TALL IN HIS TRUTH.



CIRCLE OF TRUST

The Circle of Trust is TGF's Mental Health Initiative that offers a safe and affirming space for Gentlemen to speak freely about the issues that negatively impact their life – thus beginning the healing process. This is accomplished through bi-monthly therapist-led discussions, the exchange of information, quarterly webinars, advocacy, peer consultation & motivation and themed conference calls.



MEN'S HEALTH & WELLNESS FAIR

Held annually in June - National Men's Health Month, The Men's Health & Wellness Fair seeks to provide awareness, education, and complimentary medical services to Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender men of color and their allies to help empower them to make better life choices and improve their overall quality of life.



SCHOLARSHIPS

The Gentlemen's Foundation will award 5 - \$1000 scholarships to deserving students, reinforcing our commitment to holistic development.
Our 5 Pillars:
LEADERSHIP ABILITY, EDUCATION, SOCIAL GROWTH
SPIRITUAL ENLIGHTENMENT, and PHILANTHROPY

THE
GENTLEMENS FOUNDATION

est. 2014

THE WORK

Proceeds from the 6th Annual Gentlemen's Ball support programs and initiatives that enhance the quality of life for our community

A GENTLEMEN & A SCHOLAR

Since its inception, The Gentlemen's Foundation has sought ways to positively impact the lives of Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender men of color. Success has been achieved through mentoring initiatives, financial sponsorship, and social empowerment. In 2016, as the Board of Directors conducted its annual retreat, it was decided that the foundation would expand its financial commitment through increasing the number of college scholarships it makes to GBT youth.

The 'A Gentlemen and A Scholar' Initiative was created to go beyond mentoring and provide financial assistance supporting the achievement of college degrees and vocational training.

To date, more than \$10,000 has been awarded to deserving students.

To contribute to this initiative, please visit: www.TheGentlemensFoundation.org/scholar

MENTORSHIP

mPact2, meaning Men Personifying, Affirming + Celebrating Their Truth, is The Gentlemen's Foundation's young adult-centric initiative that promotes the healthy development of Gay, Bisexual + Trans men of color ages of 18-25. It includes the flagship holistic Mentoring Program that empowers its mentees to reach their full potential by providing positive mentors who assist in building self-esteem, self-worth and self-awareness.

Through a series of strategically planned programs, workshops and events, the mPact2 mentors also encourage the development of their mentee's leadership ability, social growth, education, spiritual enlightenment and philanthropic efforts – the five defining pillars of the program.

THE CIRCLE OF TRUST (COT) endeavors to break the silence about issues that plague our community. COT empowers gentlemen of color to live their best life by providing a safe and affirming space for them to speak freely about the issues that negatively impact their life – thus beginning the healing process.

This is accomplished through weekly group discussions, the exchange of information, quarterly webinars, advocacy, peer motivation and themed conference calls.

Don't ignore the warning signs. Get help today! Our licensed professionals are here to support you or your loved one by getting to the underlying issues through group dialogue and activities.

We also offer linkage to care upon request.

For more information, visit: www.TheGentlemensFoundation.org/circleoftrust

THE GENTLEMENS FOUNDATION

est. 2014

The Gentlemen's Foundation 2017 Call to Action Consumer Survey

Our ability to offer empowering programs and affirming cultural experiences such as our annual Gentleman's Ball, is made possible through the support of corporate and nonprofit donors.

Every year, we must make the case that our audience matters. Every year, we must show the impact and the influence of men and women like you. Help us make the strongest argument to potential partners by taking the time to complete this short consumer survey.

Once you complete the survey, tear it out and return it to: The Gentleman's Ball Check-In area. Or you can mail the form back to: The Gentlemen's Foundation, ATTN: Gee Smalls, 270 17th St. NW, Atlanta, GA 30363.

How old are you? (circle one)

- 17 or younger
- 18-20
- 21-29
- 30-39

What is your gender? (circle one)

- Male
- Female
- Non-Binary
- Both Male/Female

Do you own or rent your home? (circle one)

What is your zip code? _____

What is your highest level of completed education? (circle one)

- Some high school
- High school graduate/GED Recipient
- Some college
- Associate Degree
- Bachelor Degree
- Graduate Degree

What category best describes your occupational field? (circle one)

- Retail
- Education
- Business
- Healthcare
- Marketing/Sales
- Finance
- Public Safety/Military
- Technology/Sciences
- Legal
- Social Services
- Social Justice/Advocacy
- Other _____

What is your yearly household income? (circle one)

- Less than \$20,000
- \$20,000 - \$34,999
- \$35,000 - \$49,999
- \$50,000 - \$74,999
- \$75,000 to \$99,999
- \$100,000 to \$149,999
- \$150,000 - \$199,999
- \$200,000 +

What is the make and model of the last car you purchased? _____

What cities or countries have you traveled to in the last year? _____

What was the date and amount of your last charitable contribution, excluding religious tithes and offering? _____

ISH HOLMES

WWW.ISHHOLMES.COM

CREATIVE SERVICES
PHOTOGRAPHY
DESIGN
BRANDING
MARKETING
VIDEO



WHAT IS **LOVE COACHING?**

At LoveWorks we provide Relationship, Dating, and Life Coaching services - what we have affectionately dubbed Love Coaching.

Love Coaching helps you clarify your goals, determine what action steps you need to take to meet them, helps you overcome barriers and roadblocks along the way, and cheers you on as you move forward towards success. The clearer your goals - in relationships, dating, career, spirituality, etc. - the better chance you have of making them a reality.

We believe that the two primary components to living a fulfilling, joyful, abundant life are self-awareness and love for others, for community, and for self.

We help you take a look at where your life or relationship is now, determine where you really want your life or relationship to be, and help you develop a plan of action to achieve that vision.

LOVING **ME**. LOVING **YOU**. LOVING **WE**.



@ j u a n a n d g e e



LOVEWORKS[™]
WITH **JUAN & GEE**

**RELATIONSHIP
DATING
AND LIFE
COACHING SERVICES**

w w w . j u a n a n d g e e . c o m

GENTS MAG

GENTS MAG is a wholly owned subsidiary of The Gentlemen's Foundation, Inc.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Juan Smalls
CO-FOUNDER

Gee Smalls
CO-FOUNDER

Amistad Adolph St. Arromand
CHAIRMAN

Ryan Anderson
DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT

Anaré V. Holmes
GENTS Mag EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
DIRECTOR OF MARKETING

ADVISORY BOARD

Steven Hollowell
STRATEGIC PLANNING +
LOGISTICS

Jon Diggs
HEALTH & WELLNESS ADVISOR

Lonnell Williams
SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT

Darius Cureton
mPact2 LIASON

Rameses Frederick
MARKETING ADVISOR

Vaughn Alvarez
PUBLIC RELATIONS

Charmane Skillen
CORPORATE LIASON

Brandon King
GRAPHIC DESIGNER

MEMBERS

Ahmad Abercrombie

Al "AC" Cornelius

Antoine Bates

CJ Jones

Damian Denson

Darnell Morgan

Darwin Thompson

David Murray

Dereck Wallace

Dorsel Blackwell

Dwayne Wells

Emery Lumsden

Eshun Kelly

Howard Blackwell-Turner

Jamie Allen

Jarrod Burton

Jason Brooks

Jay Torrence

John Ebron

John Moore

Josh McNair

Julius "JuJu" James

Kechia Matadin

Kenneth "Jai" Merriman

Lazorbric "DJ Ric" Alston

Malcolm Frazier

Mario Young

Melissa Scott

Reginald Ball

Romeo Michael

Stephon McIntosh

Tao Finklea

Terrence Cox

Terry Herron

Thaddeus Lancaster

Tonja Russell

Tyrone Alexander, Jr.

Warren Huntley

Dijon Lane

Ryan Lowery

Ricardo Grosso

Darrell Maddox

Robert Mason Jr.

TAKE A BOW

GENTLEMEN'S BALL ATLANTA

Your amazing dedication to the gay, bisexual and transgender men of color in our community makes such a positive impact on our city. Thanks for your unwavering support!

NORDSTROM

#NORDSTROMATL

©2017 The Gentlemen's Foundation, Inc. All rights reserved. No part of this magazine may be used or reproduced without the written permission of the publisher The Gentlemen's Foundation. The views expressed in GENTS Mag are those of the respective contributors and are not necessarily shared by the magazine or its staff. The registered office of The Gentlemen's Foundation is 270 17th Street NW Suite #3508 Atlanta, GA 30363. All information contained in the magazine is for information only and is as far as we are aware, correct at the time of going to press. The Gentlemen's Foundation cannot accept any responsibility for errors or inaccuracies in such format. Readers are advised to contact manufactures and retailers directly with regard to the price of products/services referred to in this magazine. If you submit unsolicited material to us, you automatically grant The Gentlemen's Foundation a license to publish your submission in whole, or in part, in all editions of the magazine, including licensed editions worldwide and in any physical or digital format throughout the world. Any material you submit is sent at your risk and, although every care is taken, neither The Gentlemen's Foundation nor its employees, agents or subcontractors shall be liable for loss or damage.



*Celebrating our
differences every day*

PROUD SPONSOR OF THE
2017 GENTLEMEN'S BALL



Pernod Ricard USA
Creators of Conviviality

ABSOLUT.

AVIÓN
TEQUILA

 **CHIVAS**

JAMESON


KENWOOD
VINEYARDS

 **MALIBU**

MARTELL
COGNAC

 **PERRIER-JOUËT**
GARDEN OF WONDER BY

Seagram's Gin.

**THE
GLENLIVET.**