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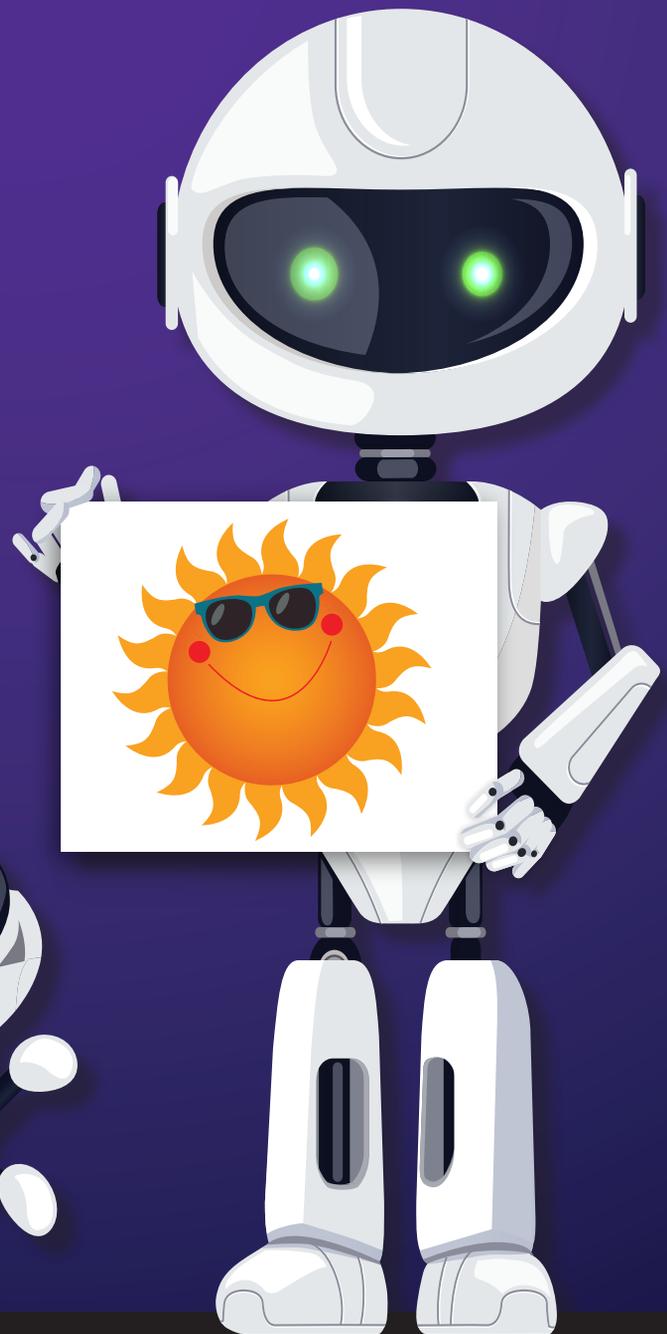
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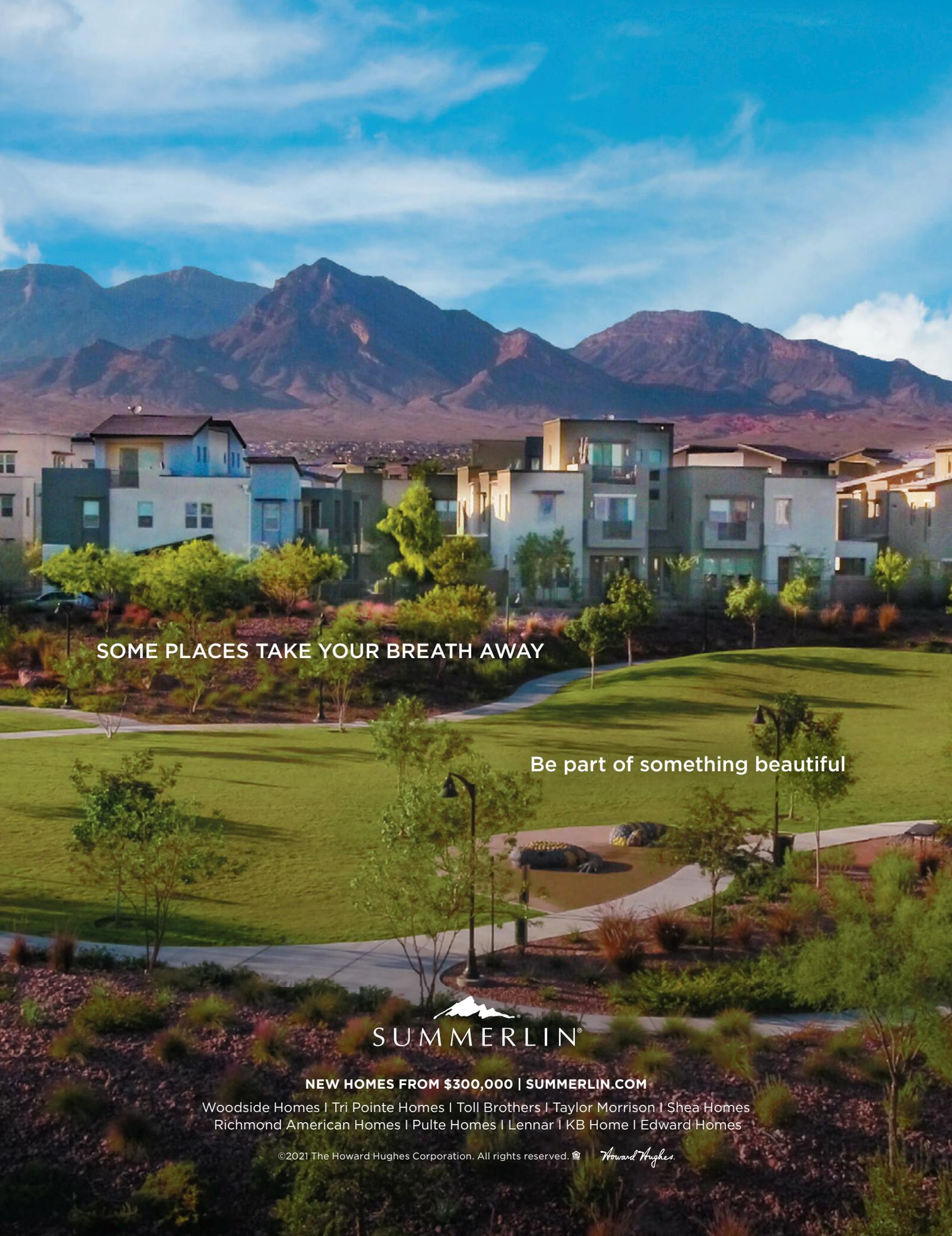
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**9TH ANNUAL
FOCUS ON NEVADA
PHOTO CONTEST**

We celebrate the winners and honorable mentions for their stunning visions of Nevada — from our wildlife to our wild nightlife.

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Al Baker

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Editor's Note

SEEING IS BELIEVING

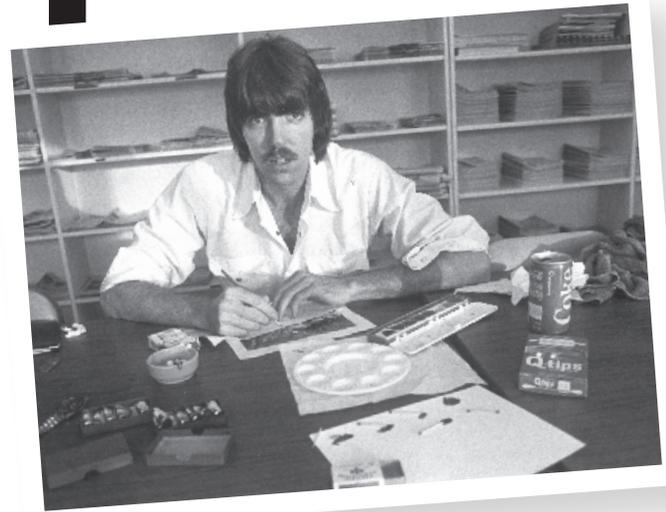
It's both surprising and not that this year's "Focus on Nevada" photo contest drew a record number of entries — 1,897 to be exact. Surprising because you'd think lockdown might have, well, locked down opportunities for great photos as Vegas slipped into fitful hibernation; not surprising because you might expect a phenomenon like lockdown to only pressurize the creative mojo of Nevada photographers. Happily, the latter is just what happened. Among this year's winners, that newly urgent creativity manifests in myriad ways: in sweeping, operatic landscape photos that seize you with a desire to escape; in domestic scenes that seem particularly attentive to the nuances and tensions of our richly mundane quarantine lives; in abstract photos vibrant with a certain retrospective longing. Maybe I'm projecting, but that's half the fun of photos — letting their evocative powers play upon your imagination. (The photo above, taken at the Henderson Bird Viewing Preserve, is my humble contribution to the issue; think of it as the photographic equivalent of me playing air guitar as the real talent rocks on stage.)

Elsewhere in this issue, image and imagination figure into stories that speak to pressing conversations of the moment. In "River Justice," Avory Wyatt and Jarrette Werk tell the story of an environmental cleanup initiative taking place on the Truckee River in Reno/Sparks. This initiative is powered as much by spiritually rooted, Indigenous values of environmental stewardship as it is by community volunteerism, as tribes come together to feed the houseless and protect the waters of Pyramid Lake. And in "Ask About Emily," I profile Emily Matview, a punk-scene impresario whose coming out as a transgender woman revealed a support system she didn't realize she had.

Andrew Kiraly
EDITOR

OH, YEAH, ALSO

1. Las Vegas lost a great photojournalist last month — and local journalists lost a good friend — when Bill Hughes passed away on April 16. Hughes' career in Vegas spanned 30 years among multiple publications, including *Desert Companion*, but his style was unmistakable no matter where his photos appeared. It's not an overstatement to say Hughes' photography helped tell the grand story of modern Las Vegas. Read our reflections on his life and work at desertcompanion.com.



2. LIST *Things You Can Do Now That You're Vaccinated*

1. Bring a newfound confidence to still avoiding all human interaction 2. Try the new McBat sandwich 3. Contact Bill Gates by speaking directly into needle hole on arm 4. Survive the Double Down bathroom 5. Finally order Thai food at spice level 3! 6. Flex arm to create 5G hotspot 7. Mute co-workers in meetings by putting your hand over their mouth 8. On 11th vaccination card stamp, get a free sub 9. Show vaccine passport to receive final "Mark of the Beast" UPC code forehead tattoo 10. Host *Jeopardy!* **Scott Dickensheets and Andrew Kiraly**

3. FIFTH STREET

Desert Companion is publishing quarterly this year (#thankspandemic), but the vast, formless blobs of time between print issues was driving us crazy with boredom, so we launched a free weekly e-mail newsletter, Fifth Street. News, profiles, humor, commentary, errant whimsy, and more! Subscribe to *Fifth Street* at desertcompanion.com.

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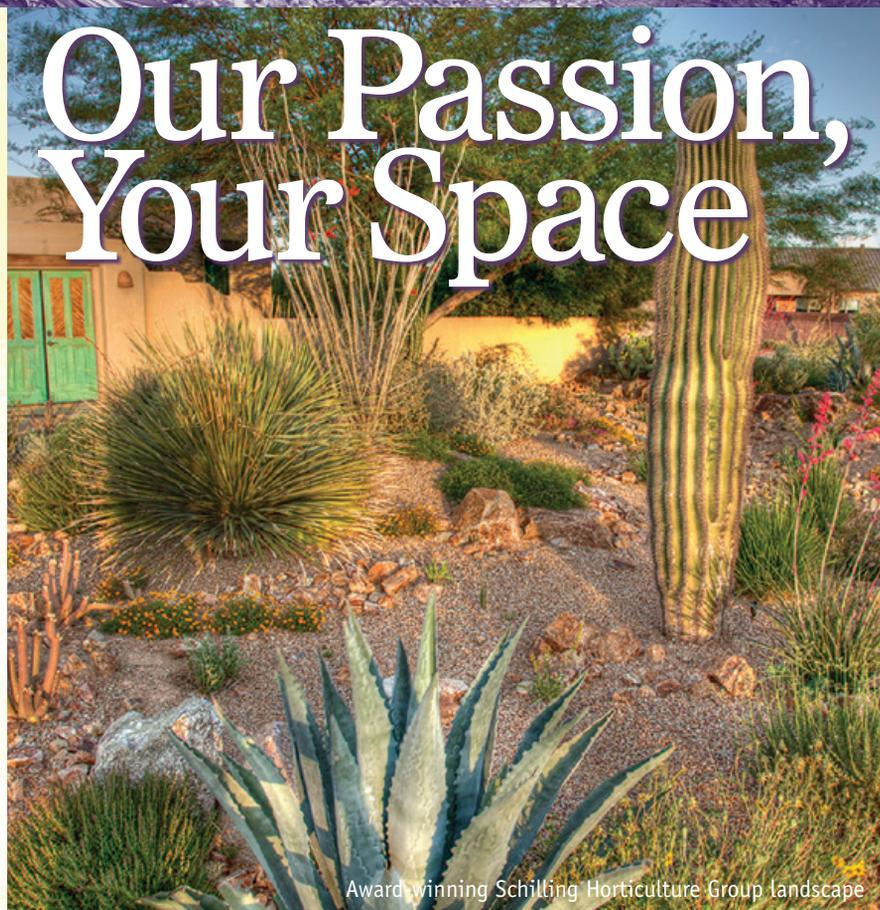
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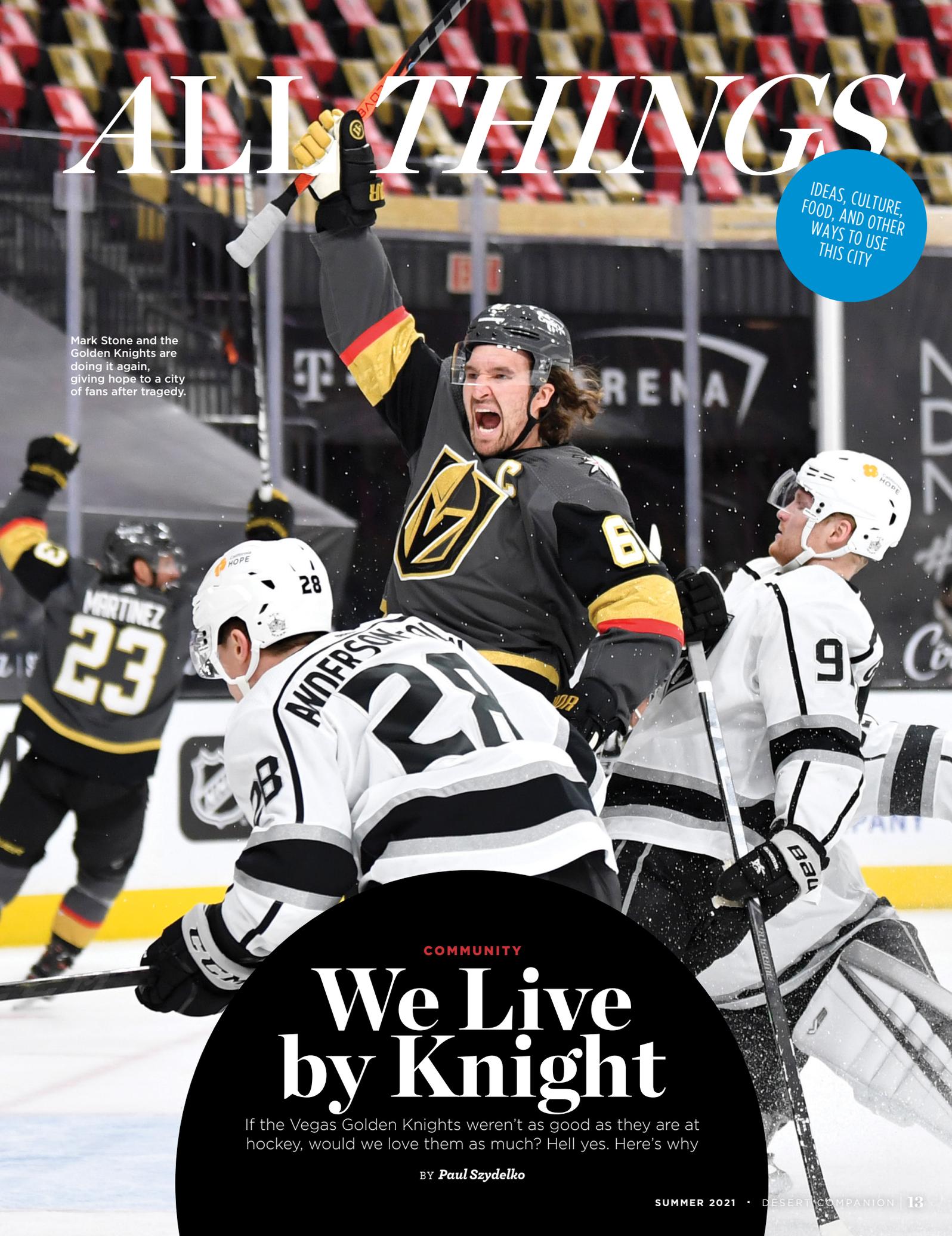
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THIS CITY

Mark Stone and the Golden Knights are doing it again, giving hope to a city of fans after tragedy.



COMMUNITY

We Live by Knight

If the Vegas Golden Knights weren't as good as they are at hockey, would we love them as much? Hell yes. Here's why

BY *Paul Szydelko*

From the tragedy of the 1 October mass shooting to the deep-seated throes of the pandemic, the capacity of the Vegas Golden Knights to heal, inspire, and unite the community seems limitless. As the team enters its fourth consecutive postseason since its inception, we're still fiercely watching and rooting — amid the economic pain and emotional toll of the past year, no less. That means something.

"In many ways, we use these teams to fight symbolic battles," says Michael Ian Borer, a sociology professor at UNLV. "Often those battles are against a rival city. But now we're fighting a different symbolic battle against this virus and against isolation. It creates this focal point, where multiple peoples from our larger community can focus on and root for the same team. That in itself can be really healing."

You don't have to be a sociologist to see this. It's a truism that teams unite their cities, foster civic identity, and create a shared narrative, all in ways both obvious and nuanced. In the case of the Golden Knights, however, it's a dynamic that seems more deeply embedded in the team's origin story.

"They started in the sad glow of (1 October). It's part of their history as a healing mechanism to deal with collective trauma," Borer continues. "In the same way that they (dealt) with that on a local scale here, they're now dealing with this collective trauma on a much larger scale."

Not since UNLV Runnin' Rebels' halcyon days more than 30 years ago has a team captured the community's attention so completely. It certainly helps that the Golden Knights have been a winning team from the first puck drop. It also helps that they've been ours from the start, too, from the moment they announced their name and unveiled their logo on Nov. 22, 2016. Being good at hockey is almost secondary to the team's Vegas roots.

"If they weren't good at all, they'd have this binding mechanism because one thing that they've done so well is promote themselves as Vegas-born," Borer says. "For a city that is known for what it imports rather than what

it creates, they've flipped the script. That appeals both to locals who are born here, but also for locals for whom this is now their home."

Jesse Granger, a 15-year Vegas resident and a writer for *The Athletic* who has covered the team from the start, points out how that homegrown appeal exists in curious tension with our other major identifier: the Strip.

"This city wanted something that represented them other than the Strip and casinos. Everybody here is super proud of what Vegas is. But they needed something else. When I leave Vegas, I want to support my city, I want to rep my city, I want something that represents us. Even if the team wasn't as good as they've been, they were going to latch on."

Consistent sellouts, soaring ticket prices on the secondary market, the existence of the minor-league Silver Knights, and two new arenas in Henderson (Lifeguard Arena on Water Street and Dollar Loan Center in Green Valley) illustrate how the Golden Knights have resonated. The rollout of an alternate gold sweater and a bright red reverse retro sweater (an homage to the former minor-league Vegas hockey teams the Wranglers and Thunder) reflects the

demand for merchandise. And, of course, VGK shirts, hats, caps, masks, flags, bumper stickers, and license plate frames abound.

Adding to their already-robust folklore, the Golden Knights staged a furious third-period comeback against the Minnesota Wild on March 1, the night fans were allowed to watch live hockey again. The Golden Knights scored two goals with less than eight minutes to play and won in overtime. Captain Mark Stone, who had assists in all five goals, skated around the ice and pumped his fists afterward — one of the season's indelible images.

"(Stone) talks a lot about how hockey players are entertainers and make really good money to play a game that they love. The only reason that they're able to do that is because the fans pay to see them," says Granger. The thinking goes: "If they're going to shell out a few hundred bucks ... I owe it to them to play my hardest and to give everything I've got," says Granger. VGK certainly isn't the first team to rally its home city after tragedy — think the Boston Red Sox after the Boston Marathon bombing in 2013, the New Orleans Saints after Hurricane Katrina in 2005, the New York Yankees after 9/11 — but it's the first

GETTING MEDIEVAL

Vegas Golden Knights fans cheer at a March 29 game against the Los Angeles Kings at T-Mobile Arena.



team in Las Vegas with the kind of public stature and community goodwill necessary to do that.

Off the ice, VGK engages the Southern Nevada in numerous ways — some publicized, but mostly under the radar. Kim Frank, president of Vegas Golden Knights Foundation and Community Relations and Player Initiatives, helps the franchise have a philanthropic impact. “When (the players) call me and want to do something, I don’t care if I have 500 things on my plate, it warms my heart and it just shows how much these guys really care about the Las Vegas community,” Frank says. “You’d be shocked at how many sick kids or somebody that just needs a message from one of our players to lift their spirits while they’re going through chemo. We get them all the time, but our guys stop what they’re doing. And they’re going to make these videos. It’s not a hard ask for me. I’m proud to say that I work with these guys.”

At the pandemic’s outset, the Golden Knights Foundation and owner Bill Foley contributed to the Nevada Covid-19 Task Force; paid \$700,000 to part-time workers who lost paychecks because of canceled games; donated paper products; funded meals to hospital staff and other front-line workers; contributed to Three Square food bank and other charities; and partnered with Cox Communications to provide gift cards for teachers to buy equipment for virtual classes. The work continued with Thanksgiving meals and Christmas presents for Adopt a Family.

They consistently try to help the homeless and address food insecurity in the valley.

Abby Quinn, spokesperson for HELP of Southern Nevada — which VGK has partnered with numerous times since 2018 — points out that the team’s generosity has a nice side effect of inspiring fans to give, too. “This team is so ingrained in the fabric of the Las Vegas through not only the team’s own involvement, but also through the team’s influence,” she writes in an email. “It is an incredible ability these players have to lead by example and as a result, we see so many fans donating their time, money, and efforts to the community because their favorite VGK player did the same.”

Only our descendants will see a Ken Burns-like documentary to learn how we fared during the pandemic. But at the end of this season, whether the Golden Knights hoist a Stanley Cup or leave the ice empty-handed, their bond with the city is as strong as ever. ♦

VEGAS GOLDEN KNIGHTS PHOTOS BY JEFF BOTTARI/NHLI VIA GETTY IMAGES

CROWDSOURCED

The Last Year Taught Me ...

We asked you on social media to fill in the blank, and you shared the many lessons you learned from the pandemic. (May contain tot waffles.)

Slowing down allows me to become friends with a squirrel.
— Jennifer Lake Smith

I don’t need to go anywhere to be happy.
— Monica Douglas

How underutilized my backyard was in the past.
— Dana Resnick Gentry

Of all the things I love to do, the thing I love most is hanging out with my pets.
— David Rosen

Teachers are magic and vital, and I am not suited for homeschooling.
— Ginger Meurer



There is not, in fact, a number of chocolate-covered almonds that would be considered “too many” to eat in one sitting.
— Tod Goldberg

I’m capable of making it through anything.
— Derek L. Washington

How to make tot waffles.
— Heather Lang-Cassera

Whether the earth is shut down or wide open for business, I am truly a loner.
— Nick Appuglise



PHOTOGRAPHY

For My Next Act ...

A local photographer captured resilient Las Vegas pivoting to new ventures

PHOTOS AND TEXT BY *Claire Hart*

I started this photo series in hopes of reflecting how a city that hosts large-scale events could adapt after the onset of a pandemic. My interest was personal:

During COVID, I lost 80 percent of my business (conventions and weddings), and I wanted to see how others were pivoting. The goal was to showcase subjects who'd lost Vegas-specific jobs, and capture each of them in their new and old occupations — in one image. The hardest part was finding people willing to tell the world about how they were surviving; many didn't want to admit that the change was real or potentially permanent. Some were even emotional about being back in their old uniforms or costumes, because it had been a year since they had put them on. (I was having the same experience after having to take a part-time job at a local golf course.) However, it's been so rewarding to see the excitement and hope they have with their new ventures — and life beyond COVID. ♦





PIVOT PARTY

Clockwise from far left: Vanessa Doleshal went from a career in digital media for Vegas.com to launching an interior design business during the pandemic.

Jesse Garon worked as an Elvis impersonator for 27 years. After COVID hit, he began delivering for DoorDash — in his Maserati, no less.

Moody Elragaal lost his job as an MGM nightclub host, but transitioned to a new profession: cleaning and sterilizing buildings.

Sean Baker, aka DJ Kid Conrad, was faced with a challenge when Vegas nightlife venues closed. He took a temporary job at Costco, and started helping out at his wife's family's dessert store, Fluff Ice.





There's a certain glamour to Las Vegas onscreen, even in the grittiest indie productions, that makes the city seem like a magical wonderland, albeit one with an occasional dark side. Nina Menkes' 1991 film *Queen of Diamonds* is a harsh antidote to that tendency, depicting Vegas as drab and monotonous and alienating, not dangerous or edgy so much as just exhausting. Menkes' avant-garde film premiered at the 1991 Sundance Film Festival and received a gorgeous restoration from the Academy Film Archive and the Film Foundation in 2018, which is now streaming on the Criterion Channel alongside a selection of Menkes' other films.

Menkes' sister Tinka stars as the unnamed main character, a blackjack dealer at Bob Stupak's Vegas World who performs her job with a sort of grim competence, and trudges through the rest of her life with the same lack of affect or enthusiasm. The film is full of long, static takes, with the camera often fixed on what appears to be an unremarkable space. The opening shot holds steady on the protagonist's hand sticking out from under her bed covers, the long, deep red nails contrasting with the plain white sheets. Menkes forces the audience to stare at that image for longer than is comfortable, and the entire movie is composed of those off-putting compositions, challenging the viewer to look away or give up.

There isn't much of a plot to *Queen of Diamonds*, which often resembles an art installation more than a narrative film,

although there is some progression for the main character as she navigates her meager Vegas existence. She lives in the kind of rundown Downtown motel that has since been obliterated by gentrification, where her neighbors are a bedridden old man and a constantly fighting couple. Menkes shows the character tenderly bathing and feeding the old man, and it takes awhile for the movie to reveal what exactly their relationship is. He's not a relative or a friend, just a neighbor, and this woman may be helping him out of kindness, or a sense of tired obligation, a fellow Vegas castoff taking care of one of her own.

She's completely unsentimental about his passing, though, just putting in a bored call to the motel manager: "Yeah, he's dead." Menkes treats the domestic violence next door with the same detached resignation. When the protagonist yells at the man for beating his girlfriend, his only response is to clarify that she's his fiancée, not his girlfriend. Later, the fiancée is showing off her wedding dress while sporting a black eye, and then eating cake and dancing with her new husband at her wedding, all while

covered in bruises.

The movie's centerpiece is a 15-minute sequence of the main character dealing blackjack at Vegas World, with only the background noise of the casino and indiscernible chatter on the soundtrack. After getting the viewer used to her long takes and fixed camera placement, Menkes instead fills this sequence with frequent cuts, often reusing the same shots, emphasizing the repetitive meaninglessness of the character's occupation. She deals and discards, over and over again, never saying a word or even changing her expression. She takes no pleasure in her job, has no investment in whether the players win or lose. Watching this sequence is almost like sitting in an actual casino and spying on gamblers or attempting to eavesdrop on their conversations, although Menkes never allows the viewer to make out more than a word or two of what anyone is saying.

That makes *Queen of Diamonds* sound like an endurance test, but while it can be grueling at times, it also has moments of stark beauty. The other standout sequence

CULTURE

Grim City

Restored and revived, 1991's *Queen of Diamonds* is the strangest Vegas film you've never seen



QUEEN OF DIAMONDS IMAGES COURTESY NINA MENKES

is an extended wide shot of a burning palm tree somewhere in the desert, and Menkes has the viewer watch along with the protagonist as the tree burns itself out, the crackling and sizzling on the soundtrack like a sort of perverse desert yule log. With the tree looming on one side of the frame and the people reduced to tiny figures, their backs to the camera, on the other side, the image could easily be captured and placed in a gallery. But it's more powerful as a real-time experience, almost suspenseful as the fire is slowly reduced to embers.

Menkes also provides a fascinating Vegas time capsule, from Vegas World (which was later remodeled as part of the Strat) to vintage wedding chapels to the scuzzy Downtown that no longer exists. But there's no retro Vegas glamour or nostalgic warmth in their portrayals. The Las Vegas of *Queen of Diamonds* isn't a place where dreams come true — or even a place where people bother dreaming at all. It's a place for the isolated, the disconnected, the people who are used and discarded like the cards that the main character cycles through endlessly. But there's a certain beauty in that bleakness, and that's what Menkes (and her protagonist) finds here.

Recent movies like Numa Perrier's *Jezebel* and the Ross brothers' *Bloody Nose*, *Empty Pockets* have similarly depicted this downtrodden side of Vegas life, but *Queen of Diamonds* remains a singular experience, showing a new perspective on the city even to viewers who've lived here for decades. **Josh Bell**

WILD AT HEART.

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1. **JOHN LOCHER**

@locherphoto

Long a mainstay in local photojournalism — first at the *Review-Journal*, now with the Associated Press — Locher imbues your feed with strong topical bass notes. Political and sporting events, disasters — he shoots it all. But his aren't meat-and-potatoes news snaps. Locher matches impeccable technique with an artist's eye. Check his image from a local Trump rally, the one with a face shadowed on a Gadsden flag amid the MAGA milling-about: It's once documentary and poetic, and, like many others, rewards a slow, thoughtful look.

2. **CLAUS SCHMIDT**

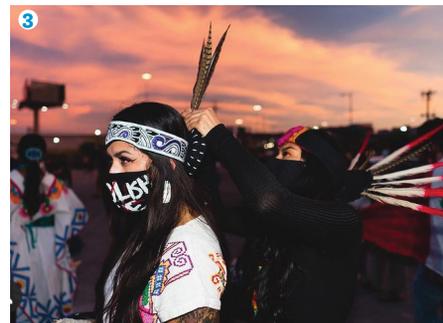
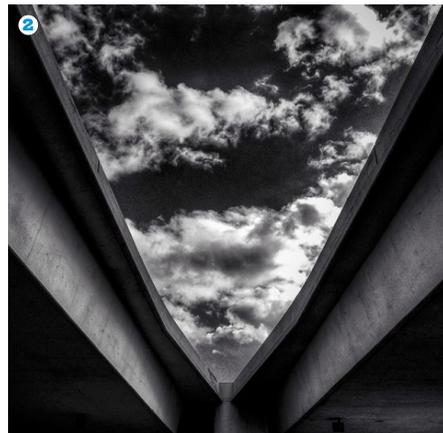
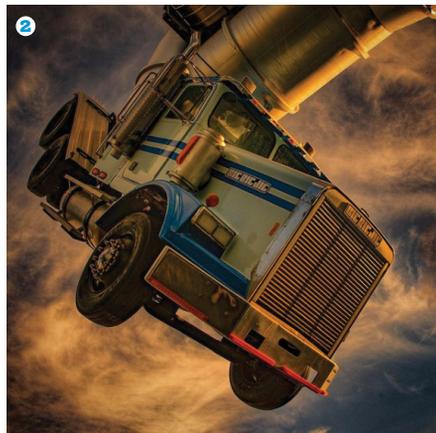
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Like many in the 702, Schmidt is smitten by neon, which, hey, cool. But amid the bright lights he shoots the big city, his streetscapes exalting the real Las Vegas without cloying into bleh boosterism; there's a sly commentary about the contours of human achievement in his shot of a Downtown construction site with snow-topped mountains behind. And bless his dogged attempts to find a unique slant on such clichés as the Lou Ruvo building and *Big Rig Jig*. On his black-and-white channel, Schmidt emphasizes portraits, abstractions, and offbeat compositions.

3. **RICK R.L.**

@rick.rl

His Insta tagline is “Documenting the Streets,” and there certainly is a palpable frontline urgency to Rick R.L.'s photos from various local social justice protests. No fancy aesthetics here, no self-branding, no journalistic distance — just unambiguous, unflinching glimpses of the real lives of this city's communities of color. But he hits plenty of other notes, too: celebrations of POC life and deeply felt portraits of people



SOCIAL MEDIA

Vegas Visions

These eye-catching Instagram accounts by local photographers will put some snap in your feed

who are too rarely reflected in the dominant images of the city.

4. **STETSON YBARRA**

@stetson.ybarra

These hero shots of big Western landscapes — sweeping desert views intensified by top-notch photographic razzmatazz — provide an epic mood board for your fantasies of post-vacci-

nation travel. Based in Las Vegas, Ybarra — a past winner in our “Focus on Nevada” photo contest — shoots locally and around the West, from California to New Mexico and every charismatic rock formation in between. Until you can leave your squalid pandemic shame hole (or is that just us?), these photos will reassure your quarantine-sozzled brain that there is indeed a world worth going back to.

»»» HACK THAT SHOOT: PRO PHOTOGRAPHERS SHARE THEIR CHEAP, STRANGE,



Tilt-shift lens

“The one lens that’s helped me get some of my best shots in my career. I used it from a helicopter to make Las Vegas look like a miniature model city, and I used its ‘shift’ ability to get perfect panoramic shots for my ‘Ode to the Parking Lot’ project.” —*Anthony Mair*

Improvised tripods

“If you find yourself without a tripod for long exposure shots, you’d be amazed at what you can use to hold your camera in a way to get the shot. I’ve used coats, hats, all kinds of objects found in the desert and once even my shoe.” —*Aaron Mayes*

Makeup compacts

“When I’m photographing food dishes or cocktails and need to brighten up areas in deep shadow, I use these little compact mirrors from the dollar store. They fold up and open to stand on their own, and will reflect a tiny direct light source that’s easily controllable.” —*Sabin Orr*



5. MIKAYLA WHITMORE

@mikaylawhitmore

Whitmore is a prominent local artist (and occasional *DC* contributor), and her Instagram account is best viewed as a kind of working sketchbook. She continually switches modes, from casual snaps to the documentary to the artistically complex, and these juxtapositions impart the sense that you're watching her think through ideas and techniques, probing even mundane images for something latent within: *What is this tattered flag, hanging open like a smile, trying to tell us?*

6. NORMA JEAN ORTEGA

@normajejanortega

Because photography is an art of excerpted moments, it most often highlights moments of drama or overt meaning. Ortega's Insta feed, a mix of her professional and personal photos, achieves an affecting sense of the *dailiness* of life in Las Vegas. A couple kissing in Sunset Park; offhand scene-grabs of local musicians; a portrait series centering Black women of achievement. The easygoing intimacy of her photos comes off as real, not as an influencer's strategic decision.

Scott Dickensheets

HANDY TOOLS

Poster board

"I like to carry poster board in my car or bag — always white in addition to a few other colors — because it can provide a quick bounce of light on my subject or a splash of color for the background. When shooting for local weeklies, I often didn't have time or space to carry around background stands and paper, so I would carry these in a tube to lessen the load I'd have to carry." —*Krystal Ramirez*

BOOKS

Outlaws in the American outback

The Low Desert probes the criminal underbelly of the Southern California desert — and of Las Vegas

BY **Geoff Schumacher**

Most stories are about people. But stories also can be about places. Sometimes, a place is not particularly vivid or pertinent. You might spend the whole story in one room, or perhaps the narrative unfolds in some corner of a person's brain. But for me, the best stories are those in which the setting is an integral part of the narrative.

In Tod Goldberg's new collection of crime fiction, *The Low Desert: Gangster Stories*, his primary setting is a part of Southern California hardly anybody else writes or thinks about: the far-inland desert towns running from Palm Springs south to the borderlands. These areas are absent, for the most part, from the public consciousness, except when the Coachella music festival materialized there for a couple of weeks each spring in pre-pandemic times. Las Vegas — a more prominent element of the desert Southwest — is a second important place in this book.

These desert towns are not where most Southern California writers set their stories. They tend to stay within sniffing distance of the ocean, and who can blame them? But Goldberg knows this area and its people, because he lives there.

And because he knows the area, he resists the temptation to produce lyrical descriptions of desert vistas or gritty urban hellscape.

Instead, he wisely opts for a well-turned sentence or snapshot, just enough to transport us to, say, the suburban sprawl of Palm Springs: "The Royal Californian sat on a stretch of Highway 111 in Indio that could have been Carson City or Bakersfield or Van Nuys or anywhere else where someone had the wise idea to plant a palm tree and then surround it with cement."

Or decaying remnants at the Salton Sea: "The barracks themselves are a Swiss cheese of mortar and drywall, to the point that even from this distance I can see the sparse traffic on Highway 86 through their walls, as if a newsreel from the future had been projected onto the past."

Or the clash of nature and city in western Las Vegas: "Red Rock Canyon loomed around them, casting everything in a peaceful amber shadow . . . until you turned and were assaulted by the nearby sprawl of sand-colored homes and, farther away, the jutting spire of the Stratosphere, along with a nice view of half of humanity landing at and launching from McCarran."



Most of Goldberg's stories are about criminals of one kind or another, from low-level drug dealers to top-rung mob bosses. This, too, is a little daring and admirable, because too often literary writers avoid this central thread in the fabric of American life. (If you don't think crime is fully integrated into American life, then you must have been sleeping for the past four years.)

Goldberg, some years back, decided that crime fiction would be his calling card, and his novels *Gangsterland* (2015) and *Gangster Nation* (2018), both largely set in Las Vegas, represent his finest work to date. But he remains one of the most literary of working crime writers.

Most of the stories in *The Low Desert* succeed by blending the thought-provoking nature of literary storytelling with the brisk action of pulp noir. Oh yes, people are killed in these stories, and not by slow-burning angst. They are shot, or drowned, or their heads get chopped off. But don't misunderstand: Amid the carnage, Goldberg deftly inserts three-dimensional people with real-life issues. There's something for everyone here, including Goldberg's trademark biting humor.

In one memorable story, "Goon Number Four," an international assassin abandons his high-risk, high-reward career in order to take classes at the local community college. But he can't quite shake his old habits. If this story isn't made into a movie or television series soon, then Hollywood has lost its mojo. In "Professor Rainmaker," a hydrologist — no joke — finds his place in the brutal world of international drug trafficking. "Mazel," featuring an FBI agent in Las Vegas who innocently wanders into the middle of the agency's biggest mystery, offers this spot-on bit of social commentary:

"She was allowed to tell people she was an FBI agent. Only the covert parts of the job were classified. But in Las Vegas, where half the people were about an inch away from a RICO

charge, it was like telling someone in East Germany that you worked for the Stasi."

Las Vegas is the setting for two of the 12 stories, but the city is mentioned here and there throughout the collection. And in each case, Goldberg not only accurately describes the geography, but displays a decent understanding of how the town works as well. In "The Royal Californian," a man dressed as a clown, sitting in a bar in Palm Springs, remarks:

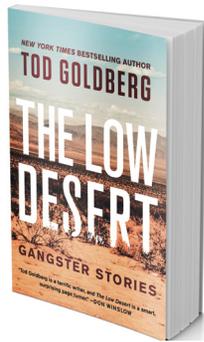
"Everyone here is always trying to get to Las Vegas, everyone in Las Vegas is always trying to get somewhere else, no one happy to be any one place."

Goldberg clearly put a lot of thought into the selection and order of the stories in this volume. Some are fast-paced cops-and-crooks tales, while others have a more contemplative literary bent. Most of them are connected in some way. A restaurant referenced in passing in the opening story

becomes the focal point of another story toward the end of the collection. A character in one story shows up in another. Something that happened several decades ago in one story has significance in a more contemporary narrative. A few are directly connected to Goldberg's novels *Gangsterland* and *Gangster Nation* — they could be chapters trimmed to meet a word count. (These stories surely are required reading for *Gangsterland* completists.) Goldberg might cringe at the reference, but there's a Tolkien-esque element of world-building going on here.

This imagined desert underworld, home to racketeers and regret, buried bodies and criminal clowns, is an engrossing place to spend time. The thoughtful treatment of Las Vegas is particularly appreciated. One hopes Goldberg continues to explore these places he knows so well. ♦

Geoff Schumacher is the vice president of exhibits and programs at The Mob Museum in Las Vegas.



CRIME TIME
The Low Desert: Gangster Stories
Tod Goldberg
Counterpoint Press, 2021
304 pages



You know those articles that are like, "10 Crazy Things You Didn't Know About Las Vegas"?

I've always found that they typically contain facts I *did* know. I already know that Las Vegas is home to the world's tallest observation wheel. I know that the Strip is actually in the unincorporated town of Paradise. I know that there are real flamingos behind the Flamingo.

Here's something I didn't always know: There are a lot of feral cats here.

Like, *a lot*. More than 200,000 — a number roughly equivalent to a tenth of the population of the city. You see them slinking outside of gilded lobbies, prowling behind gas stations. Or maybe you're looking up — up at the signs promising money, shrimp cocktails, and sunset helicopter tours — and you don't see them at all.

* * * * *

IN 2015, MY boyfriend and I moved from Montana to the Shangri-La, a cluster of white cottages in Downtown built in 1939. Picture *Leave it to Beaver*-style suburbia in the center of a city. Manicured bushes, tidy black roofs, and, looming over it all, the golden marquee of the El Cortez.

Our lives were exactly as ridiculous as tourists imagine those of locals to be. We hung out in casinos, bumming wi-fi and applying



OPEN TOPIC

Ultimate Locals

How a colony of feral cats welcomed me to Las Vegas

BY **Krista Diamond**

for jobs at other casinos. We took double decker buses to the Strip and rode elevators to high floors of hotels for the views. We ate at buffets for Thanksgiving and saw Britney Spears light the tree for Christmas.

There's a wedding chapel inside the Denny's here, I texted my non-Vegas friends. Or, I'm drunk at a rooftop pool on a Tuesday.

There was a comfort in telling others — and myself — that living in Las Vegas is exactly what you think it's like. The embodiment of those clickbait articles: A towering chocolate fountain! The site where Elvis first performed "Suspicious Minds"! The world's largest sex bike! To believe in the clichés is to belong. New to the city, I longed for that.

But at bars it was always the same. Someone would ask, "Where are you visiting from?"

Here, I'd say. I'm from here.

One evening, I sat at my desk facing the

alleyway that separated the Shangri-La from the El Cortez parking garage. Other people's nights were beginning. Heels clicked on the cement, laughter echoed. And there in that dark river of an alley, six eyes glowed from the shadows. Three cats: two obsidian and slender as weasels, one shaggy and gray. When I went outside to look closer, they hid beneath a car, their eyes still watching me.

* * * * *

ACCORDING TO THE Humane Society, if you deprive a cat colony of food, it won't go away; the cats will stick around and keep hunting. Or find a sucker willing to feed them.

We became suckers, at first setting out deli meat, and then graduating to cat food, purchased from a market on Fremont Street.

"What kind of cat do you have?" the cashier asked one night as I set a can of

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The Nature Conservancy 

Continued on Page 24

Friskies on the counter.

“I don’t have one,” I replied.

The three cats did not belong to us, they belonged to Las Vegas, which is the type of ownership every new resident of a city wants: to be taken in, to be a part of it. Each night, the cats emerged from the parking garage and ate greedily. The two black cats came out first. The shaggy gray one hung back, always letting them get their fill. She was their mother, we realized. They were a family.

* * * * *

THEY WERE EVER-PRESENT and invisible. Stretching out languorously in the vacant lot beside the Shangri-La during the daytime, disappearing when pedestrians passed through.

I began to see colonies of cats everywhere. Orange cats tiptoeing along the spine of a house, striped ones sunning themselves at Charlie Frias Park, a gray-eyed pair on the Strip, so close to a casino entrance they could have walked right in.

* * * * *

I WENT OUT cat trapping one night with the C5 Community Cat Coalition of Clark County, an organization that traps feral cats, neuters them, and returns them to where they were found.

I met a C5 volunteer in Sunrise Manor, a Las Vegas neighborhood so close to Nellis Air Force Base that windows rattle when jets fly over. The cats, of which there are many in the area, don’t seem to mind.

We would be catching both kittens and cats, the C5 volunteer told me. The former would be kept for adoption and the latter would be returned, with a piece removed from the tip of the ear to show they had been fixed.

We met a woman who had a colony of cats mousing around in her dirt yard. It was easy to catch them — significantly easier than I’d expected. They weren’t afraid of us at all. We set the traps and they went in right away, as docile as house cats, only hissing and howling when they realized they’d been discovered.

* * * * *

WHEN OUR LEASE was up, we moved out of the Shangri-La, traded the cottage for the kind of stucco apartment complex everyone in Las Vegas lives in at some point. Resort-style living with a sparkling pool.

I no longer felt like a tourist trying to blend in. I knew which casinos charged for parking and which didn’t. I didn’t need Google Maps to walk from Fremont Street to the Arts District. I had a Nevada ID, a library card, a gym membership — tokens

proving I belonged.

But I couldn’t abandon those three cats. Not after all the times I’d gone to bed wondering if anyone else in Las Vegas even knew I existed, only to hear their meows outside, at first plaintive and then demanding. I was a constant presence to them, not just a traveler passing through.

I drove back to the Shangri-La with a can of cat food in my purse. Just as I arrived, a car pulled up. Someone in a hooded jacket got out, a large bag in their arms. It was cat food, I realized, watching them empty the contents.

True to form, the cats appeared, tails switching. After the car drove away, I walked over. Mercifully, they didn’t flinch at the sight of me. They looked healthy, their coats shiny, their eyes alert. All around them, tourists parked and headed out for the evening, the felines at their feet as unknown to them as the residents of Las Vegas, who also dwell in the shadows of gambling halls and steakhouses, out of sight but at home nonetheless. I took the can of food out from my purse, pausing for a moment, wondering if the cats even needed it.

Eventually I decided they did. ♦

COMMUNITY

The Rainbow Bridge

Drag culture is as popular as ever. But beneath the makeup is a rich history of promoting LGBTQ acceptance

BY **Mike Prevatt**

It’s tough to pinpoint when drag went mainstream in Las Vegas. Maybe it was *RuPaul’s Drag Race* becoming a runaway (or is that runway?) success on TV, eventually landing its own show at the Flamingo. Or maybe it was 2003, when Cirque du Soleil contracted one of the most subversive drag queens in America, Joey Arias, to emcee its third Las Vegas production, *Zumanity*. Or 18 years before that, when the Riviera introduced *An Evening at La Cage*, no doubt rubber-stamped because of the success of the female-impersonation show across the street, *Boylesque*.

The truth is: Las Vegas was out before you were — or before Siegfried and Roy ever were. At the very least, drag isn’t the niche diversion you may have thought it was. From anchoring both straight and gay clubs in the 1940s to male performers in dresses and makeup reading books to children in Henderson libraries, drag culture has had the kind of multi-demographic audience Madison Avenue could only dream of, and its appeal has accelerated alongside LGBTQ acceptance and cultural exposure. Plus, the Venn diagram overlap between drag and Las Vegas is considerable: They’re both glitzy, sensational, uninhibited — and hoping you’ll take out your wallet and make it rain.

“Drag has always been part of the Strip,” says Coco Montrese, longtime Las Vegas drag performer and former contestant on *RuPaul’s Drag Race*. “People have always come to see drag because they want to get away from the norm, (especially) if you’re from Iowa or Wyoming or someplace like that. When you come to Vegas, that’s what you want to see. They want to see something they can’t see at home. Vegas and drag have come hand in hand.”

Drag’s reign on Las Vegas stages predates World War II. As documented by local historian Dennis McBride in his 2017 book *Out of the Neon Closet*:

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Queer Community in the Silver State, national touring female impersonator Billy Richards landed a two-month stint at the Fremont Tavern back in 1938. Richards would return six years later to a pioneering gay club on Charleston Boulevard called the Kit Kat, which openly advertised drag shows at “Nevada’s Gayest Night Club” until it was sold in 1944.

Queens from the Kit Kat would later find work in town just like female impersonators did in other American cities: performing in both heterosexual and queer spaces. “There’s always been a gay audience and a straight audience for female/male improvisation,” says Joe E. Jeffreys, a drag historian and video documentarian based in New York City. Jeffreys, who traces drag as far back as the Old Testament, says that the art form really thrived during the age of vaudeville — from the mid-1880s up until the advent of television — where drag performers were as commonplace as singers and dancers (which drag queens often were themselves). This meant straights were the drag world’s biggest audience — especially since most gay functions that featured female impersonators were, at the time, clandestine affairs.

In Las Vegas, not only did the queens play straight venues and gay bars, they also notably worked their way into hotel-casino showrooms and lounges, freelancing the Strip like *America’s Got Talent* acts do today. In November 1953, nationally renowned female impersonator Lynne Carter played an extended engagement at the El Cortez while transgender performer Christine Jorgensen wowed packed crowds at the Sahara. That same hotel would serve as the local launching pad for the East Coast show *Boylesque*, helmed by the late, widely revered Kenny Kerr. He and the new local version of *Boylesque* — which eventually held court at the Silver Slipper across the street — would play a pivotal part in “the golden age of drag,” as McBride terms it, during the 1980s.

Since then, multiple shows and performers have found a home both on the Strip and off. There’s even a weekly drag brunch event at Señor Frog’s, where Montrese and others work the tables while diners guzzle mimosas and enter twerking contests.

Montrese, one of 10 local queens who have been featured on *Drag Race*, is also one of the many local participants in *Dragapalooza*, a recent video-on-de-

mand performance film — think VH1 Divas, but gayer. It’s also a glow-up from the modern era of drag, where performers eschew singing for lip-synching. While Jeffreys calls the latter “an art form,” the performers of *Dragapalooza* proudly belt their numbers out, and they’re flanked by live musicians (which includes local Grammy-nominated producer/DJ Chris Cox). Not only is drag crossing over to the world of pay-per-view, but also concerts.

Then again, drag is the ultimate cross-over, and the metaphor goes beyond gender. There’s a reason why *Boylesque* endured during a time when the AIDS crisis heightened homophobia, and why *An Evening at La Cage*, another 1980s-born drag revue and a star vehicle for Joan Rivers impersonator Frank Marino, became a go-to Strip show for uptight tourists seeking an experience they likely wouldn’t have pursued back home in Dubuque.

“Audiences both gay and straight have always had the fascination with crossing the gender line,” says drag historian Jeffreys. “It’s something so impermeable, but actually it’s very porous; it’s very easy to go from one side of the gender binary to the other. That’s a problem in and itself, that people see it as

QUEEN’S GAMBIT
“Drag has always been part of the Strip,” says Coco Montrese, longtime Las Vegas drag performer and former contestant on *RuPaul’s Drag Race*.



a binary. ... Gender is learned behavior or presentation, so this is what amazes people. Other people have figured out the tricks of gender. And for a lot of gay people, for the things they were criticized for as a kid — they're too swishy or too masculine — they are (now) praised for."

And in Las Vegas, the added layer of celebrity impersonation can be the hook for straight audiences, thus blurring, if not erasing, the lines of gender and sexuality. "(Drag) is exciting to watch, especially when you're doing look-a-likes," says veteran drag performer Toni James. "People can't believe that a guy can look like, say, Diana Ross or Whitney Houston or Cher or any of the famous superstars that a lot of us impersonate. They got mesmerized by it. ... When people see you on stage, they forget the discrimination stuff."

More than that, drag has bridged the queer and straight populations. McBride writes that drag was a "vehicle for (LGBTQ) community whose importance is often overlooked." Historically, straight folks weren't comfortable going to businesses that celebrated gay sexuality, but they'd patronize showrooms and lounges to see gay performers. McBride writes, "It was nonetheless these entertainers who often provided straight people their first glimpse of gay community. With their gay lives and their straight audiences, female impersonators brought both worlds together."

Which makes drag queens natural ambassadors of the LGBTQ community. Jeffrey compares the stars of *RuPaul's Drag Race* to Miss America contestants who must use their platform to connect with the public offstage and express what they're about. He also cites the work of cultural anthropologist and drag scholar Esther Newton, who ascertained that drag and camp are the two things most representative of homosexuality in the Western world. "So the drag queens are the spokespeople of the gay community," Jeffrey says.

That platform now stretches to the suburbs. "It's now to the point where everyone is turned on about it," Montrese says. "I can be in a Target and I'll see a father and his football-player son, and they'll both say, 'Oh, it's you! We watch you on the show — we love you, you're awesome!' And I'm like, 'Ohhhh, okay. Well, thank you!' It catches you off guard."

"That's the new dimension," Jeffrey says. "I'm constantly amazed that when I go to some of the *Drag Race* events, the demographics of the audience — it's not a gay audience." ♦

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FOOD + DRINK



SOUND BITES

Alternating layers of goodness from Saginaw's Deli: Ben Sherman's Corned Beef & Pastrami and Zach's Corned Beef & Mustard sandwiches





Stack Attack

Take your 'wichcraft to the next level this picnic season with our crash course in sandwich mastery

BY **Lissa Townsend Rodgers**

Tortas, paninis, banh mis, buttys, croque madames — every culture has its sandwich. And every moment has its sandwich as well: Egg sandwiches for breakfast, turkey and Swiss for lunch, cheesesteak for dinner, a late-night PB&J. (Perhaps you've had more than a few of those during the pandemic.) But just because something is everyday doesn't mean it has to be ordinary. Quality ingredients, flavorful condiments, and a bit of finesse can turn that quick bite into a dish to savor. Here's how.

THE BREAD

"**THE PERFECT SANDWICH** starts with the bread," says Paul Saginaw of Saginaw's Deli in Circa. If you need to do some one-stop carb shopping, **Great Buns Bakery** (3270 E. Tropicana Ave., greatbunsbakery.net) is the spot. They've been supplying local restaurants and casinos for decades (I've seen that olive dinner roll before!), and can hook you up with loaves of marble rye for pastrami, potato rolls for ham, challah for grilled cheese. The outlet store is located in the factory building, so you can smell wheaty goodness baking as you peruse the goods.

The **German Bread Bakery** (9255 S. Eastern Ave., 2237 N. Rampart Blvd., germanbreadbakerylasvegas.com) has a narrow selection of bread, but also offers sausage, spreads, jams, and other condiments of Deutschland. There's challah and whole wheat, a sunflower seed loaf that adds texture and flavor to your peanut butter & jelly — and then there's the pretzels, the pretzel bread, pretzel rolls, pretzel

sticks and, miracle of miracles, the pretzel croissant, which will elevate your quotidian turkey or grilled cheese to gourmet.

Délices Gourmands French Bakery (3620 W. Sahara Ave. #W2, delicesgourmandslv.com) can hook you up with crusty baguettes, country-style boule loaves, golden brioche, and, of course, croissants. Even if you're thinking "sandwich" and not "dessert," it'll be hard to leave without a mille-feuille or macaron.

THE STUFF

THE ESSENCE OF a sandwich is the meats and cheeses inside. Don't skimp. Dave Simmons, executive chef of the Goodwich, says "double the protein" is the key to their sandwiches, and that holds true for those playing at home. **Weiss Deli Bakery** (2744 N. Green Valley Parkway, 702-454-0565) makes a means sandwich platter, but it also offers most of the individual components for sale by the pound — marbled brisket, peppery pastrami, a classic chicken salad with shreds of meat in creamy dressing, as well as cream cheese varieties from plain to chive and scallion. The **Polish Deli** (5900 W. Charleston Blvd., 702-259-2008) may be best known as purveyors of pierogies and paczki, but it's also a place to behold (and slice) the pig in all its many forms: Black Forest ham and Tyrolean ham, pork loin and pork butt, rolls of bacon, and slabs of bacon.

You can order meat-piled sandwiches and other Italian specialties pre-made from **Roma Deli** (8524 W. Sahara Ave., romadelilv.com), or you can choose your own ingredients from the case of salame, mortadella, capicola — go ahead and throw some provolone and mozzarella on there, too!



WATCH

Chef Johnny Church of Johnny C's Diner shares his sandwich secrets.

THE CONDIMENTS

BREAD, MEAT, AND CHEESE may be the building blocks of the sandwich, but condiments are where you can personalize. Take a trip with French herbs or Moroccan spice, add levels of sweet or savory, or just grab a jar that looks interesting and see what happens. The **International Marketplace** (5000 S. Decatur Blvd., impfoods.co) offers flavors from around the globe in a warehouse as big as the world. There are varieties of German ketchup such as garlic, pepper and curry; mustards of the United Kingdom from sharp, yellow British to stout-based Irish, Polish jams of every fruit and flavor; wasabi and ginger sauces and dressings from Japan and thousands of options from dozens of countries.

Chef fave **Artisanal Foods** (4860 S. Eastern Ave., artisanalfoods.com) offers an ever-changing array of top-shelf products — giant, gorgeous pickles from the Real Dill, Moutarde Pommery mustard in chunky crockery jars, Matiz All i Oli Garlic Spread, and Romesco sauce. If you want to see what walnut preserves or pepper chutney can do to your grilled cheese, this is the place.

At the opposite end of the spectrum is the ubiquitous **99 Cents Only** store (multiple locations, 99only.com). Sure, you can grab basic mayo or relish on the cheap, but you can also find more intriguing options — flavored ketchups, gourmet salad dressings, regional barbecue sauces. If you don't like it, you're only out a buck. ♦

INSPIRATION ON BREAD

Four sandwich spots show how it's done

Downtown's beloved **Goodwich** (900 Las Vegas Boulevard S., thegoodwich.com) has made its name by combining comfort-food sandwich classics with unusual twists — tempura batter on the fried chicken, chicharrónes on a Cubano, strawberry and avocado instead of tomato on the BLT/BLS. "Some come from many nights lying there just dreaming about all of the great flavor combinations waiting for me to try. Some nights it makes it hard to find sleep," says Executive Chef Dave Simmons.

The sandwiches of **Bronze Café** (2380

N. Buffalo Drive #110, bronzecafe.com) offer an extensive range of vegetarian and vegan options — not just versions with different ingredients, but entirely different dishes. The Miss Piggy's addition of basil to chicken salad and bacon to the chicken salad sandwich will change the way you make them, while their Guac & Mole uses avocado and mole sauce to add substance and savory to a vegetable sandwich.

Sinful Subs (5135 S. Fort Apache #145, sinfulsubs.com) specializes in Italian sandwiches — a hot chicken parm or

meatball sub, as well as cold variations on the club (turkey and bacon) and Italian hero (salami, pepperoni and ham). The use of big, chunky bread and combining the usual afterthought of lettuce and tomato into a topping that's like a chopped Caesar salad give the sandwiches a satisfying heft.

Saginaw's Delicatessen (inside Circa, circalasvegas.com) is a local offshoot of Detroit's classic old-school deli, Zingerman's. Proprietor Paul Saginaw maintains that quality ingredients are what makes a simple sandwich special. "We've been using the same corned beef supplier for 39 years," he says. "We worked for about two-and-a-half years to get the bread right." Brisket, pastrami, and roast beef are slow-cooked and served on sliced bread with house-made condiments — quality in every layer. *LTR*



Chef Bruce Kalman took a long and winding path to Las Vegas, with stints in Chicago, New York City, Santa Fe, Phoenix, and finally Los Angeles, where his career really took off. He cooked his way to fifth place on season 15 of *Top Chef*, where head judge Tom Colicchio lauded Kalman's pasta skills. That only helped raise the profile of Kalman's already renowned Pasadena restaurant, Union, acclaimed for its California twist on North Italian cuisine.

But Kalman didn't bring his celebrated pasta dishes to Las Vegas. He brought barbecue.

"It's really similar, actually," Kalman explains. "In Italy and in barbecue, too, it's all about tradition. The common denominator is soul. It's soulful. It's slow cooking a lot of times, in Italian food especially. The thing is when you go to Italy, they don't stray from tradition."

Kalman aims to bring that respect for tradition to his latest venture, SoulBelly BBQ. Actually, make that *traditions*. Inspired by America's diverse regional barbecue styles,



the meats. I don't want any dead weight on the menu where people are just okay with it. If it's not special to somebody, it's not good enough." One of the most popular sides is Gigi's Green Chile Corn Casserole, based on his wife's recipe. (She likes to say he "cheffed it up.") His macaroni and cheese is also a must-have, as the chef showcases his famed pasta-making skills.

Friend and colleague Chef James Trees of Esther's Kitchen seconds that opinion. "I think it's really important to remember that Bruce can cook anything," Trees says. "When you look at where most barbecue people fall down, it's on the sides. And his barbecue is technically fantastic, but his sides are where his chef vibe comes through and pulls you in."

Trees' enthusiasm explains why he encouraged Kalman in the first place to give up the glamour of Los Angeles and set roots in Vegas. Kalman says, "He told me to move out here and said, 'You know what's missing out here? Great barbecue.'" Before the big move, Kalman tested the waters with a few pop-up dinners — first a pasta night at Bardot Brasserie with Chef Josh Smith, then a pizza party at Esther's Kitchen — but barbecue was always the plan.

As a pop-up, SoulBelly BBQ has taken its own long and winding path, with Kalman cooking out of Piero's and Fergusons Downtown before he and his team set up their big boy smoker near HUDL Brewing Company on Main Street, serving brisket, pork ribs, and pulled pork. When his permanent space is complete — which should happen by the time you read this — it'll be a new home for a seasoned chef serving up the many flavors of traditional American barbecue. ♦

BARBECUE

Slow Cooker

At SoulBelly BBQ, Bruce Kalman takes his sweet time with regional 'cue classics

BY **Jason Harris**

Kalman's take on barbecue is a greatest-hits package of sorts. His brisket is influenced by Central Texas; he cooks it simply with salt and pepper over post oak wood. "It's a 20-hour process, a 10- to 12-hour cook and then a 10-hour rest. Going through R&D, we've tried it many different ways, and this is the way we nail it."

The pork ribs — arguably the best in Las Vegas — take the diner toward Memphis. Kalman covers the meat with a dry rub of spices and some brown sugar. As it cooks, he slathers it repeatedly

with sweet barbecue sauce, giving the meat a sticky, firm glaze. And SoulBelly's pulled pork has the chef traveling by way of North Carolina with a dry rub and a Carolina red sauce laced with vinegar. But these wide-ranging regional approaches have one thing in common. "What is important to me is that the meat is beautiful and unctuous and perfectly executed."

However, that doesn't mean SoulBelly's side dishes are an afterthought. "Our sides are pretty spectacular," Kalman says. "I want them to be just as good as

SOULBELLY BBQ
1327 S. Main Street
soulbellybbq.com

“ I’m a void-filler,” Jolene Mannina says of her latest project. In this instance, the project isn’t an after-hours chefs’ competition like Back of House Brawl, or a pop-up specialty menu on secretburger.com — two breakout projects from the culinary entrepreneur. No, Mannina’s latest project, Vegas Test Kitchen, fills an everyday void for both Las Vegas diners and chefs. It’s a Downtown food hall made for Vegas locals by Vegas locals, a place where foodies and culinary professionals can regularly be seen tasting and talking, exchanges bites and ideas.

The concept: Seven chefs share a building, each with their own space, each trying out dining concepts that may one day develop into their own brick-and-mortar restaurants. Or, they might flame out after their initial three-month run.

It works like this. You walk into the “hall” to see what strikes your fancy. But unlike traditional food halls such as Grand Central Market in Los Angeles or St. Roch Market in New Orleans, you don’t really see what everybody is offering. (The tiny space allotted for each outlet at Vegas Test Kitchen doesn’t allow for much eye candy.) Instead, you scan a QR code on your phone, and the entire menu, with pictures, appears on your screen via the website vegastestkitchen.menu. The site also serves as a one-stop point of payment.

“The whole thing, overall, is a test,” Mannina says. And she’s not just talking about chefs experimenting with menu concepts; she’s talking about testing new ways of ordering, preparing, and serving food. For her, it’s a menu of possibilities. “Doing contactless and cashless ordering, you have to order from your phone, you have to pay from your phone — will that work? Can you have this number of chefs under one roof working cohesively and offering something unique to the public?” It’s rife with risks and rewards: The reward of a possible breakout concept that buoys the rest, or conversely, swallows up most of the customers.

Nina Manchev, owner of the popular Forte European Tapas Bar and Bistro, leaped at



FRESH IDEAS

Try Me

At Vegas Test Kitchen, fresh concepts (and brave chefs) make the menu

BY Jason Harris

the opportunity to take a chance at Vegas Test Kitchen with a new concept that’s decidedly Old World. Her corner of the venue, Banichka, exclusively sells varieties of European stuffed pastries. Vegas Test Kitchen provided a welcome laboratory for the experiment.

“If I wanted to do this (myself), I’d have to find a place, I’d have to get the licenses,

I’d have to go through this whole process,” she says. Here, all she has to do is focus on making *baniza*, a pastry dish from Bulgaria. Manchev and her team are currently offering eight different types of *baniza*, *sofiiska*, and *zakuski*, which feature multiple shapes, fillings, and doughs. (Her most popular so far is The Bulldog, a roll stuffed with bacon-wrapped hot dogs and cheese.) It’s

not just a business opportunity for her, but a cultural one as well.

“People are just figuring out that Bulgaria has all these different things that maybe they’ve tried in other cultures,” Manchev says. “I want to share these different parts, just show it and let people experience it.”

Sonia El-Nawal, best known for Rooster Boy Café in Desert Shores, is also using Vegas Test Kitchen as a launch pad for a spinoff specialty. When El-Nawal unveiled her version of a New York bagel sandwich in 2020 at Rooster Boy, her bagels were quickly acclaimed as some of the best in Las Vegas. It inspired her to launch her new Bodega Bagel kiosk at Vegas Test Kitchen.

Serving up pies in the alley, Alex White’s Yukon Pizza is another breakout success. White uses a sourdough starter that’s been in his family since 1897 to create his base dough, and his pies riff on Neapolitan and New York-style pizza. After years of cooking pies anywhere he could — whether out of his own house or at pop-ups at Fergusons Downtown — Vegas Test Kitchen gave him a place to land.

“Jolene approached us last fall and offered us this awesome spot, and the opportunity to come into the kitchen space and legitimize the last part of the business, which was proper permitting, licensing with the health department, and stuff like that.”

Along with the regular offerings, a slate of pop-up eateries brings new flavors to the Test Kitchen each week. Taco Tuesdays, a collaboration between Mariana Alvarado of Masazul and Gary LaMorte of Honest Hospitality, has found a groove serving tacos focused on fresh, high-quality ingredients. LaMorte points out that having so many chefs under one roof makes Vegas Test Kitchen a lively culinary workshop as well. “The opportunity to get feedback from some of the industry’s best chefs and restaurateurs is truly a blessing,” he says.

Vegas Test Kitchen seems to be taking off — not just among adventurous diners, but among entrepreneurial chefs, too. Mannina says she’s fielding emails from chefs pitching new concepts, and she’s had discussions about bringing the test-kitchen idea to other parts of the city as well. The concept is novel, but to her, the spirit is simple. “It’s just about having an amazing restaurant with great food.” Make that seven amazing restaurants — all under one roof. ♦

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PROFILE

ASK ABOUT EMILY

When Emily Matview came out as transgender, she discovered an unlikely support network — a punk rock community she helped build herself

BY **Andrew Kiraly**

Emily Matview had always wanted a professional manicure. One August day last year, she worked up the nerve and finally did it. She and her friends went to a nail salon on West Charleston. As she walked in, Emily's mind was a whirl of feelings. She was excited, but also nervous, a little scared. Would anyone look at her funny? Would someone say something? Besides that, she wasn't sure what kind of nails she wanted to get; she wasn't even sure what kind of nails she

should want to get. At 37 years old, Emily was so new to all of this.

"Getting my nails done is something I'd always wanted to do," she says. "But I had always been too scared to do it before. Like, I had always been picked on so hard for already being too feminine or whatever, so it wasn't like I was ever going to do anything to draw *more* attention to myself."

Emily had come out as transgender to her closest friends less than a year earlier, in November 2019.

The vibe at Gel Nails & Spa was welcoming and kind. There was laughter and chatter. No one batted an eye. Nothing happened, and yet, in a way, everything happened, because the outing was so happily unremarkable, so natural.

"I felt like a normal girl that day," Emily says. "It felt like I was living my life the way it's supposed to be, and that's a really nice feeling." For her nails, she got a gel polish in lavender, and she splurged on a pedicure, too.

"She has to deal with so many things (during her transition), and she handles it all so well, and with such grace," says Samantha Carbonaro, the friend who invited her out for manicure day. "But it can be such a struggle. So when we said, 'Want to come with us to the nail salon?,' she was super into it."

That day at the nail salon was also important as a kind of sneak preview of comfortable selfhood. One thing about transitioning, Emily points out, is how torturously slow and expensive the process is, turning it into one long hurry-up-and-wait scenario — except you're waiting in a body that doesn't feel like your own. Growing your

hair out long is slow. Hormones take time to arrange and months to kick in. Hair removal? Painfully slow. Surgery is an epic quest all its own. Nails let you be a little more yourself right now.

“Nails can just happen,” Emily says, “and they help me express my femininity, and also help others know how to gender me.”

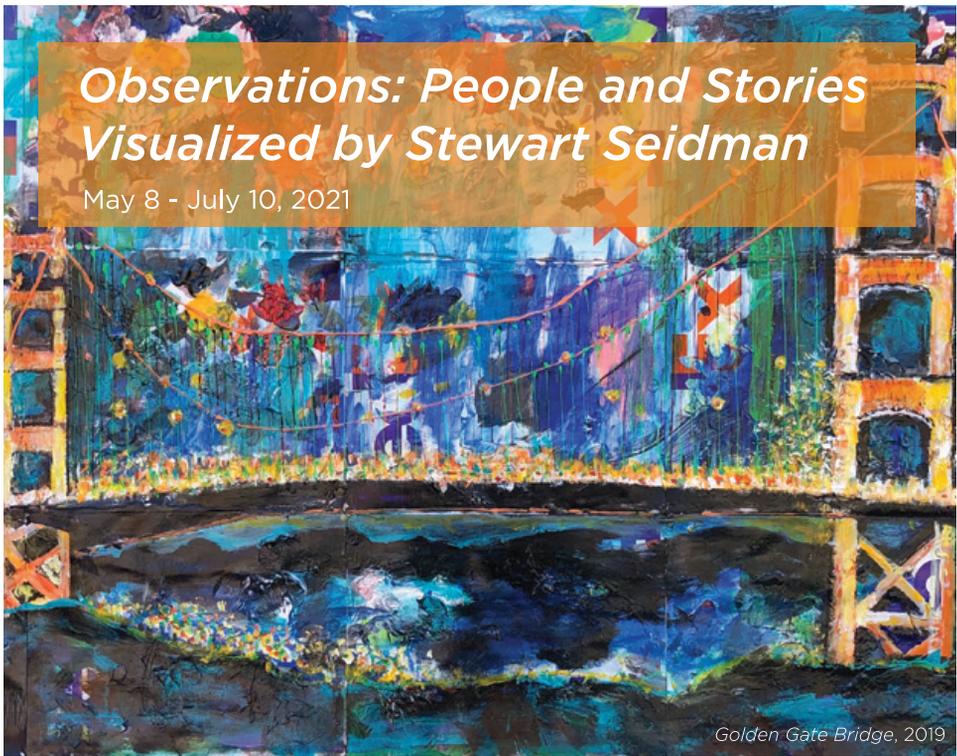
As Emily transitions — a process that reached a milestone in April after she underwent gender confirmation surgery in Thailand — she has a curious support network backing her up: the Las Vegas punk rock scene. It was her punk rock friends who turned a fraught, nervous episode into a fun afternoon at the nail salon. It was her punk rock friends who listened to Emily over the years as she confided the truth about her gender, her deepest self, as they hung out in the parking lot at Zia Records, as they lingered over dinner at Fuddruckers, as they nursed cocktails at ReBar. Her punk rock friends paid patient attention as Emily explained concepts such as *misgendering* and *deadnaming*; her punk rock friends are doing their best to be sensitive and compassionate, minding their pronouns, shaking their vocabulary of their classic, seemingly innocent exclamations like “dude!” (Misgendering is referring to a transgender person by using a word that does not correctly reflect the gender they identify with; deadnaming is using the birth name or other former name of a transgender person without their consent. Both can be hurtful, even traumatizing. That’s why we’re not using her previous name in this story.)

“We’re all learning,” Carbonaro says. “But our community is so accepting, it’s what we know. No matter how abrasive the music is, when it comes down to it, we toss our shit aside and take care of each other.”

This is a punk rock support network that Emily helped build herself with the popular website she runs, Punks in Vegas (punksinvegas.com). The story of Punks in Vegas is interwoven with the story of Emily’s transition, but not in the way you might think.

‘AN EASIER WAY’

PUNK CULTURE HAS stereotypically been the arena of rebels and underdogs — and, let’s be honest, the aggro energy of angry white men — but the image of punk as showcased on Emily’s website has little of that. The splashy, sunny Punks in Vegas logo looks like branding for a kids’ cereal. The writing is unabashedly enthusiastic, bracingly earnest, and free of snark. Sure, there are plenty



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PROFILE

of pics of guitar-wielding dudes frozen in mid-scream, but the site also has an impressive video vault of “Stripped Down Sessions” in which bands strum out spirited acoustic sets amid cheery domestic settings — think Tiny Desk Concerts you can mosh to. Indeed, the big tent for “punk” on Emily’s site stretches wide to include indie, blues, bluegrass, even folk and spoken word.

“I’ve watched her build Punks in Vegas from the beginning,” says Aaron Bautista, Emily’s friend since high school, “and she’s helped bring so much exposure to local bands and the local scene. But it’s not just locally. She’s attracted bigger bands to town (on tour stops) that might not otherwise even know we have a scene.”

“She always had a good sense, artistically, for bands that were going to be big,” says friend Austin Jeffers, a local musician whose bands Emily has featured on Punks in Vegas. “I swear, it borders on clairvoyance.”

Emily fell in love with punk rock in the eighth grade. A classmate offered her an earbud, and what poured forth hooked her immediately: Green Day, The Offspring, The Bosstones, No Doubt. If the music hooked her, the appeal of a community forged among outsiders and misfits sealed the deal.

She started Punks in Vegas in 2011. It was germinating long before that, though, as a graduate project for her master’s in library science program at the University of North Texas. Back in the early aughts, Facebook was growing like a tidal wave, but MySpace was still a thing, a useful if clunky social media site for finding out about live music — that is, if you didn’t mind leapfrogging from promoter pages to venue pages to band pages to cobble together your own personal concert calendar.

“I just thought, there has to be an easier way,” Emily says. “So that’s what I did for my project in grad school, I made this show guide.” Emily had a eureka moment when her friend Bautista explained how to buy a domain name, and in February 2011, she launched Punks in Vegas. It wasn’t a mere punk show guide for long. Punks in Vegas would quickly grow into a veritable living digest of local punk bands, concert reviews,



interviews, photo collections, performance videos, and even oral histories of older Vegas punk bands reaching back to the ’90s.

“When she first started the site, she was like, ‘I’ll start blogging!’ Then she was like, ‘Maybe I’ll take photos, too!’ ‘And I’ll do interviews!’ It just all came together really organically,” Bautista says.

There was a method to the madness. “I’d always ask bands and promoters, ‘Why don’t you come to Vegas?’” Emily says. “And it was always, ‘Well, we played there five years ago and no one came,’ or, ‘We didn’t know there was a scene, we just stop in Vegas to party.’ So I thought, what if I could actually push this idea out there that there’s cool stuff happening here?” The site’s upbeat look and feel make sense in a larger context: By day, Emily works as a children’s librarian for the Clark County Las Vegas Library District. In a way, her library job and her Punks in Vegas pastime are both literacy projects — the overarching purpose of both entails promoting community, communication, and exploration. “That’s the kind of stuff that I’ve always sort of gravitated toward with punk,” Emily says, “versus the whole other side that’s, like, let’s be offensive and

gross and weird.”

Of course, there were punks in Vegas before there was Punks in Vegas. But, as it developed,

Emily’s website threw a spotlight on a local scene and subculture that had historically thrived on a kind of strategic, separatist obscurity. In adult-oriented Vegas, all-ages punk shows were notoriously difficult to put on, thanks in large part to a thicket of restrictions shaped around the city’s ubiquitous casinos and video-poker bars. Thus, the valley punk scene of the ’80s and ’90s survived on “underground” shows at warehouses, Elks Lodges, and far-flung desert spots at the valley’s edges. By the time Punks in Vegas launched, punk rock had long broken into the mainstream; what Emily’s site did was reframe the local punk scene as a bona fide branch in the broader Vegas entertainment ecosystem.

Her industrious zeal for building out Punks in Vegas with her raw, dramatic photos and enthusiastic reviews stemmed from her love of photography and music, to be sure, but it was also a vital distraction. During this time, Emily had begun to try to seriously understand the wrenching psychological discomfort she’d felt since childhood, a dysphoria she tried to bulldoze as an adult, by dating, by diving into romantic relationships, even by getting

CONCERT PHOTOS: EMILY MATVIEW



SCENES FROM A SCENE: A sampling of Emily Matview's punk concert photos published on Punks in Vegas over the years: Clockwise from far left, The Story So Far (2013); Lucero (2012); Tiny Stills (2018); Bayside's equipment on stage (2013); the crowd goes wild at a Punk Rock Bowling show (2015).

married. "I really convinced myself at one point that that's what I needed to do," she says. "It was a bad way to handle things, but I was just really young and confused and scared." At the same time she was silently struggling with her gender identity, she was also unwittingly building a public persona as a punk-scene impresario — a frequent fixture at shows with tattooed arms, band T-shirt, camera at the ready. Sure, slightly aloof, somewhat withdrawn and standoffish, but maybe that was just punk rock cool?

"Honestly, I originally started taking photos at shows because I felt really awkward and uncomfortable talking to people," Emily says. "And a lot of that, in retrospect, had to do with delaying this transition. It felt like I was talking to everyone through this weird mask, and taking pictures at shows helped. I felt like it gave me a purpose when I was at a show, and something to do to sort of separate me from everyone else. There was one year where I shot 137 videos for the site. I don't think I necessarily would have been quite that dedicated if I wasn't also sort of avoiding the inevitable issues that were going on in my life at the time."

Photography allowed her to take refuge behind the camera, but, perhaps ironically, it had a different effect. "But then in a weird way, I actually ended up becoming friends with people through doing that, and becoming friends with those people helped give

me the confidence to come out as trans."

What started as a ferociously — perhaps even obsessively — DIY webzine became a team effort as many of those friends became contributors, snapping photos, writing reviews, doing interviews, and producing videos for the site. Site photographer Aaron Mattern moved here from Portland in 2013. "Working for Punks in Vegas introduced me to an entirely new group of friends I wouldn't have otherwise, kind of like going to college would," he says. "And plus, I essentially learned a trade as a photographer, and got to meet some bands that have been heroes to me."

Inviting those friends aboard taught Emily a simple skill she's still perfecting in her new chapter: Asking for help. "Running Punks in Vegas has helped with my patience and ability to rely on others. Like, I was always the person who did the whole group project herself in college and high school. But there's no way I could do that with Punks in Vegas."

'WHAT I NEEDED TO DO'

"COMING OUT" IS a deceptive term. It sounds so neatly singular and comprehensive, like there's some grand public reckoning and, hurray, life moves on. It speaks to our appetite for dramatic climax. Obviously, it's much more nuanced and complicated than that — and difficult. But in May 2012, Emily was inspired by the high-profile example of Laura Jane Grace, lead singer of the popular Florida punk band

Against Me! — one of Emily's favorites. Grace came out as a transgender woman, and began the process of transitioning. It spurred Emily to finally articulate the truth to herself, even amid knotty circumstances.

"When Laura Jane Grace came out, that was the time that I sort of realized that this is what I needed to do to be happy and to be myself. But it was also really bad timing, because it was the same time that I got married — like, literally within the same couple months," she says. "And I felt like I just didn't know what to do, because it added that extra complication. Now that I'm far removed from the situation, it seems a lot more obvious what I should have done. But that's kind of when I realized that that's really what I needed to do." Coming out happened in layers and phases over





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the subsequent years — in those heartfelt conversations with friends in parking lots, restaurants, and bars, in an amicable but nonetheless painful divorce. Emily set a goal to tell all her closest friends by Thanksgiving 2019. Some were surprised, some were not, many had questions, but all of them were unconditionally accepting.

“The first thing I said was, ‘Can I hug you?’” Samantha Carbonaro recalls. “There was no question, no wondering, no judgment. I just thought, nobody’s going to hurt this person.”

“When she told me, I asked every single incorrect question a person could ask. I hit every checklist item,” Jeffers recalls, laughing. “We sat on the side of Zia Records for three hours, drinking sodas and just talking. While I considered myself an ally, I was still as uninformed as any idiot raised in the ’90s, so it was really an eye-opening conversation.” The conversation struck a chord with Jeffers that’s still reverberating. “It made me realize a lot of things raising my own daughter now,” he says. “I can say I have a better understanding of what a moral and empathetic person is, thanks in large part to Emily. She helped make me a better person.”

Lately, Emily’s been getting into baking. Well, that’s not accurate. She always enjoyed baking, but it’s cast differently now; indeed, there are stubborn, gendered assumptions lurking even among the progressive prerogatives of punk culture. Better to say that lately she’s been getting into baking as an affirmative act of selfhood — not as something she enjoys as a woman, but something she enjoys as Emily.

“I liked baking before I came out, so it’s not like that changed for me, but I do think the perception changed for other people,” she says. “Like, people changed from joking that I didn’t know how to cook to actually complimenting me on my cooking, which is nice, but in the past, I just sort of let people believe whatever they wanted about me. I was depressed and hated myself and couldn’t find the will to push back and say ‘Actually ...’ So, I feel like I’m better at asserting who I am — now that I know who I am. I don’t want to be a blank slate anymore.”

And she’s been back to the nail salon since that first outing in August. In fact, she’s kind of becoming a regular. “I’m happy that I’m confident enough now, thanks to Samantha, that I can do these trips on my own now, too,” Emily says. “It’s cute — the ladies at the salon always ask me about Sam.” And when Samantha goes to the salon, they always ask about Emily. ♦



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RIVER JUSTICE

Native water protectors show the way to care for houseless community members and the environment. Can non-natives follow?

BY **Avory Wyatt and Jarrette Werk**

Editor's note: Avory Wyatt is Wašiw and Numu, and grew up on the Hungry Valley Reservation in Sparks. He's a land defender, water protector, and social justice activist who has worked closely with both Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. Jarrette Werk is A'aniih and Nakoda from Fort Belknap, Montana, and has been living in Northern Nevada since 2014. He's an independent journalist and photographer who focuses on rewriting the narrative of Indigenous Peoples within the media. Wyatt and Werk are assistant producers for KNPR's Native Nevada podcast.

RENO/SPARKS— Autumn Harry, of Pyramid Lake, asked us to join her at the Sparks Marina on February 4 to celebrate the birthday of her mother, Beverly Harry. Beverly wanted to celebrate by giving back to our unsheltered relatives along the Truckee River.

Beverly, Autumn, and 15 community members and volunteers, including us, came together to make Beverly's wish come true. That morning, we prepared and distributed 120 burritos, dog and cat food, propane, firewood, trash bags, and other supplies to the encampments along the river.

"We organized a small roundup with trash bags, food, burritos, and different supplies that we would need to pick up trash. But we're mainly just concentrating on reconnaissance, trying to figure out what these individuals on the river needed, and how we could be better companions to them," says Beverly, who is Diné and serves as the native community organizer for the Progressive Leadership Alliance of Nevada. "We were trying to address this as a relationship-building event, and then also not to be critical of the way that they lived, (and learn) how we could bring better understanding to what was happening on the river with the issues that they were facing."

What began as a birthday wish to provide food and supplies to the most vulnerable populations living along the Truckee River blossomed into an Indigenous-led movement to establish collective justice for all the communities that rely on the Truckee River system.



RESTORE AND PROTECT: Brian Wohlgemuth and other River Justice activists collect trash along the Truckee River.

Autumn, who is Numu and Diné, grew up on the rural Pyramid Lake Reservation with her mother and late father, Norm Harry, and didn't spend a lot of time in the urban settings of Reno or Sparks. Instead, she spent most of her time with her parents exploring the sagebrush-covered mountains or the turquoise waters of Pyramid Lake.

While distributing food and supplies to the houseless camps along the river, she got to know some of the people living there. She also saw how much trash had accumulated.

"That was a big eye-opener for us who do live at Pyramid lake, because we're concerned about the water quality and what's coming down the river because of our fish species," says Autumn, who works as the campaign strategist for Great Basin Water

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Network. “Because there is a disconnection between the reservation and the cities of Reno and Sparks, I think a lot of our people aren’t seeing those impacts directly.”

It is striking to see firsthand. While we were distributing supplies to the camps, we noticed large amounts of trash near the water’s edge, human feces in containers, and used needles littering the dirt and bushes.

The experience sparked something in our group. We came together to make a change and help the river. Within a few days, River Justice was born. The first cleanup, titled Protect River, Protect Life, attracted almost 90 volunteers. Beverly coined the term “River Otters” for team members. She

describes the overall focus of River Justice as providing a voice for the river and addressing the injustices on the river that begin with the behavior, mindset, ideas, and systems brought by white society. We all wanted to educate and remind non-Indigenous volunteers that the Truckee River is still an Indigenous river, and Indigenous people are still here to take care of it.

“Our ancestors have been caring for these lands for thousands of years,” Autumn says, “and there’s been a lot of work and a lot of love that has been put into taking care of the land, the water, and especially the watershed.”

Most watersheds drain into an ocean, but

the Truckee River watershed starts in a lake and ends in a lake. Its unique flow is north to east — the opposite of most watersheds west of the Continental Divide.

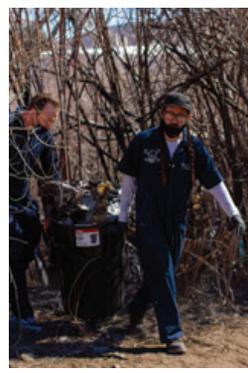
The watershed is made up of a series of streams, creeks, and reservoirs that empty into the 121-mile-long Truckee River, which is also the sole outlet of Lake Tahoe. The watershed drains 3,120 square miles of land in Truckee, Reno, Sparks, and out into the desert, finally connecting Lake Tahoe to Pyramid Lake.

Autumn and Beverly dedicated the first cleanup to Chief Truckee, who was Numu, reminding people that the Truckee River is named after him. They also showed the river’s



CLEAN SCENES

Snapshots from the Feb. 4 River Justice cleanup along the Truckee River. Volunteers picked through rubble to dispose of everything from bicycle tires to propane tanks to drug paraphernalia that had accumulated over many years.



On the far page: Beverly Harry (upper left) and her daughter Autumn Harry (lower right) have organized five community cleanups along the Truckee River since February.



connection to the watershed and Reno-Sparks, as well as the connection that Indigenous peoples — specifically Washoe and Northern Paiute people — still have to these areas.

“We’re all from different tribes or reservations, but we’re all working together to take care of these lands that our ancestors have always cared for,” Autumn says.

BRIDGING DIVIDES

SIMILAR TO INDIGENOUS peoples in the United States, houseless individuals have been displaced by colonialism and colonization. This helps explain why we use the term “houseless” in place of “homeless.”

To say someone is “homeless” means they inherently do not belong to the place where they reside.

Throughout February and March, the River Protectors continued to perform periodic weekend cleanups along the Truckee River. As she got to know the community, Autumn educated herself on the term “homeless,” and came to understand the negative impacts of using it.

“I was starting to hear more of a dialogue on why we shouldn’t use the term ‘homeless,’” she says, “because, when we say that you’re homeless, that means you’re without a home.” But for the people she was getting to know along the Truckee River, their tents

and shelters *were* their homes. She saw that using “houseless” could acknowledge that someone didn’t have a house, but was still part of the community.

“I think it’s always important for all of us, no matter who we are, or what background we have, to really understand and check our own privileges,” Autumn says. “And so for me, when I first went into these camps and started talking with more people, you know, I had to understand my own privileges when entering those spaces.”

At the same time, she acknowledges, it’s our traditional ancestral homelands. We feel the responsibility to do what we can to take care of the river and the watershed.



RIVER AND FLOW

River Justice volunteers use gardening tools, tarps, shopping carts, and plain muscle to remove trash and debris from the banks of the Truckee River.

This page, lower left: Colleen Williams is a River Justice volunteer who is a familiar face at the organization's cleanups.

Opposite page, middle: Autumn Harry, Dwight George, Alese McMurtry and others haul a tarp full of garbage to the dumpster.



As we all had our own intimate conversations with those living in the encampments along the river, we started developing relationships with them. It became apparent they had nowhere to properly dispose of their waste. Different individuals in different camps shared similar experiences, telling us stories of taking trash to designated drop-off locations provided by the city, only to have dump trucks drive past them, refusing to pick up the trash because they knew where it was coming from. This, we believe, is what ultimately leads to the accumulation of trash along the Truckee River.

From our first river cleanup, it was apparent that the task at hand was not going to be easy. It was clear that much of the trash

had been sitting and decomposing for years. We'd touch plastics, and they'd disintegrate into microplastics, which are extremely harmful to the environment. What looked to be spiderwebs turned out to be plastics intertwined with plants. In one of several areas that had layers upon layers of garbage, we discovered a milk jug from 2007.

It's hard to know if that specific jug had been in that location for 14 years, but it does show how long plastics can last, and how long this area has been suffocating. Mother Earth was doing her best — plants were growing in and around the debris — but once it was all removed, it was like this big sigh of relief. She could finally breathe again.

Another thing we learned after our first cleanup was how expensive it is to dispose of waste. On average, each full truckload, around 36 cubic yards of waste, costs \$350 per to dispose of in the landfill.

"When we had gone through (the Vista) area, and just walked it and just observed what this land was being used for and how it wasn't being respected, it made us realize that there was a larger part of this issue," Beverly says. "This was just an example of what was happening throughout the Truckee Meadows, throughout the state, throughout the nation, and throughout the world."

We could all see that the issue expanded further than the pollution associated with



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the houseless community. Couches, mattresses, and other large items were evidence of non-houseless people illegally dumping their waste at locations like Vista, the first area we cleaned up.

“I thought it was two loads, and people were saying three, and it ended up taking seven trips altogether,” Beverly says. “So, we have a huge problem that we didn’t correctly estimate. The problem was larger than we had even expected.”

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

BEVERLY HARRY, AUTUMN Harry, and the rest of the River Justice team have proven that it’s

possible to remove a huge amount of waste along the Truckee River without harming communities near the watershed. However, more has to be done to prevent the trash from further accumulating in the future. Indigenous communities are stepping up to tackle the problem, but the weight of the issue should not be put entirely on the shoulders of the original caretakers of this land. The cities of Reno and Sparks must dedicate more resources to keeping the river clean, while minimizing harm to houseless communities.

City officials “need to be on the ground, witnessing and helping to remove the trash themselves, so that they can fully understand the impacts and all of the communities that

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CLEAR VIEW

Top, the Truckee banks are visible again after a long day of cleaning by River Justice.

Bottom left: Volunteer Alicia Reyes has participated in the last five River Justice cleanups.



are impacted by the waste accumulation,” Autumn says.

Our experience showed us that it’s not only local governing bodies, but the settler community as a whole, that needs to step up and take care of the waste in the watershed. Settler colonialism is a driving force of the waste issue along the river, as it perpetuates a mentality of haves and have-nots. Non-Indigenous residents and organizations must dedicate more time and funding to the waste issue to ensure this responsibility doesn’t always fall on Indigenous communities.

Time and time again, we hear settlers speak about how much they care about the land and water, yet their words rarely result

in direct action. There are organizations who receive hundreds of thousands of dollars and whose sole purpose is to keep the river “beautiful,” yet, according to Autumn, “They are not doing their jobs.”

As Indigenous people, we face a multitude of challenges resulting from colonization and colonialism, including keeping our waters free from waste and other pollutants. Though we’re passionate about every single challenge, all of our energy can’t be put toward any single issue. “I don’t want to be picking up trash for the rest of my life,” Autumn says. And a majority of Indigenous organizers would agree. We agree.

And when you show up, do so with hu-

mility. “One of the things that we advocate for is, if you’re showing up for Indigenous peoples, provide them space, check yourself on how you’re showing up, and make sure that you’re ready to understand what Native people are all about, and not based on assumptions,” Beverly says.

Unless you are a Washoe or Northern Paiute person, you are a guest on these lands, obligated to take care of the land and water just as Indigenous peoples have done since time immemorial. It’s time for non-Indigenous communities to learn about the original peoples’ values and stewardship of the land, to stand up for Native communities in Nevada. ♦



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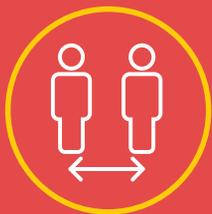
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RETURN TO WELLNESS

TIPS FOR HEALTHY LIVING IN A POST-PANDEMIC WORLD

BY ELISABETH DANIELS





No pain, no gain. Grind now, shine later. I'll sleep when I'm dead. Americans have been conditioned to believe that success means pushing ourselves 110% and burnout is to be celebrated. A culture of toxic productivity – where no matter what we're doing, we need to be doing more of it... and faster – has pervaded nearly every aspect of modern life.

But recent events upended that paradigm. Gone were the streets packed with runners, long days spent climbing the corporate ladder, and bars packed with happy-hour revelers. In came distance learning and Zoom meetings, exercising in unfamiliar ways, and taking mental health more seriously. When gyms were closed, farmers markets shut down, and socializing went online, we had to change our health and self-care practices. Pausing our typically hectic lives over the past several months has highlighted the value of embracing moments of quiet and stillness.

Even as the world starts to open up again, the desire for a more nuanced approach to wellbeing remains. This mindfulness offers immense benefits because it allows us to make purposeful decisions instead of constantly reacting to the world around us. The result is that many of us are eschewing the 24/7 hustle mentality and prioritizing mental and physical work-life balance.

Which is why we've prepared this guide to taking care of yourself in the "new normal" environment. Whether you need to get rid of an undesirable quarantine habit, nutritional help in the kitchen, or ways to help others while helping yourself, this wellness guide has you covered for the new season ahead. It's packed with tips for building a sustainable exercise

routine, developing healthy work-from-home habits, making good nutrition convenient, and leading a healthy lifestyle while at work or out exploring.

Building a Sustainable Exercise Routine

Movement matters. In fact, our physical, mental, and emotional health depends on it. Exercise reduces blood pressure, drops our resting heart rate, combats body fat, strengthens our immune system, improves our mental state, and enhances our quality of sleep.

As the saying goes, the best workout is the one you'll stick with. While that's true, developing a lifelong exercise habit is not quite that simple – although it's a great place to start. Figure out what physical activity you enjoy, ideally one that suits your level of mobility and fitness. Even doing some stretches while you're watching Netflix counts. Any movement is better than no movement at all.

When you're ready to design a more comprehensive program that works for

your physical and lifestyle needs, try to incorporate the four types of exercise we should all be doing, according to Harvard Medical School: aerobics, stretching, strengthening, and balance.

Activities that boost your heart rate and breathing are aerobic, and they're terrific for heart health, reducing inflammation, weight loss, alleviating depression, and more. Doctors suggest aiming for 150 minutes of brisk walking, dance classes, jogging, bicycling, swimming, or step aerobics per week.

Strength training helps keep our muscles strong as we age. It's vital for the activities of daily living such as going up stairs, carrying groceries, gardening, and getting up off the floor after playing with the kids or cat. Strength training two to three times a week also boosts bone growth, improves posture and balance, minimizes back and joint pain, and can even keep blood sugar in check. Don't have a gym membership or access to dumbbells? Body weight exercises,



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like arm circles, push-ups, lunges, and burpees, are just as effective.

Whether you're hunched over a laptop while working from home or just not as supple as you used to be when you were younger, stretching is vital to maintaining flexibility and easing muscle cramps. Stretching increases your range of motion by lengthening your muscles, which in turn reduces the risk of falls and other injuries. Experts recommend stretching at least three or four times per week, starting with a warm-up and then performing static stretches that you hold for up to 60 seconds as long as it's not painful.

Like stretching, balance is another component of exercise that's often overlooked. It's especially important as we age and falling becomes a more serious concern. Consider taking a tai chi or yoga class. Or make an appointment with a physical therapist to discuss weak areas you may have and specific balance

Exposure to sunlight promotes the release of serotonin in the body, which can elevate your mood.

exercises to improve them.

Combining these four types of exercise into a plan customized just for you is the key to building a program that you will reap mental and physical rewards for years to come.

Think about when, where, and with whom you most enjoy exercising. Do you like to take solitary walks in the park in the evening after work? Or do

you prefer meeting up with a friend at a Zumba class first thing in the morning? Does boulder scrambling in Red Rock refresh your body and mind? Or do you crave the endorphins of high-intensity workout you can do anywhere through a monthly subscription?

If you'd rather work out at home, get creative with items you've already got in the house. Use wine bottles, soup cans, or milk jugs for weights. Turn dish towels into sliders for exercises like lunges and mountain climbers. Brace a sturdy chair against a wall for triceps dips.

Understanding which types of workouts make you happiest will help you stay physically strong – without having to put yourself through a bunch of mental gymnastics every day.

As always, be sure to get your doctor's okay before starting any new exercise routine.

* * *

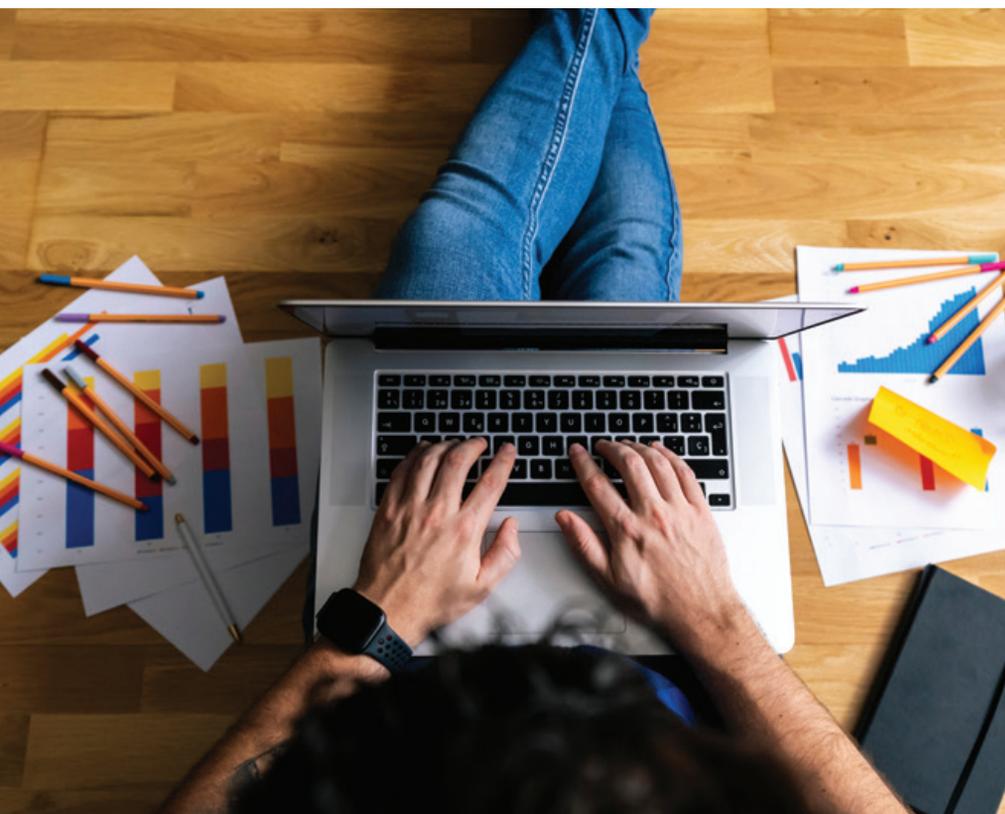
Developing Healthy Work-from-Home Habits

More of us are working from home than ever before, and that trend will likely continue. While there are a lot of perks to the work-from-home life, it also comes with several challenges.

To stay on task during the day, turn off pop-up notifications and alerts on your computer and/or phone. Turn on the 'do not disturb' or 'sleep' functions while you are working on assignments that require concentration. It's also essential to make time for yourself. Between work, housework, and kids and/or pets, factor in something that rewards your passions.

Focus on creating an organized, clutter-free space to keep your mind clear and minimize the stress of not being able to find what you need to do the job. Take before and after pictures. You'll appreciate the effort put into arranging the space.

Be aware that, without proper



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planning, it's easy for the workday to bleed into home time. Maintain boundaries by creating a structure for your days, beginning and ending them with some sort of routine. Maybe you start your workday with a cup of coffee or tea. Maybe you end it by writing a to-do list for the following day. When the workday is done, enhance your evening by eating a healthy and satisfying meal or treating yourself to a hot bath or time

working on a special project.

Try as much as possible to designate specific areas for work and fitness, which makes it easier to mentally separate the parts of your day.

Another challenge is keeping your body feeling good and functioning optimally when you're hunched over a laptop or working from the couch. Make sure to take breaks and move regularly. Stand up and do calf raises while you

are on the phone. Roll your shoulders while seated at your computer. Every little bit counts! (See previous section for more ideas.)

A dedicated office is ideal, but if that's not an option, create a workspace that you use only when you're on the job. Find a comfortable and supportive chair, make sure your desk or table is at an appropriate height, and try to position yourself near a window for fresh air and natural light. Exposure to sunlight promotes the release of serotonin the body, which can elevate your mood. Bonus points if there are birds chirping outside your window. Researchers at California Polytechnic State University have found that listening to birdsong can increase feelings of wellbeing. If there's more construction noise than nature in your neighborhood, even a recording works. Search for 'birdsong' on YouTube or a music app like Spotify to fill your home with happy twittering.

Using a laptop? Look into an external keyboard to improve your body mechanics. Even better, consider a standing desk.

Working from home can be isolating, so don't rely solely on email to communicate with your colleagues. Consider calling instead of messaging and participate in online meetings when you can. Hearing your coworkers' voices and seeing their faces will help you feel connected.

* * *

Making Good Nutrition Convenient

A big component of wellness is how you fuel your body. With all the diet advice out there, including the latest fad diets that seem to be on every morning show, eating healthy can quickly become overwhelming. But it doesn't have to be. As author and journalist Michael Pollan says, "Eat food. Not too much. Mostly plants."

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that? Take inventory of what's already in your pantry, and then plan your meals around those items. Steaming, broiling, baking, or poaching are healthier than frying. Check nutrition labels and use lower-calorie sauces and condiments to add flavor to your meals. Replace white, heavily processed carbs with brown rice and whole grains. And, of course, load up on fresh vegetables.

Cooking at home is healthier than grabbing takeout. (Although not always. I'm looking at you, Ice Cream Bread.) To make it easier, buy fresh fruits and vegetables, cut them up and put them in your freezer. They'll keep for months.

Setting aside a bit of time each week to plan your meals can keep your food costs down while helping you create nutritious meals and snacks.

Since not everyone has the time, aptitude, or space in the kitchen for meal prepping, there are plenty of healthy premade foods that can help you stick to a nutritious diet and save prep time. Once again, read nutrition labels closely. Don't worry too much about the number of ingredients. Instead, look at the quality.

While big wins are great, be sure to celebrate the little things

Is the product mostly organic? Do you recognize the ingredients listed?

Stock up on stir-in herbs and spice pastes, microwaveable grains, bone broth, whole grain bread, ready-made salad mixes, pre-made, plant-based pizza crusts, and healthy frozen meals from brands like Dr. Praeger's or Amy's.

Good nutrition includes staying hydrated. Even if you're only mildly dehydrated, you may experience fatigue, low energy, and headaches. Be proactive about drinking enough water throughout the day. Have a water bottle handy at all times. If plain water doesn't appeal to you, add lemon slices or no-sugar flavor drops to your beverages or

brew a carafe of decaf iced tea. Since we often perceive thirst as hunger, drinking enough water may also help you avoid overeating.

LEADING A HEALTHY LIFESTYLE

The slowdown of the last year has spotlighted the benefit of doing something purely for fun. As schedules start to fill up again, it's important to continue to make time for pastimes and passion projects that boost our spirits. Play a game, garden, dance, or indulge your crafty side with some DIY. Don't be afraid to try something new, revive an old hobby, or sign up for a course. Check out the offerings from CreativeLive, Skill Share, Udemy, or Coursera. Practice playing an instrument or discover how to cook a favorite cuisine. Study a new language. Learning new things will increase your confidence, as well as being fun to do.

These kinds of activities enhance our quality of life because they allow us to engage with something solely because we love it. Block off time in your calendar for these endeavors and be mindful of when you're doing too many things that don't bring you joy.

Mindfulness can also help you combat boredom and stress eating. When you feel the urge to eat, ask yourself if you're really hungry. If not, handle those feelings differently by venting to a good friend, going for a walk, or getting lost in a good book.

These techniques not only help with emotional eating; they can also help you manage stress and get better sleep, which is critical for just about every aspect of your health.

Another way to offload anxiety that may be affecting your sleep is to keep a journal to track your moods. It doesn't have to be especially detailed. Write a sentence or two about whatever situation you're dealing with. Experts suggest





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that journaling can help manage anxiety, reduce stress, and manage with depression because it provides a way to express your emotions, track symptoms, and prioritize fears and concerns. Putting pen to paper can help you see things more clearly and understand what your next step should be. Talking to a close friend or family member might also be a good option, allowing you to relax and rest more easily.

You can also try yoga or meditation. Both can be done in small spaces and have online options. If you've got a smartphone, apps like Headspace and Talkspace deliver guided meditation or talk therapy in a few taps of the screen.

As with your dedicated work-from-home space, make your bedroom an oasis of calm and quiet by limiting electronic devices, keeping it cool, and using blackout curtains to reduce the light coming in. Having a weighted blanket, a favorite pillow, and house plants can also foster relaxation and quality sleep.

Good sleep starts before you head the bedroom. Don't exercise or eat large meals within two hours before bedtime. Avoid alcohol for at least four hours before bed. Skip that afternoon cup of joe. And do your best to go to sleep and wake up at the same times each day.

On a broader scale, whether you're at home, at work, or out exploring, do your best to stay present by single-tasking. Observe what's around you. Look for something beautiful, extraordinary, or unusual. Having trouble staying in the moment? Ground yourself by focusing on all your senses. Take note of five things you can see, four things you can feel, three things you can hear, two things you can smell, and one thing you can taste.

Sometimes the best way to take care of yourself is to take care of other people. There's a growing awareness that helping other people is a pathway to

Small gestures are just as impactful as big commitments

happiness. Self-care for the community can include giving back, donating your time and skills, and using your clout to address systemic issues.

Small gestures are just as impactful as big commitments. Do something nice for a friend, colleague, or a loved one. At the drive-through, pay for the order of the car behind you. Text a friend a funny meme. Pop a surprise card or letter into the mail.

Have you recently learned a new skill or adopted a new hobby? Turn it into a gift for someone else. If you've taken up painting, send an original canvas to an acquaintance. If you've just learned to sew, ask if anyone has clothes that need mending.

Think about which issues matter most to you and explore volunteer opportunities in those areas through sites like Volunteer Match. Volunteering is a wonderful way to get more involved in your community (in person or online) and meet new people who have similar interests, all while supporting a cause you're passionate about.

Another way to turn a negative or low mood into happiness and contentment is to draft a gratitude list. While big wins are great, be sure to celebrate the little things, the small joys of life that crop up every day and may be easy to overlook. Focusing on what you have, instead of what you lack, shifts you into an abundance mindset, which fosters appreciation, perspective, and hope.

* * *

WELLNESS GOING FORWARD

As we consider the way we want to live going forward, educating ourselves on the benefits of nutrition, how to get appropriate amounts of exercise, improving the quality of our sleep, and embracing time for fun and relaxation will be crucial for managing stress and leading a balanced life. These elements will also play a major role in battling mental health challenges.

Because we've been spending so much time online, wellness going forward will likely involve digital detoxes in which we live without our phones, social media, and TV for a day, a weekend, a week or more. Disconnecting from the noise around us will help us avoid comparison and doom-scrolling and allow more time for long walks in nature with friends, meditation, reading, or working on creative projects.

Leaving hustle culture behind, at least somewhat, means focusing on more realistic, smaller goals. Knowing that our plans can be upended by circumstances beyond our control has taught us the value of remaining open and flexible. Micro goals are more achievable and adaptable, which means they build confidence.

A return to wellness will also include an understanding our purpose and creating our own definition of a life well lived. Whether it's family, spirituality, fulfilling work, school, time in nature, or other daily activities that help us find our place in the world, we all need something that sets our souls on fire and drives our imaginations and energy.

Whether it's tailoring our work lives to better match our needs as well as those of our employers, finding a workout that fits our schedule and comfort level, taking time more regularly to refresh and recover, or learning new skills that also benefit our communities, we will be more proactive with our overall wellness than ever before. ■

Equal to the moment. Looking to the future.



UMC takes pride in offering the resources and expertise needed to help our community safely reopen and recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. We've developed the state's largest COVID-19 testing lab and supported local businesses and events by collaborating to develop detailed reopening protocols. Our team has administered 60,000 doses of the COVID-19 vaccine, supporting our mission to safeguard the health of community members. As we move toward emerging from the pandemic, we'll continue to do all we can to answer the challenge—and secure a brighter future.



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THE ANNUAL

FOCUS ON NEVADA

photo contest

JUDGES

SCOTT DICKENSHEETS
Writer

JOE DUMIC
B&C Camera

BRENT HOLMES
Artist

ANDREW KIRALY
Desert Companion

ROBERT JOHN KLEY
Photographer

HEIDI KYSER
Companion

CHASE MCCURDY
Artist and photographer

**ELIZABETH
QUINONES-ZALDAÑA**
Poet

CHRISTOPHER SMITH
Desert Companion

LANCE L. SMITH
Artist

WOW. IF WE'VE LEARNED

one thing over the past year, it's that a virulent global pandemic can't even touch the resilient mojo of avid photographers. The honorees in this year's Focus on Nevada photo contest seem to have taken the assorted bummers of COVID as an artistic challenge, sublimating them into images that pop with raw, longing beauty — but just as often hum with the tensions and subtle dramas of domestic life that we got to know all too well. Congratulations to our winners and honorable mentions — and thanks as always for inspiring us to look at Nevada with a truly fresh perspective.



Honorable Mention
Artistic & Abstract

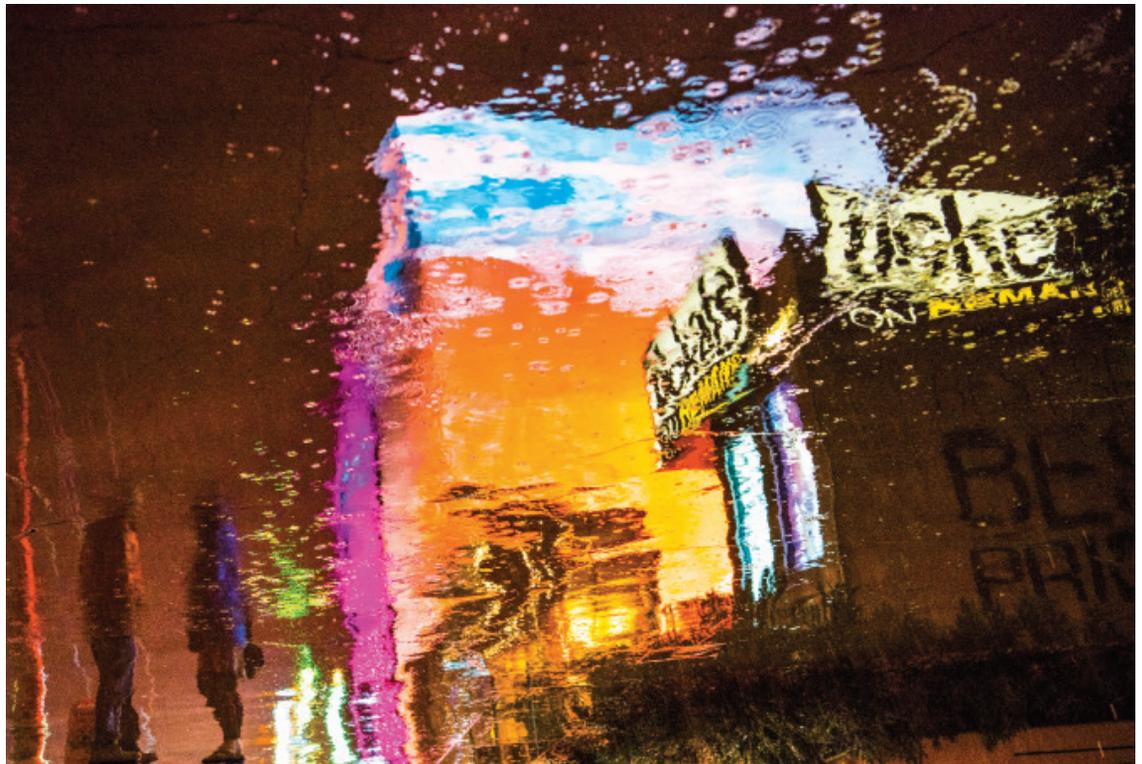
JOHN ROHLING
PROFESSIONAL

ARTISTIC & ABSTRACT

1st Place

JOHN ROHLING
PROFESSIONAL

"Since the late 1990s, I've been working on a series of images I call Wet Floor Vegas. With the iconic lights of Las Vegas as the subject, enhanced by rare desert rain, WFV reflects the ever-changing landscapes that have illuminated Las Vegas and made it so much fun. Simply put, when it rains at night, I'm down on the Strip or Downtown shooting reflections in pools of water, having a great time doing it."



Honorable Mentions

1 NORM CRAFT

AMATEUR/STUDENT

"I've been passing by this building in Boulder City my entire life, always fascinated by its purpose and the message painted on its windows. The building has been there on the hill overlooking the lake for 90 years and first served as the maintenance shop for the trains that ran supplies and equipment out to the dam construction site. Glad I finally took the time to stop and shoot it."



1

2 JAY PIPER

AMATEUR/STUDENT

"Summer wind in oleanders, the flowers swayed in waves of color while small birds sheltered in the hedge."



2

3 SANTI-JOSE ACOSTA
SEMIPROFESSIONAL

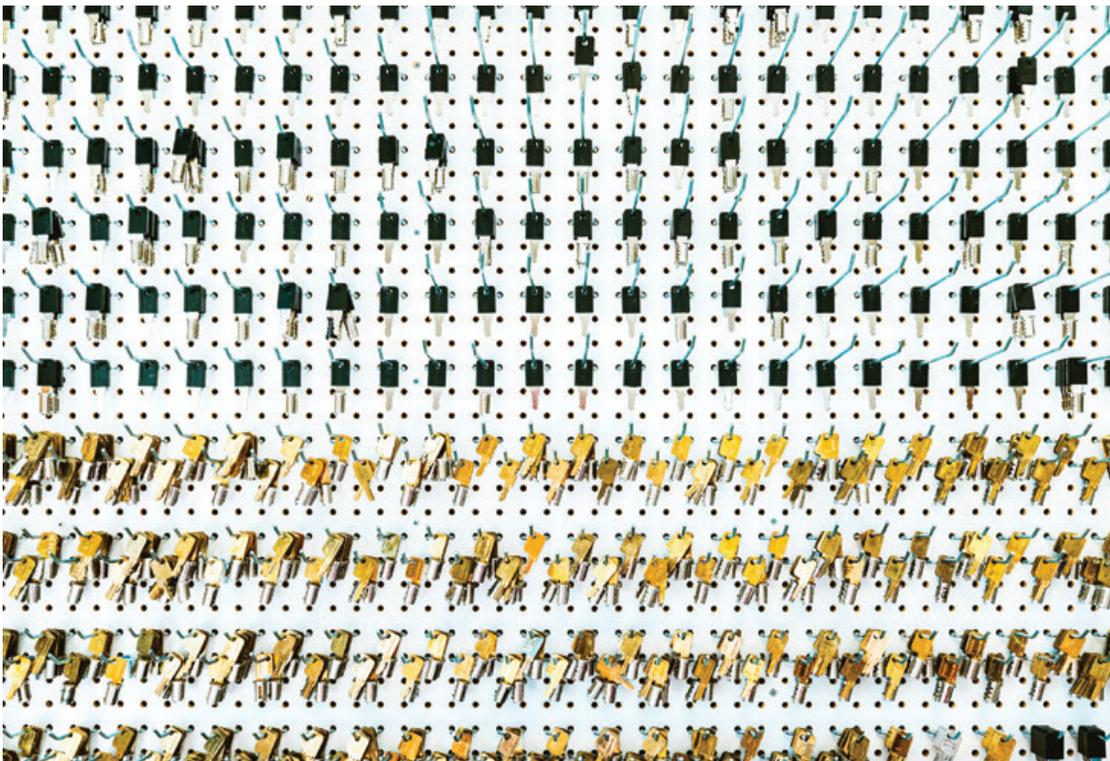
"The Shops at Crystals creates an art installation of light, color, and form with its interior walls, while consumers shop."



3

4 SHANE SAVANAPRIDI
PROFESSIONAL

"While I was interviewing the locksmiths that work for the Department of Public Safety, they showed me their key board. It was almost disorienting to see just how many keys they are in charge of. I loved the symmetry and pattern of all the hanging keys and the overload of information."



2nd Place

AL BAKER
SEMIPROFESSIONAL

"This photo was actually taken on my kitchen counter! I created the scene based on Pride Month last year. I wanted to focus on local art as well, and thought that *Seven Magic Mountains* was a good place. I used ordinary rocks from my backyard, painted them individually, and glued them in the exact order of the real thing. The foreground is made up of a cardboard base, dirt, and little grass bunches from outside to look like bushes. The background was made with a doormat (as tall grass), wrapping paper (as mountains) and the sky was made by holding a sheet up behind the scene."

CITY SCENES

1st Place

NATHAN VAN ARSDALE
SEMIPROFESSIONAL

“An electric view of Las Vegas from Sunrise Mountain during an isolated thunderstorm.”



1



2

Honorable Mentions

1 RUDY PLAZA
PROFESSIONAL

"This was taken on the tram at McCarran airport. I had a 4 a.m. flight to Seattle, and in my exhausted state and with how empty the airport was, I just felt it looked absolutely beautiful, especially in a wide lens. It felt like an underappreciated and unnoticed piece of Las Vegas."



3

2 DEAN CATLETT
**AMATEUR/
STUDENT**

"Shot the day it snowed from the Rio parking garage to the backside of the Bellagio. I love the low-hanging clouds and steam elements. Not something you see very often on the Strip."

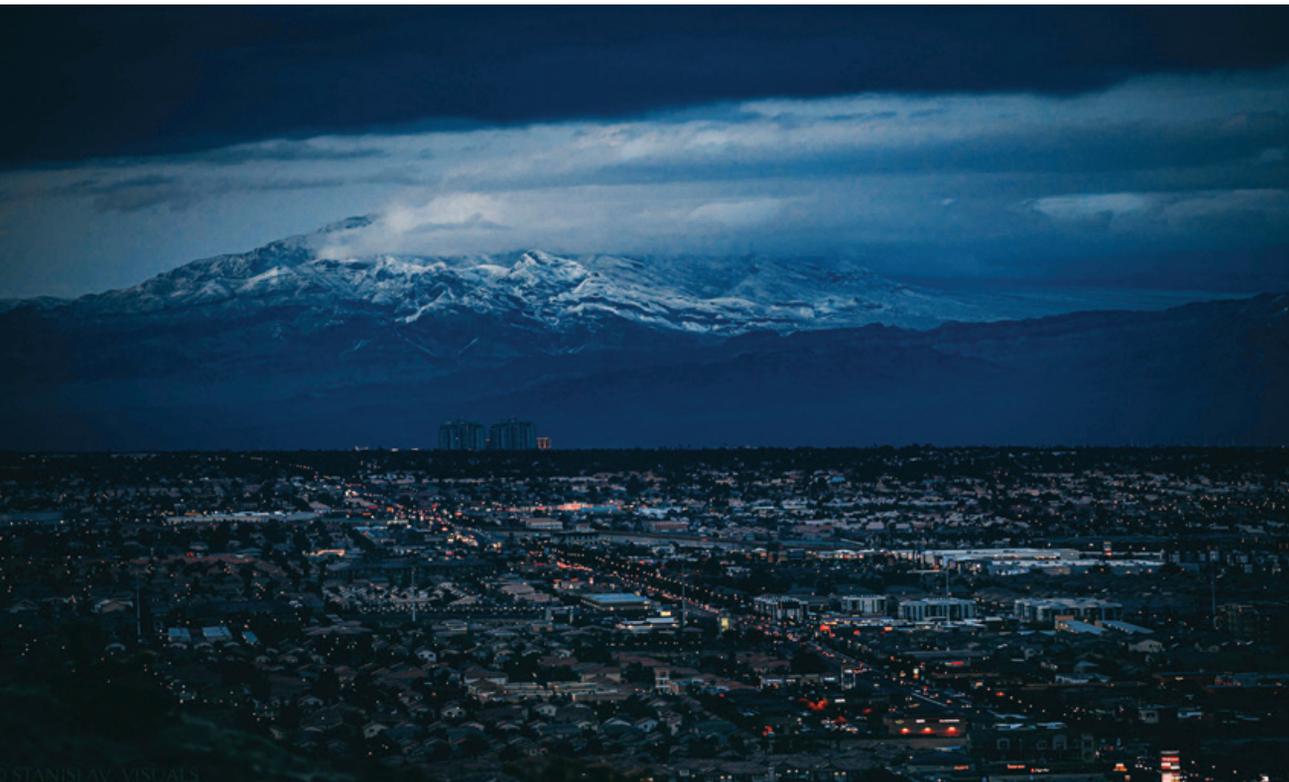
3 SHANE SAVANAPRIDI
PROFESSIONAL

"We have the best sunsets here in Southern Nevada. I was waiting for my wife to come out of Target when I noticed the black car next to me was reflecting the amazing light. I grabbed the camera at hand (an iPhone)."

4 DIANE BUSH
SEMI-PROFESSIONAL
"Courtyard, cropped."



4



2nd Place
STANISLAV SABEV
**AMATEUR/
STUDENT**
"Epic view of Las Vegas with the snowy mountains for natural backdrop."

STORYTELLER

1st Place

JEFF SCHEID

PROFESSIONAL

“What are you holding?”

“These are nuts.”

Taken in Nye County.



Honorable Mentions

1 BRIAN CLOPP

SEMIPROFESSIONAL

“A photographer wanders deeper into the Mesquite Flat dunes in Death Valley while another photographer sets up a shot (while this photographer took a photo of both). The wind blasted us with sand at over 40 mph, causing my nose to bleed, but gave us the dunes to ourselves.”

2 KYLE OSTER

SEMIPROFESSIONAL

“Micro burst hits the open desert behind *Seven Magic Mountains*, appearing and disappearing within a matter of minutes.”

3 RUBEN PERMEL

SEMIPROFESSIONAL

“I was invited into homes and yards to document children who had been in isolation for many months. It was my quest to capture their resilience, while most adults were not as adaptable. Here, Luka creates his own new world by connecting blocks in his own family bubble.”

4 ALEX ISOM

SEMIPROFESSIONAL

“As soon as the streets became empty, some people took advantage to turn the backdrop into a sweet photo opportunity for their classic car.”

5 JESSICA MILIAN

AMATEUR/STUDENT

“Taken in Circus Circus. Before this photo, I hadn’t visited the casino for over 10 years. In this photo is a family playing what seems to be a game like Skee-Ball.”



1



2nd Place

JULIA ANTHONY
SEMI-PROFESSIONAL

“Part of a series named ‘My Pandemic Family Life,’ this is what quarantine looks like every day. This series follows one woman’s struggle with being abandoned by the father of her children and what life is like when you are left alone to take care of them.”



3



4



2



5

THE RURALS



1st Place
HUGH BYRNE
AMATEUR/STUDENT
“Stone water tower in Cathedral Gorge State Park, Pioche, shot at 2 a.m.”

2nd Place
CHRIS PFLUM
AMATEUR/
STUDENT

Desert National Wildlife Refuge, Corn Creek Station

“I thought I might try some astrophotography at a secluded wildlife refuge where the sky would not be polluted by the Las Vegas lights. Around 11 p.m., clouds moved in and obscured the stars, so I decided to leave. While packing my gear, I noticed that the clouds were gathering above an abandoned cabin. To give the cabin a more occupied and cozy appearance, I put a flashlight inside and aimed it at the window. During the time exposure, I light-painted the cabin exterior with another flashlight whose color temperature was considerably cooler than the inside light. I was surprised and lucky to get this photo.”



1



4



Honorable Mentions

1 CARLOS MANZO
AMATEUR/
STUDENT
The Alamo Inn in Alamo

2 JEFF SCHEID
PROFESSIONAL
"Victor, a Peruvian
sheepherder, drives a flock
near the Toiyabe Range
east of Austin."

3 NATHAN VAN ARSDALE
SEMIPROFESSIONAL
"Lights hovering somewhere
near Rachel."

4 DAVID SADLEIR
PROFESSIONAL
"Aerial panoramic shot
of Blue Diamond, from
my drone."



2



3

WILD NEVADA



1

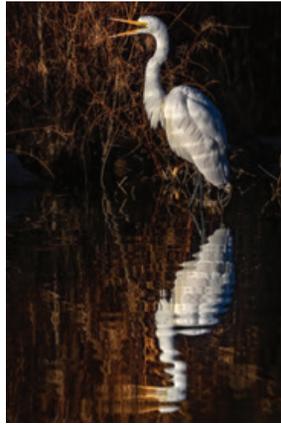


2





3



4



5



6

Honorable Mentions

1 PATRICIA VENEZIO
AMATEUR/STUDENT

“Amargosa Big Dune”

2 MARK SILVERSTEIN
AMATEUR/STUDENT

“Four Tracks on Roach Lake”

3 TREVOR VELLINGA
AMATEUR/STUDENT

“This photo was taken in Gold Butte National Monument, a hidden gem in Nevada and a photographer’s playground. I planned out this shot so that the Milky Way rises over a unique sandstone fin sculpted by wind erosion.”

4 WARREN LEE
SEMIPROFESSIONAL

“Early morning light and ripples on the water highlight this Egret at Cornerstone Park. He seems to be expressing the frustrations we have all faced with the pandemic. Cornerstone (the old quarry turned wetlands) continues to provide an excellent place to work through those challenges.”

5 LOUIS ATWOOD
AMATEUR/STUDENT

“The Ruby Mountains outside of Elko house some of the most dramatic landscape scenes in Nevada. Thomas Canyon sits at the base of majestic Mount Fitzgerald and provides a magical stream for those who choose to wander up its trail. The first portion of the trail passes thundering waterfalls in deep alpine forest. As you gain in elevation, the larger trees dissipate and Mount Fitzgerald comes into view. Just past the end of the trail, time for bushwhacking, you will encounter this stunning view — and if you time it right, you will be blessed with a sunset that only Nevada can provide.”

6 JOSE DAVALOS
SEMIPROFESSIONAL

“Sunset while California fires were burning and sending smoke to the Las Vegas Valley.”

2nd Place

ALEX ISOM
SEMIPROFESSIONAL

“Escaping the city lights to the higher rural ground near Pioche, a once-in-my-lifetime view of the Comet Neowise, streaking silently across the sky. A solemn visitor in our solar system, much like the aluminum sojourner Argosy in the foreground, a relic of the past. An ion tail stretching many millions of miles reminds us all, the distance that light may travel to our eyes, all to inspire.”

1st Place

WARREN LEE
SEMIPROFESSIONAL

“Small ‘Bites’: this Anna’s hummingbird is pleased to supplement nectar with a little bit of something as she ‘lunches’ in the backyard. We are fortunate to have several species of hummingbirds throughout the year in our valley. Much of the country has a brief hummingbird ‘season.’”



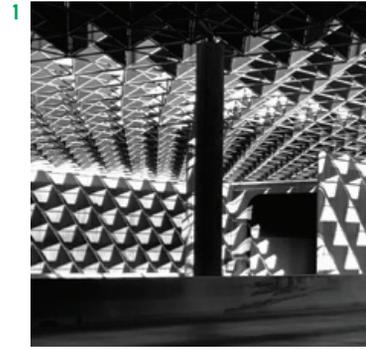
LIGHT & SHADOW



1st Place

JULIA ANTHONY
SEMIPROFESSIONAL

"'Where's Forky' is part of my series, 'My Pandemic Family Life.' It follows the life of my three-generation family living together during the pandemic. Atlas is in the garbage looking for his toy, Forky."



Honorable Mentions

1 VICTOR RAINIER GONZALES
AMATEUR/STUDENT
"This is how it feels to travel alone during the pandemic."

2 RUBEN PERMEL
AMATEUR/STUDENT
"There is light and shade, joy and pain, and even comedy and tragedy in the closing of live performances in Las Vegas. This interactive and rhythmic group, Molodi, had to face what they thought was just a short stop in their plans to perform throughout Nevada. I shot these images hoping to promote their work, but all was put on hold because of the pandemic."

3 STEPHEN CHANDLER
PROFESSIONAL
"Nevada's Black Rock Desert playa surface never remains the same for very long. Constantly changing shapes and textures are because of many varying conditions, natural and human-caused. This image was made during a period of 'transient dune' formations which lasted only a few months in pristine form."



2



3

2nd Place

RUBEN PERMEL
AMATEUR/STUDENT

“The Majestic Repertory Theatre in the Arts District had to cancel half their run of *The Garden Party*. It took place outdoors and was an immersive experience with audience participation. The then-unknown virus halted this party. Here I captured actress Fred Daisy as she waited for the few brave guests who showed up for their final performance before the shutdown.”





FOCUS ON NEVADA

GRAND PRIZE

HELEN MONTEZ-CARR
AMATEUR/STUDENT

"A tiny spider, no bigger than a quarter of an inch, found hanging out in the flower bed. Add a little bit of light and a macro lens, and he looks six feet tall."



WATCH

Helen Montez-Carr discusses how she captured her winning image.

EAST FREMONT

*I love photographing
Fremont Street's
neon — but the
shadows tell the real
story of Downtown*

BY **Aaron Mayes**

.....

Photography is an art of simplification, I remind myself as I tick through the settings on my camera. An *F-stop* of 1.7 will keep the depth of field shallow. I'm at 100 ISO at about a 60th of a second. Good, that should bring the exposure in nicely. Those highlights will blow out a bit, but that will look good here. Compose. Wait for it. Wait for it. Wait for ...

"STOP TALKING TO ME!" screams a man somewhere behind me. I don't turn around, because I don't want any part of what's going on. He continues to scream — racist obscenities mixed with reasons he hates this place. The woman with him tries to calm him, but he's lost it, spewing his racism all over the sidewalk.

I look up from my camera to see a stylish couple looking a little frazzled at what they just witnessed. They're standing there, afraid of getting in the way of my shot. They give me a kind look and I, in turn, thank them for not walking in front of me and wish them a wonderful evening. They walk on, disappearing into a restaurant just up the block.

I turn back to my camera. It's quiet now. Overly quiet. The void is filled with the buzz of electricity from nearby neon signs coming alive to perform their nightly pirouette with an ever-dwindling dusk. It's a dance that for decades has filled my viewfinder with the brilliance of glass tubing, metal, and hue as neon battles darkness in the waning heat of the day. Hopes of capturing that dance drives me to photograph here tonight. The sun has set, and the sky to the northeast has begun to turn shades of cornflower and pink. The screamer has disappeared around the corner, and I don't

hear him anymore. Distant traffic noise is mostly overpowered by soft music from an alley that's lined with tables and chairs. Conversation flows as people enjoy food from the adjoining restaurant. Behind me, a black Rolls-Royce parked a few feet away seems a bit out of place. I'm lost in thought. *What just happened? Where am I?*

The corner of East Fremont and 11th Street may be the most divergent place in Vegas. Don't get me wrong, Vegas has always been a place of contradictions. But standing along the storied thoroughfare, I'm struck by what a complicated scene this is. Rundown and beautiful; dangerous and safe; it is old and new with such hope for a brighter future while clearly strained by its past. This corner is the tattered edge of business dreams meets the tattered edge of life on the edge. New stores that opened to pandemic hardships now display messages acknowledging the loss of the area's visionary. "Thanks Tony," says one. Successive motel signs, recently restored, display "DTLV Loves Tony" and "We Will Miss You Tony Hsieh." Success is right here, but now feels miles away.

Fergusons Downtown is empty, but some of the tenants are there working late on their dreams. Across the street inside the café PublicUs, a man tidies up. Up the street, the iconic Atomic Liquors sign catches my eye. The famed bar is COVID quiet but open. Meanwhile, tonight's chef at the Vegas Test Kitchen is bringing in a crowd. (I'm pretty sure one of their patrons owns the Rolls.)

I cross the street to change things up, trying to get back into my photo headspace. But before I can get set, I hear crowd noise. *What now?* I think, before I see a huge group of bicyclists turning west on East Fremont. The leader rides a double-decker cycle, perched six or seven feet up, commanding the group from his flybridge. People are smiling, taking their chance to get together and do something human. There has to be at least a couple hundred of them.

They cheer as they pass my camera and groan when I put it down. Kids and families, lowriders with LED lighting kits, and custom-made jobs with killer paint and graphics; old guys and young girls, some dressed for the ride, others dressed for the show. I get another cheer as I raise my camera back up just in time to catch a guy pop a wheelie like he probably did in his childhood.

They ride on through the unsure future of this place as if believing in the power of neon to chase away the long grip of darkness. ♦

Photographer Aaron Mayes is the visual materials curator for UNLV University Libraries, Special Collections and Archives.





THE NEVADA PUBLIC RADIO FAMILY LOST A DEAR FRIEND AND COLLEAGUE, SHARON CLIFTON, THIS PAST YEAR. IN CELEBRATION OF HER LIFE, WE ALL RAISE A GLASS OF CABERNET IN HER HONOR. YOU ARE DEEPLY MISSED, SHARON - YOU WILL BE IN OUR HEARTS FOREVER.





ERIC S. FARBMAN, MD

Associate Professor of Neurology
Chief of the Movement Disorders Section
Roseman University College of Medicine

NEUROLOGY

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