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EDITOR’S NOTE

FRESH EYES

Media and language theorists must be having the head-explodingly best time right now trying to make sense of the seismic shifts in how we communicate. I mean, remember? How, back in the day, we used to write long, reflective love letters with velvety dollops of forsooth and verily? Now we just Snapchat our head as a heart-drunk emoji. This isn’t a world/hell/handbasket grumble. For years I refused to even use the smiley emoticon in texts, convinced it was a toe on the slippery slope to mass howling philistinism, but then I learned how to send devil horns — it’s like the verily of texting! — and I was a convert. \m/

My point is that we’re all visual communicators now, whether it’s dropping a cat meme on Facebook or tossing an eggplant into a text message. And the great democratization of photography is another factor driving this change. The possible downside: A dystopian future in which we’ve devolved into mute, shambling morlocks spamming each other with GIFs. The upside: Everyone is a born photographer.

And our fifth annual photo issue is just brimming with eye-popping upside. This year, 374 photographers submitted 1,109 photos, and 30 judges from the community applied their eyeballs to the mountain of visual splendor to choose the best. The result — well, see for yourself on p. 50. They’re photos of mountains and bees, hikers and dancers, cars and casinos, but, for all the wheeling variety, they share in common a spirit of striving for a perspective and sensibility beyond the easy visual tropes that a photographically seductive place like Nevada invites. These days, anyone can take a serviceably awesome snap of, say, the morning sunbeams dancing on Calico Hills at Red Rock. But it takes a true photographer to find the fresh angle, to wait for just the right light. That’s what sets these photos apart; there’s a dose of ineffable quantum bonus mojo going on in every one. For our companion photo essay, “Yes maybe no,” we conscripted Heather Protz and our own Brent Holmes to explore the tensions of city life — action and stasis, absence and presence, trust and suspicion. Like our contest’s finalists and winners, they contribute to a special issue that’s about more than pretty pictures. It’s an issue about courageously seeing, celebrating and investigating where we live with fresh eyes.

DING DING DING DING!

That’s the sound of winning. I’m proud to trumpet the news that Desert Companion received four Maggie Awards (the Oscars of publishing!) from the Western Publishing Association April 28 in Los Angeles. We won for Best Single Editorial Illustration (“Debated breath,” Chris Morris, September 2016); Best News Story, for Heidi Kyser’s in-depth look at rural healthcare in Nevada (“No country for sick men,” August 2016); Best Feature, for our story on one mother’s desperate search for mental health resources for her suicidal son (“I swear I will!,” August 2016), and, the sweepstakes biggie, Best City and Metropolitan Magazine in our class. But the real prize is having the privilege to work with such a talented team of writers, photographers, and artists to bring compelling stories to life for you, the reader, every month.
Meet the faces and places of the past at Boomtown 1905, a re-created historical streetscape. Stroll the street and learn more about Las Vegas’ humble beginnings.

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A FEW OF OUR FAVORITE COVERS ...

**FALL 2009**
In the magazine biz, the cover is often considered the most important page of an issue. It’s literally our pick-up line, as in, “Hey, pick up this magazine!” This one is near to Art Director Christopher Smith’s heart. “It was our first real delve into custom photography for the cover,” he says. (We used provided art before that.) And the warehouse setting was perfect for the arty subject matter.

**MAY 2013**
You’ll need a closer shot than we can provide here to see why Smith put this cover on the list. It’s in the details. For example, the travel guides in the backpack’s pocket all refer to different stories within the issue, as do other small touches. It’s a subtle level of editorial integration that rewards readers who pay attention.

**FEBRUARY 2014**
Illustrating the notion of “best of the city” is an annual challenge. Three years ago, Smith met it brilliantly with this retro trophy shot. “This was the vision I had in my head the whole time,” he enthuses. It took the aid of a trophy maker, and Smith’s team scouring the city for items that could serve as, say, a donut. It worked. In a nod to his sporty childhood, Smith gave the image an ’80s feel.

**JANUARY 2011**
This issue’s theme was “Happy New You.” Which suggested to Smith a giant happy face: “It was perfect for the subject matter; the color, the smiling face — it just evoked the theme.” However, with this issue, Desert Companion was going monthly, and we ultimately felt a more traditional approach (below) would signal a seriousness commensurate with that frequency. Smith agrees, but kinda wishes the smiley face existed somewhere besides his computer archives. And now it does!

**APRIL 2014**
This shot represents an experiment, something “we’d never seen in fashion photography before.” Smith says — projecting images behind the model, in a way that was artistic but still highlighted the clothing. The result is pleasantly ethereal. “The model appears to be floating above the headline and in front of the logo. It has an angelic quality.”

**JULY 2016**
“I had this idea in my head for I don’t know how many years,” Smith says. At long last, a year ago, when the editorial team finally highlighted barbecue, he was ready. Note how the model’s arms lead your eye to her eyes, which then bounce you to the main headline — it’s kinetic, neatly composed, gorgeously executed. Everything readers have come to expect from a Desert Companion cover.

**JULY 2016**

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FEATURES

50 FOCUS ON NEVADA
From landscapes bathed in starlight to sophisticated artistic visions to, yes, a few good selfies, the results of our annual photo contest are shutterific.

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From photographers Heather Protz and Brent Holmes, a suite of images that explore the tension between action and stasis, presence and absence, trust and suspicion.

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In the late 1980s, a group of high-profile business and community leaders brought New York artist Jenny Holzer to town to scroll her famous “truisms” — example: “Protect me from what I want” — on the Caesars Palace electronic marquee. It was a milestone event for Las Vegas made possible by the Nevada Institute for Contemporary Art and its well-connected founders Roger Thomas and Steven Molasky. NICA went on to mount exhibits and host impressive fundraisers before disbanding in the 1990s.

What makes this relevant today is Molasky’s attempt to create another artistic milestone. He has purchased eight parcels on Commerce Street, between Charleston Boule-
All of it will be tied to Smart Initiative, a new cultural organization headed by arts consultant Michele Quinn, which will serve as a project-based institution focused on contemporary art. They’ve been working on it quietly for nearly two years, and as Quinn says, it’s a “lean-running institution,” comprising her, Molasky, and her staff.

One small portion of the project has already been unveiled. The two worked to secure the Commerce Street space that recently hosted the popular two-month run of Tiltling the Basin, a large exhibit surveying Nevada’s contemporary arts scene, which Quinn cocurated with the Nevada Museum of Art’s Joanne Northrup. The 14,000-square-foot space, at 920 S. Commerce, already revamped into a whistle-clean functional venue, will be kept active for future arts projects. The others along Commerce Street will undergo renovations over the next couple of years. Not all will be used consistently or simultaneously (and some Smart Initiative projects will take place elsewhere around the valley).

All of this began after a conversation the two had a couple of years ago about NICA and its role in the arts. The Las Vegas natives met regularly to find a project that would add value to the city’s arts and cultural experience. The Smart Initiative, Quinn says, is a multiveneue institution that will be flexible and open to different possibilities — exhibits, events, indoor-outdoor installations. One large installation project by a well-known international artist is already being developed and will be announced once it’s farther along.

If seen through to fruition, Molasky’s Commerce Street project could have an outsized impact on the Arts District, which has seen a more thriving gallery scene in years past (Dust Gallery, GC Arts, Contemporary Arts Center, Trifecta Gallery, Blackbird Studios), but which is now better known for boutiques, antique stores, bars, and coffee shops than for art. “What we’re really trying to accomplish is to bring new life to the area and a new perspective as to what Las Vegas can be as a cultural destination, locally as well as nationally,” Quinn says.

And it’s coming to light at what seems like a fertile time for Downtown art. West from Molasky’s properties, across the railroad tracks, where serious public and private dollars have already been invested in the arts with The Smith Center for the Performing Arts, there’s now the growing possibility of a new facility, the Art Museum at Symphony Park, a nonprofit effort quietly raising funds for a contemporary art museum. In May, the Senate Finance Committee heard Senate Bill 187, which would allocate $10 million in matching state funds for the construction of the building, and also allow for expansion of the Nevada State Museum, which has been discussing a potential merger with the Las Vegas museum. The Las Vegas facility was originally envisioned for the Arts District, but its new board (which includes Quinn) opted for Symphony Park.

Molasky refers to Commerce Street — now under construction as part of the city of Las Vegas’ $36 million project to turn the parallel Main and Commerce streets into one-way roads — as the Historical Railroad Neighborhood. Some of the buildings on the west side of the street open up directly to loading docks facing the railroad tracks that helped establish Las Vegas. Molasky says that in addition to reactivating the industrial buildings for exhibits and events, some buildings will include live/workspaces tied to the arts. Other property owners on the street are also working on projects, he says.

“It’s really a play of passion to me,” he says. “The art being produced here and going through here is really significant. I’ve always been a painter, collector, and lover of art. I really believe in the vibrancy of our local artists and community.”

The Molasky family imprint in Las Vegas is huge. Steven Molasky is son of real-estate developer Irwin Molasky, who arrived in the 1950s, built Paradise Palms as the city’s first master-planned community, Sunrise Hospital, Boulevard Mall, high-rise condos, Downtown offices, and the IRS headquarters in Las Vegas. Known also for his philanthropy, he was the one who donated 45 acres of land on Maryland Parkway for what is now UNLV.

Steven Molasky has always been dedicated to the arts, says Pamela Pummel, spokeswoman for the Molasky Group of Companies, a comment echoed by others, including Quinn, a Las Vegas-based art advisor who was involved in putting together CityCenter’s $40 million art collection. Behind Pummel, architect Rob Gurdison rolls open one of the warehouse doors at 924 Commerce, which previously had Catholic Charities as a tenant. Sunlight blasts in, allowing for a better view of the old barrel-vaulted ceiling. Gurdison says one of the reasons this area was selected was because of its history, its location in a public realm (rather than a master-planned community), and because it sits within the Arts District.

“Instead of getting land and scraping off old buildings, which sometimes has to happen, and then gentrify it for business, we’d rather have control of what the environment’s going to be, utilizing the body and energy that’s there,” Gurdison says.

“We’ve identified about 12 acres. Everything between Gass and Charleston on either side of Commerce is the initiative. Most of the buildings we’ve invested in we found to be reusable. Some parcels will include urban infill and some adaptive reuse.”

As to whether anything might hold up or derail his project, Molasky said he didn’t think so, though, having declared bankruptcy during the recession, he might be aware of the ups and downs of big plans in Las Vegas. And the Arts District has seen its share of failed big plans, from museum proposals to a sculpture garden with no sculpture next to the Arts Factory.

Still, for Molasky, who says this creates the opportunity for “larger, edgier programming” in a suitable industrial area, it’s all about the art: “It’s really an exciting project for me and for us.”
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“Repeal and replace” has been the Republican Party’s mantra since the Affordable Care Act (aka “Obamacare”) became law in March 2010. But what would a repeal mean, exactly, for Nevadans? That question can’t be fully answered until the GOP’s proposal for a replacement is finalized, and as of this writing, the U.S. Senate is still considering the American Health Care Act, an alternative to the ACA that the House passed in March. Policy experts say that the Senate is likely to significantly revise the bill, a process that may take weeks or months.

But one thing won’t change between now and then: the benchmark of where we are today. To put a law’s repeal in context, you have to understand the effect it had while active — in our case, what Nevada has gained (or lost) under the ACA, particularly since 2012, when Brian Sandoval became the first governor to accept President Obama’s Medicaid expansion offer. (States that did so got federal funding to cover the cost of making their healthcare programs for low-income residents available to more people.)

Here’s a summary of our status in some key ACA areas.

**The Silver State Health Insurance Exchange.** Health exchanges were envisioned as websites that would do for individual insurance shopping what Expedia has done for travel bookings, and a way to offset the burden of making insurance mandatory for all. Nevada’s Silver State Health Insurance Exchange got off to a rocky start, technologically, but has been going gangbusters the last couple years. As of January 2017, nearly 90,000 Nevadans had enrolled in a health insurance plan through the Silver State Exchange. Its executive director, Heather Korbulic, says it’s unclear what would happen to exchanges under the repeal proposals she’s seen.

**Medicaid expansion.** Add to those 90,000 people another 300,000 who’ve gotten insurance through broadened Medicaid eligibility, and you have a total of around 400,000 previously uninsured Nevadans who are now covered by a government-certified plan. Ellen Crecelius, deputy director of fiscal services for the state health department, notes that childless adults account for the bulk of the expansion; in Clark County, as of March, almost 112,000 clients, or 77 percent of the state’s total Medicaid caseload, were adults with no children (57 percent of them, incidentally, reported having no income). Most repeal ideas floated so far include eliminating or reducing funds that subsidize Medicaid expansions such as Nevada’s.

**Preexisting conditions.** Arguably the ACA’s most popular feature was its ban on insurance companies’ practice of denying people coverage based on prior illness or injury. “Of our exchange consumers, based on research we’ve done, 80 percent have a preexisting condition,” Korbulic said on “KNPR’s State of Nevada” in May. Repeal proponents are divided on whether to keep this benefit in a replacement and, if so, how. Critics of one suggested solution, risk pools, characterize it as grossly insufficient.

**Premiums.** If it seems like your monthly insurance bill has been going up, you’re not crazy; just about everyone’s has. However, the 11 percent average increase seen last year in Nevada for full-price plans pales in comparison to the 25 percent average increase nationwide. And Medicaid subsidies have risen in sync with the cost of those plans.

Finally, it’s worth noting that the Nevada Legislature is considering several bills that would codify certain ACA benefits in state law. But their passage, funding source, and compliance with federal regulations are far from given. The bottom line is, if you like the benefits you’ve gotten through the ACA, your best bet for keeping them is, simply, not repealing the ACA.
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Vanishing cabinet
A trail, a cave, a secret, a memory

BY NICHOLAS RUSSELL

I’ve inhabited the same five-mile block of Summerlin for most of my life. The connective tissue for four out of the five houses I’ve ever lived in is Pueblo Park, an open recreation space that sits behind a gated community called Monterey Este. Pedestrian gates from at least three disparate communities lead to this fairly large patch of grass and charred black barbecue grills. A walking trail starts here and continues parallel to nearby Cielo Vista Avenue, starting near Buffalo and continuing up past Fort Apache. You’ll pass a colony of stray cats that lives in the dry expanse of weeds, rock, and lifeless soil on either side of the trail, fed daily by an older (not elderly) lady who defies the will of both animal control and park security. You’ll pass Richard H. Bryan Elementary, home of the Bulldogs, where a group of children, including me, were repeatedly forced to climb the playground fence after hours; this, at the behest of our Little League coach, to stage practices on the tiny field regardless of the fact that we didn’t go to school there.

And if you know where to look, you’ll come across a small hole in one of the rocky outcroppings beside the trail, a miniature cave that used to house an old metal military ammo box supposedly full of secrets. Only a select few at the parochial school I attended knew about this. One boy (of course, only boys were in the know) suggested it held a gun; another, secret documents about the government. The most imaginative of us said the box was migratory, that there was a GPS inside to track its location, that after a period of time, the box would be taken away and moved to a new place.

I only visited the box once before it disappeared, and it held none of these things. All that lay inside were various mementos: bits of notebook paper scrawled with obscure references, a rubber bracelet, half a candy bar. The only item of curiosity was a set of dog tags, but even these were fake. Little stories, a large part of my childhood and my life now, have the power to bind people to places. I still take walks on that trail where that tiny cave still exists. Memories wash through my head as I pass by. I often feel the urge to step off the trail and crawl through the brush, to peer inside and see if the past has returned.

In the book Rants From the Hill, Michael P. Branch describes his family’s life in the outback of the Great Basin, an area he dubs Silver Hills. A sampling:

But the best thing about mud season in Silver Hills is the “gumbo luge” ...
(Page 39)

The most surprising item in this remarkable, wild digs was stacked neatly beneath one corner of the tarp: an impressive cache of surprisingly well-preserved Nixon-era Playboy magazines. In effect, I had made the astounding anthropological discovery of a western Great Basin Mancave, circa 1973. (Page 3)

I realize that this kind of self-righteous, tree-hugging sermonizing dodges the central issue, which is that cell phone towers are just plain ugly. (Page 156)

He began to swing the feathered bob back and forth hypnotically over the sand, apparently feeling for the water through some invisible vibration along that feathered string, listening for the life-giving water...
FACIAL RECOGNITION
An exhibit about seeing things that aren’t there

Time to enrich your word power: Pareidolia is a term for the way our brains grope for recognizable patterns in fields of visual information — the way you might see human-like features in the grill of a car, or a saint in the burn marks on your toast.

Photographer Checko Salgado’s show Valley of Faces (June 8 to July 13, Winchester Cultural Center) pairs this phenomenon with another of his longtime interests, Nevada’s outdoors, and gives it a twist: He’ll present 11 local artists — Matt Couper, Bekah Just, Sean Slattery among them — with photos of enigmatic rock formations in the Basin & Range National Monument. Working on clear acetate overlays, the artists will tease out images they see within the rocks. Pareidolia in action. Those works will be printed out on photo paper and shown beside the photos that inspired them.

The title, Valley of Faces, comes from Salgado’s experiences in the narrow canyons within Basin & Range. “I started noticing the pareidolia in these rocks, from faces of various sizes, life-size to well over 20 feet high, and a variety of oddly shaped animals,” he says. It stuck with him forcefully. “Later on, when the roads and key spots were being named for the Bureau of Land Management map, I asked if we could name this area Valley of Faces.” This, he adds, is his fifth exhibit dealing with Basin & Range — an area given new urgency by the Trump administration’s move to rethink its national monument status. Scott Dickensheets

The opening reception for Valley of Faces will be 5:30p, June 16.

percolating in its rock sanctuary far below the desiccated surface of the Great Basin. “You’ll go 400 feet and get twenty-six gallons a minute,” he declared, “and that water will be sweet as honey in the rock.” (Page 100)

I have made close observations of cattle out on the BLM land here in Silver Hills, and I do not like what I see. (Page 165)

Communities around Yreka, California, have tried to leave the Union to form the State of Jefferson, an ongoing effort since 1941, when some independent-minded folks declared they would attempt to secede from the United States “every Thursday until further notice.” (Page 82)

Rants From the Hill: On Packrats, Bobcats, Wildfires, Curmudgeons, a Drunken Mary Kay Lady & Other Encounters With the Wild in the High Desert, by Michael P. Branch (Roost Books, $14.95)
One afternoon when he was 11, Paul Macias rode his bike 11 miles to his parents’ neon shop in North Hollywood — that’s how badly he wanted to work on neon signs. Thirty years and a move to Las Vegas later, that hasn’t changed. “It’s pretty much the only job I’ve ever had,” he says. And neon remains a family affair. When Desert Companion visited their shop, Paul’s Neon Signs #2, his mother, Ina, was working on a glowing token that implored “Be Nice.”

Though he drew sign patterns by hand when he started out, Paul now handles that on computer. Using fire, an employee known as a glass-bender shapes the long, fragile tubes according to Paul’s pattern. This is the part of the process that captivated Paul all those years ago. “I thought it was cool, with the fire,” he says. “My mom started to show me how to do simple things. I would stand on a booster step and heat up the glass.” For much of the process, the bender will blow through a rubber hose attached to the glass tube to prevent it from collapsing. Given such close give-and-take, it’s not a job that could be easily transferred to a machine.

In the final steps, the sign is pumped full of gas — neon for red or argon for blue — and sealed. Other colors are achieved by coating the inside of the tubes with colored powders. (Unless you want brown; that’s not an option.)

Juan and Ina Macias, Paul’s parents, met in California after both immigrated to the United States from Guadalajara, Mexico, in the mid-’70s. His mom used a handful of silver dollars Paul had received as a birthday present to buy gas to drive to a job interview at a neon factory. She was hired, and shortly thereafter, so was his dad. They went to work assembling neon beer signs — this was the ’80s, after all. “Every day, it was Budweiser, Budweiser, Budweiser,” Paul says.

Ina immediately had her eye on bending. Though most of the men at the factory had doubts — “They would say, ‘You are a woman. You’re not going to know how to bend,’” says Paul — she learned quickly. Juan also became a bender. Because the beer industry’s demand was so high, Juan and Ina started an independent operation in their garage in 1985. This is when Paul got his first taste of neon.

Business outgrew the garage, and the family opened Paul’s Neon Signs #1. While still in California, HBO contacted the shop to create a tiny neon sign to accompany a “roach motel” in a commercial, and the same production company hired them to help recreate the Hard Rock guitar sign in miniature for the movie Con Air.

The family started its move to Las Vegas in the early 2000s. “My parents thought maybe we should open a shop in Vegas because there is so much neon here,” Paul says. An uncle came out first, followed by Paul, and Paul’s Neon Signs #2 was born. His parents eventually closed the shop in California and relocated, too. Technically, Juan and Ina own #2, but Paul plans to open his own sign operation — Paul’s Neon Signs #3, of course.

“The sign business has changed a lot since I moved here,” Paul says. Indeed, the sign industry has changed radically since what are thought to be the first neon signs in the United States promoted a Packard car dealership in Los Angeles. As with many technologies, cheaper and easier alternatives, such as LEDs, became available. “When I first moved here, people were still using neon, even inside channel letters, but now everyone is using LED.” (And, despite the name, Paul’s Neon Signs also creates LED signs — indeed, pretty much every type of sign you can imagine.)

Several neon-only shops have closed, and not every sign shop can do neon; this is good for Paul and his family. They get more orders for neon signs, and other sign shops outsource neon work to them. Ronnie Vannucci, the drummer for The Killers, ordered a neon sign for his father’s funeral from Paul’s Neon Signs #2. Paul also repaired the flickering “R” in the sign for Artifice Downtown and created the sign for the revival of the Starboard Tack.

“I don’t think it is going to ever completely die out,” he says. “A lot of people just love neon.”

Misti Yang
Save the whales. Save the rainforests. Save the pandas. The slogans sound good — but to a kid who’s never even seen the ocean or a rainforest, they might not mean much.

“If a kid only hears about dams collapsing in Northern California and natural disasters without actually experiencing nature, then asking them to save nature becomes akin to saving Frankenstein,” says Chris Sakmar, a staff naturalist at the Springs Preserve who oversees the Preserve’s Nature Exchange. At the Exchange, Sakmar is working bit by bit to ensure that nature becomes a living, breathing thing that children (and adults) want to protect.

The Nature Exchange is exactly what it sounds like, a place where you can exchange nature for nature. The first one opened in Canada in 1984, and today there are nine across the U.S. and Canada, including the one at Springs Preserve. The idea is simple: You bring in a natural object and earn points based on what you know about it, plus its condition and rarity. You redeem your points for other earthy accessories. Bring in a piece of gypsum, leave with some agate. Or you can save your points for a more coveted find, like an elusive whelk egg cluster. Visiting and trading is free.

The local database keeps track of approximately 5 million points amassed by traders. In addition to cashing in on curiosity, traders have been known to use their points to get gifts for parents. “It’s like *Pawn Stars* for nature,” Sakmar says.

But the Nature Exchange isn’t about transactions. It’s here to foster education, which is why you can also earn points for answering trivia questions or bringing in a report about a topic in nature. Some of Sakmar’s favorites are on display. A recent report on tigers by a preschooler features a loosely drawn catlike creature and the statement, “TIGERS EAT MEET.” (That earned the eager youngster 300 points, which included 100 bonus points for making Sakmar chuckle.)

If you’re stumped about an object, the staff works with you to identify and learn about it. Sakmar is typically a quick read, able to survey a collection of natural artifacts and pronounce with Holmesian accuracy, “I see you recently vacationed in Oregon.” But he has been stymied, too. When that happens, a stack of reference books and knowing where the item was found usually provide the necessary clues.

And so, with every rock, fossil, dead insect, leaf and shell they trade, Sakmar and the Nature Exchange turn city kids into budding nature-lovers at a time when the planet needs all the love it can get.
Giant Clam (2,000,000 points) Weighing in at around 85 pounds, this half of a bivalve is the Exchange's most "pricey" object — and its most coveted. "A lot of people are saving for it," Sakmar says. The Exchange received the shell from a clam rehabilitation center in Florida. A Springs Preserve employee was in touch with the center, and when the clam died, the center offered to donate the shell to the Exchange. All they had to cover was shipping.

Fish Fossils (10,000-25,000 points) While there are no ichthyosaur fossils on display, there are 300-million-year-old trilobite specimens. There is also a collection of 80-million-year-old fish fossils that are collected and traded by a local mom-daughter team. Every year, the amateur paleontologists travel to Green River, Wyoming, in search of these fish fossils to bring home and trade.

Piñon Pine Cone (10-30 points) Because they are easy to find, pine cones are considered the gateway item to becoming an active trader. With just a glance, Sakmar names the tree, and begins a monologue on the intrigue of the cone. Pine cones can be male or female, and usually the smaller the tree the bigger the cone, and vice versa. Some of the smallest cones at the Exchange are produced by the giant sequoia, but Sakmar thinks the piñon is a useful specimen for education: "We can talk to kids about how its seeds were a staple food for people in this area in the past."

Minerals of Nevada: The staff scours the 500-plus pages of this ultimate guide to minerals when they're stumped. The tome includes every mineral found in the state, along with where to find them, and essays about the science and history of minerals. A review on Google Books insists that after reading it, you will immediately want to go rock hounding.

Iron Pyrite Cube (6,000-12,000 points) If you thought that Plato's talk about forms was a bit harebrained, behold this perfect, golden cube. You might think that the glistening geometric ideal was shaped by hand, but it was not. The cube can occur naturally thanks to the molecular structure of pyrite. According to Sakmar, it happens when the pyrite grows in a softer mineral, such as gypsum.

Palo Verde Root Borer Beetle (300-400 points) Bugs are filed into slim drawers for safekeeping, and one of the largest drawer-dwellers is this 3-inch longhorn beetle. The critter begins life underground as a large, white grub, and after it surfaces, it only lives for a couple of weeks. They can be seen flocking to the light of lampposts on the Strip, but the ones at the Exchange are most often found dead around the house. "I have to reassure people they don't need to burn their house down," Sakmar says.
of my straight blond hair, doused each one with a spray that smelled like Grenadine and drew a narrow flat-iron down it while rocking her wrist left and right, creating what she called a “beach wave.” It completed the ridiculousness of the picture: Middle-aged lady surrounded by youthful beauties desperately tries to recapture the carefree look of her L.A. years.

“Dear Heidi,” the invitation two months prior had read, “In recognition of your thoughtful, conscientious coverage of sexual assault, the Rape Crisis Center invites you to walk the runway in your finest denim during the Denim Day Luncheon on Wednesday, April 26.” I would be a “media champion,” joining others, as well as survivors, in what was described as the “inspirational portion” of the program.

How could I say no?

Here are a few reasons that crossed my mind: (1) Journalism ethics discourage participation in branded commercial events; (2) I dislike being eyeballed generally and abhor being ogled by strangers; and (3) It was taking place in a mall, temple of irresponsible consumerism.

And yet, this was an honor, not an endorsement, so my editor approved. I was to have control over what I wore, so I figured I could dress myself according to my comfort level. And, c’mon, sometimes I just need to get over myself.

Still, from the moment I accepted the invitation, I was roiled by an internal war between my feminist and humanist selves. Consider the fitting. The fashion consultant at Macy’s style office picked out clothes for me to try on, and then studied me slowly from the neck down, pinching a too-loose swath here, tugging on a too-tight hem there. The first outfit she brought me — designer jeans and a drapey gray blouse — made me look like Disney’s Dopey dwarf up top and a squat Kardashian from the waist down. And it cost what I make in a week. (We didn’t have to buy the clothes, but I looked at the tags anyway.)

Also at that fitting I met Katy (not her real name), a high school-age survivor who...
was walking in the show. When the consultant pressed Katy on wearing a denim skirt rather than her preferred jeans, the teen replied, “I don’t want to show my legs. I have scars.”

Ego checked.

With event day looming, I grew overly sensitive to other people’s feedback. The only thing that annoyed me more than being reassured by a couple female acquaintances, with whom I’d shared my reservations, not to worry, that I was pretty enough to pull it off, was a male acquaintance’s assessment that the event was inappropriate for the cause because the fashion industry sexually objectifies women.

The day of the show, my discomfort took on a physical dimension. After having my hair pulled and face rubbed by strangers (albeit kind ones), I donned my chosen outfit: a fuschia, off-the-shoulder top and fitted jean skirt. Here’s the thing about fitted skirts: They prevent you from taking strides of more than about six inches. Add to that the high-heeled beige wedges I’d chosen, and I was forced to walk like I was desperately staving off a pee. Here’s the thing about off-the-shoulder shirts: In order to stay up, they have to have some sort of elastic ring around the top. The designer of my shirt opted for a wide, stiff band that gripped the fabric in bulky pleats. Attractive though I’m assured it was, it was either riding up towards my neck or pinning my arms by my side, boa constrictor-like.

My grooming and dressing done, I waddled out to the luncheon to join my husband at the media table, where various TV journalists sat, looking exactly like they always do. Of course they didn’t need the mall’s hair and makeup services. They have their own.

“Oh, my god,” my husband said, “you look so beautiful.”

“My god,” I replied, “you look so beautiful.”

“That’s a great idea!” I said, and we spent the next few minutes working out the logistics: Which hands would we use? Which side would we cross each other on?

Then came the big moment. A headset-clad producer lifted a black curtain and pushed me onstage. There were millions of people, half of them holding up phone cameras. As I walked (faster than instructed) down the runway, I realized that the bright lights must be illuminating my legs, which I’d run out of time to shave that morning. I was having trouble holding my head upright, and a sudden facial paralysis prevented me from smiling. After pausing at the end of the runway to wave at an imaginary friend, I turned and stalked back toward the stage.

But my awkwardness vanished the moment Yazmine and I connected hands in a perfect high-five; indeed, the entire experience crystallized in the moment she emerged from backstage. I knew I would never again wonder why I agreed to walk, or whether it was worth all the stress and trouble. I’d just remember her big, confident smile.
‘YOU GUYS ARE THE BEST!’

Working it with hustlin’ Marty Mancuso, the Rocky Balboa of the assisted-living circuit  

BY JOHN M. GLIONNA

Time for the Last Happy Hour. That’s what they call it on the assisted-living circuit. “What a crowd,” singer and saxophonist Marty Mancuso tells the two dozen clients at the Desert Springs Senior Living Center on West Flamingo Road. “It’s always a pleasure to be here.” He slides a worn CD with a bass beat into his boombox. “I’m Italian, so I’ve got this motto,” he says. “I come as a friend, but I leave as family.”

The audience is old enough to have witnessed early Sinatra, laughed at Don Rickles’ raunchy jokes, swooned over the sweet sounds of Wayne Newton or Louis Prima. Now they’re residents of an advanced care facility. These days, they move to the beat in wheelchairs, walkers, and motorized carts, eating cake and vanilla ice cream, with an occasional glass of wine. Sometimes aides whisk them away for emergency bathroom breaks.

These are Mancuso’s people, and the 60-year-old singer, dancer, and inspirational speaker says he loves them. It’s not just anywhere that listeners weep at the memories his performances evoke. “I play their songbook of life,” he says. “They’re tunes they might remember from high school, when they were on the football field and met Sharon and took her to the diner after the game. They tell me these songs bring back their greatest memories.”

Each year, the longtime Las Vegan plays some 300-plus shows, many at area hospitals and senior centers — gigs that local musicians have played for more than half a century. He doesn’t play the same show twice. Naturally, he endures a few smirks. “They’ll say, ‘Oh, you do nursing homes.’ They dismiss you as a no-talent,” he says. “But there’s no reason to look down on this. They’re fantastic audiences.”

So what if many of the cafeterias and activity rooms in which he performs his hour-long, mid-afternoon sets often have tinny acoustics, or if the appreciative 90-year-old woman who loves a certain saxophone solo has died since his last visit. Mancuso marshals on.

“Who was the King of Rock ‘n’ Roll?” he asks the Desert Springs crowd. “Elvis!” shouts an old man up front. “You’re so good,” Mancuso says, tightening the neck strap on his alto sax. “How did you know?”

He slips into a spirited rendition of “Heartbreak Hotel,” at the end, holding notes for impressive lengths. One woman moves her shoulders to the beat as her tablemate claps her hands. Another,
who has seen Mancuso numerous times, leans toward a visitor. “I don’t know who this guy is,” she says. “But he’s good!”

Mancuso is dressed in a Hawaiian shirt, sneakers, and James Cagney cap pulled low. But for his listeners, many of whom close their eyes when he plays, he might as well be wearing a tux with tails as he moves frenetically between tables. He pauses to blow his sax softly into one woman’s ear. Then he caresses the cheek of a wheelchair-bound woman at a front table. She blushes and smiles broadly. A man in a cowboy hat, sunglasses, and Western shirt applauds.

“Every time I come here, this place is spotless,” Mancuso says. “They really clean this place up good.”

A woman shouts at a neighbor, “I keep my music up in my room!” She’s drowning out Mancuso’s shtick, but he doesn’t mind. He doesn’t miss a beat.

“That’s the way to do it,” he says, sharing the spotlight. “You got a nice voice on ya!”

He begins another Elvis hit, “Return to Sender,” as an aide dressed in a smock and white pants dances across the room. “Watch this!” Mancuso says, tipping back his head for the song’s final notes. Sweat sheens his brow as the audience breaks into applause.

Mancuso beams: “You guys are the best!”

*****

Mancuso grew from musical roots. His father, Joe, taught school and worked nights as a jazz pianist; his uncle Gus played piano and bass for Sarah Vaughan and Les Brown; and his aunt Lorraine Hunt, the former Nevada lieutenant governor, runs the Bootlegger restaurant and jazz club in town.

One of three kids, he grew up a minute from the Palace Station casino. His living room was a jazz factory where his father practiced piano and entertained his uncle and their musician friends. The soundtrack of his childhood was Frank Sinatra, Vic Damone, and Steve Lawrence.

His father wanted him to attend college, but Mancuso longed for the performer’s life. At 18, he joined a lounge act called the Dance Machine, his James Brown-inspired splits and acrobatic moves leading to a hip replacement many
years later. During the day, he listened to his father’s jazz albums at home.

In June 1976, he saw Rocky and went back seven times that first month. “I liked the whole story of his climb to success,” he says. “That movie was like a motivational speaker to me. It gave me inspiration that I can do whatever I want. I just had to start working on my tools.”

That year he also fell for Charlie Parker’s crazy bebop sound and bought an alto saxophone for $150. He practiced every day, his version of Rocky Balboa guzzling a glass of raw eggs. Soon, Mancuso had worked his sax into his dance routine.

While working as a bellhop at the Hilton, he developed a one-man comedy and music variety act. He did standup. He impersonated cartoon characters such as Roger Rabbit, and even a typewriter. He played TV and movie themes, performed hat tricks and break-dance moves, all the while singing and playing his sax. When a friend of his father’s gave him a tip on a gig at Harrah’s, he brought in his alto sax and his boombox, played his heart out, and got the job. “That’s what Rocky was all about,” he says. “Give me one shot to fight the Creed. Just one shot.”

But Las Vegas was changing. By the ’90s, club bosses no longer offered impromptu auditions that allowed performers to show their stuff. Still, Mancuso persisted. He found gigs. He traveled to Southern California to perform at wineries. He began giving motivational seminars to businessmen and retirees, channeling that Rocky Balboa spirit.

In 2014, a musician friend told Mancuso about his unlikely series of new gigs at retirement homes. To Mancuso this was an opportunity. Most senior circuit performers he’d seen didn’t sing or dance; they played piano or violin or cello. And nobody played the sax like Marty.

He called the senior care facilities in
Las Vegas, one by one. “I could go on for hours,” he says. “I’m a research artist. I’m a studier.” He started to get gigs, lots and lots of gigs.

* * * * *

Working from his regular table at his neighborhood Starbucks, Mancuso hustles work by phone. Fueled by caffeine, his bible by his side (\textit{Think and Grow Rich} by Napoleon Hill), he makes 30 to 50 calls a day, following up with emails containing clips of his performances. “This is a fast-moving world,” he says. “People don’t have time to look at a website. If I meet someone, I get their email. If you tell me to send you what I’ve got, you’d better be ready.”

Call by call, email by email, he fills his calendar with gigs at hotels, restaurants, wineries, private parties, corporate, and speaking events — and 15 to 20 retirement-home gigs a month.

He’s his own marketer, promoter, producer, and arranger. “I’m not a duck; they’re only good at one thing,” he says. “I’m a peacock. I’ll color ya in red, orange, purple, and blue. Can you imagine what I could do if I had an agent?”

Pursuing one job, he left 69 voice mails at Sam’s Town. He didn’t get that gig but was recently booked at Railroad Pass after 48 calls. “Success is going from one rejection or failure to another without any loss of enthusiasm,” he says. “I will call you for the rest of your life.”

Often, the hard sell doesn’t work. People tell him to get lost. But sometimes it does. “He left me a voicemail saying he was one of the best performers on the assisted-living circuit,” said Desert Springs activities director Cheryl Curry. “I liked his energy.”

Phillip Robb, director of resident engagement at the Poet’s Walk senior center in Henderson, has auditioned his share of pianists so low-key they almost fell asleep on their bench. “Marty gives it his all,” he says. “It’s like he’s performing at a Strip show or vaudeville. He’ll do anything to get a laugh or a round of applause.”

Frank Leone, a former president of the Musician’s Union of Las Vegas, said Mancuso has brought his own sense of style to the decades-old senior circuit. “There’s no disgrace to what he does,”
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You're the best!” he tells a dozen residents of Poet’s Walk. “Everybody here is the best tonight!” It is just after 3 p.m.

Tooting his saxophone, he playfully chases an aide who walks past the room. Approaching a wheelchair-bound Alzheimer’s patient who stares ahead in a trance, he begins playing “I’m in the Mood for Love” softly into her ear. She looks up and stares into his eyes; a connection.

Between songs he goes standup comedian. “I’m so ugly that when I was born, my Dad took one look at my face and my butt and yelled out, ‘Twin!’ They put me inside an incubator with tinted windows.” A woman sips a glass of white wine, her hand shaking almost uncontrollably. “My birth certificate is written in Roman numerals.”

A man dozes in his wheelchair. “I just divorced my wife and — guess what? — I got to keep the cave.” Like his audience, the jokes are old. But sometimes Mancuso makes an emotional connection, and it’s those moments that keep him coming back.

At Desert Springs, 85-year-old Patricia Matthews and her dog Ruby listen from the lobby because she can’t bring her pet into the cafeteria.

She turns to a visitor. “Do you jitterbug?” Matthews doesn’t wait for an answer. “I love to dance. My parents taught me,” she says breezily. “My husband and I used to dance. We’d go to the Strip. Then he started fooling around, so I divorced him. He’s gone now.”

Slender, cheeky, she gazes out at Mancuso and begins to dance in place. “He’s good. I just love his pretty playing.” She smiles. “He makes you want to dance, to let it loose!”
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What does a movie producer do? Better question: What doesn’t one do? “You do everything,” says May May Luong, an award-winning producer of local films. “You have your hand in everything, you get to talk to everybody on the set, you’re there from the very beginning to the very end.”

Luong, a Las Vegas native, has been producing independent films shot here by a tight-knit community of directors and filmmakers since 2006. She’s worked on five features, as well as a host of short films, commercials, marques, and web series. Her filmography includes the acclaimed 2 Little Monsters, about two young boys who murder an even younger boy, which first aired on the Lifetime Movie channel in January 2015 and drew double the normal ratings for its Sunday evening time slot. It continues to be featured on the channel. She’s good enough at this work that, in March, at the Nevada Women’s Film Festival, she was named Nevada Woman Filmmaker of the Year, the festival’s highest honor.

If the producer’s role is often unclear to your average moviegoer, it’s crucial to the success of any film, especially the indie movies made locally on tight budgets. Luong manages the budget, organizes contracts, secures locations — everything that has to happen so that the movie can be filmed. She also breaks down the script and determines what needs to happen for the movie to be made. Sometimes, that means making the decision to change or even remove certain elements.

Luong jokes that producing is like doing homework, but in reality it means that she is the driving force behind the movie. As she tells me about her films, it becomes clear that the role requires a balance of empathy for the passion of the writers and directors working to make their dreams come true, and the practicalities of creating a movie with tight and conflicting schedules and minuscule financing. “I rarely run into problems during the produc-

**PRODUCING RESULTS**

If you’re a local filmmaker with a big dream and a tiny budget, you want May May Luong on your team

*BY NADIA ELDEMERDASH*
tion process because I have all my bases covered, plus plan Bs and Cs.” (She even budgets for stationery and uses family and friends as extras on tight-budget projects.)

She says it helps to be objective, even though you’re emotionally invested in the project. “You need someone who’s in the process to maintain objectivity and say, ‘Well, okay, this just doesn’t work, we have to take it out even if it costs X amount of dollars.’ The story has to come first, the audience reaction and their investment into the story has to come before all of the things that they don’t know about,” she says.

It’s easy to see that Luong is suited to the producer’s role. She punctuates our conversation with easy laughter and lighthearted jokes; when the conversation turns serious, Luong makes that shift subtly and easily. You see why she can be convincing, and why she is not only well-respected by her colleagues, but also well-liked.

“‘It’s a very difficult thing to get all the tiny, little details right while at the same time planning for the big picture,’” says Mike Thompson, writer and director of Luong’s first feature production, Thor at the Bus Stop. “May May is great at that. She sees what’s important at the right time, somehow. She never loses focus of what the big picture is, but she also sees what little details need to get done. It’s a difficult thing to learn or teach or even understand, but May May gets it quick, effortless.”

Director Brett Levner, who worked with Luong on the feature The Track, agrees. “May May defies stereotypes,” she says. “She’s incredibly smart. That goes without saying. But she also has a knack for producing that is unmatched. She will go to the ends of the Earth to make your film happen while still managing to be the kindest, most generous, honest, dedicated, and unwavering person you’ll meet.”

THE MESSAGE MATTERS

Luong wasn’t always on the path of production. Her career started in Silicon Valley, where she spent three years working for a tech startup — but, she says, she just wasn’t invested in the work. So, in 2002, she sold all her belongings in Cali-
fornia, moved back in with her father in Las Vegas, and enrolled in UNLV’s theater program. Eventually, she began working toward a degree in cinematography. Then a professor, David Schmoeller, asked her to produce his short comedy film Spanking Lessons.

“It was just something I naturally fit into, because I am interested in learning about everything that I can, so I never feel like I want to limit myself to learning just one job,” Luong says.

Today, Luong teaches undergraduate classes in film production at UNLV. She is also working towards an MFA in Writing for Dramatic Media, and reading through a few scripts to decide on her next project.

Whatever she works on next will have a high bar to clear: Thor at the Bus Stop received the Narrative Feature Special Jury Recognition for Independent Filmmaking at the Austin Film Festival; Popovich and the Voice of the Fabled American West (which Luong jokingly calls Popovich and the Extremely Long Title) won awards at the annual Dances with Films festival and the Austin Film Festival. Her most recent feature, The Track, won Best Local Feature film and Best First Time Feature Director at the Las Vegas Film Festival in 2016.

That’s quite a range. While she prefers comedies, Luong values the important messages of 2 Little Monsters and The Track, which addresses sex trafficking in Las Vegas.

“The Track really has a message that needs to be told, and we have support from community organizations that help too because you learn about how prevalent this problem is here in Las Vegas and all the major cities,” she says. “I don’t know if people realize … that there’s this alternate world in which there are people who are exploited."

“I like being able to make something that will affect a lot of people, whether it’s to make them laugh or to make them think,” she adds.

The most important factor Luong considers before signing onto a project is whom she’ll be working with. A film can take two to three years to make, too long to spend with people you don’t work well with, she says.

That’s a big part of the reason Luong prefers to work in a freelance capacity: the freedom to choose her work. “I think it’s better to make sacrifices personally and be able to do the projects I want to do.”

“It might seem cheesy, but I do think that life is really short, and the people you meet and the way you treat them and the way you interact with them is important,” she explains.

That is a big part of the reason Luong prefers to work in a freelance capacity: the freedom to choose her work. But she has not been immune to the lure of stability. She took jobs at UNLV’s information technology department and at MGM Resorts International, but eventually quit both to pursue film production.

“I think that a lot of us have doubts a lot of the time, because you never know from day to day whether or not there’s a project that you have coming up or whether or not that project is something you even want to take on or if it’ll pay off,” she explains. “I think it’s better to make sacrifices personally and be able to do the projects that I want to do than be constrained by what other people are working on or what other people think that you should be doing.”

MAKING IT WORK

For Luong, Las Vegas has proven to be a better place for her to pursue her passions than, say, Hollywood. “I don’t know if I would be able to do the projects that I want to do because there’s also the cost of living in L.A.,” she explains. “In Las Vegas, sometimes you can take jobs that aren’t going to be … as financially viable as the ones in L.A., because you don’t need to have that in order to live.”

UNLV has also been a boon. “I love UNLV, I have been there forever and have never left,” she says, laughing.

“One of my favorite places to shoot is UNLV because (it) has a lot of locations that you might not think about that work for many different things,” Luong explains. “We shot 2 Little Monsters a lot at UNLV, and Brett’s film, The Track, because for The Track we needed a couple of alleyways … it has a dining commons and a restaurant and bar. “There are locations that you may not think of; you just have to be creative, know the techniques of filmmaking so that you can make alternative locations work,” she says.

She recalls producing and editing a 2007 Schmoeller short that required a scene they didn’t have in the can: a bride walking across a bridge in Singapore. Though Luong had no formal training in post-production effects, she helped improvise a solution: “In a green screen studio, we set up a top angle shot of my sister in a wedding dress, and then I superimposed that shot with a scanned image of a bridge postcard that Schmoeller brought back from Singapore. It was a short shot and it ended up working out in the final edit.”

That creativity is what earned her the Nevada Woman Filmmaker of the Year Award. “We look for women in our community … who not only possess impressive resume credits in film, but who have shown leadership in the community and are role models for women in the arts,” says Nikki Corda, the festival’s executive director. Previous recipients include director Rebecca Thomas and filmmaker Robin Greenspun. The day she received the award, March 24, was proclaimed May May Day, an honor that left Luong stuttering in surprise onstage as she accepted the certificate signed by Mayor Carolyn Goodman.

The award, the special day, the praise of her colleagues — it’s a validation of all the work she’s done over the years, on a path that has often been bumpy.

“I used to tell my students sometimes that (filmmaking is) like going into battle, because everybody has a goal in mind, and you have limited resources, and there are long days, and you’re put with people who, some of them you get to choose but most of them you don’t, and you have to get to the end goal in a certain amount of time,” she says.

“Hopefully you come out of it as better people, and hopefully our relationships with those people are better too,” she says. ✩
Our first Recycle Day for 2017 took place this past April, on the College of Southern Nevada Campus. With over 800 vehicles, our Recycle Day continues to grow and is an integral part of helping the green initiative in Southern Nevada. Thank you to our sponsors for another successful event! Look forward to joining us in November for our final event of the year.
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221 N Rampart Blvd, Las Vegas, Nevada 89145 Jwlasvegasresort.com
Flavor explosion: The Caesarette salad at Atomic Kitchen boasts novel touches such as sliced cactus, crispy hominy bits and a chile-infused vinaigrette.
Sixty gallons of chili boil in the back kitchen of Catholic Charities of Southern Nevada on Las Vegas Boulevard. Executive chef Jun Lao reaches for a metal instrument that looks more like a boat paddle than a kitchen utensil, and gives the chili a stir. He mostly does this to break up the chunks of ground beef that had been frozen, thawed, and added into the mixture about a half-hour prior.

“You can’t use just your arm strength to stir, or else you’ll get tired,” Lao says. Years of experience stirring countless soups, pastas, and other dishes have made him an expert on properly mixing whatever is in his pot. “You gotta use your leverage,” he says.

Lao has been a chef nearly 22 years, eight of which he’s spent here. He is in charge of feeding the hungry and homeless several meals a day, some for as many as 600 to 900. A mile and a half away, the Las Vegas Rescue Mission’s kitchen, under the direction of executive chef Sammy Chong, has a similar mission.

“It’s nice not to have to worry about where my food is coming from,” says Joseph Wilson, a 65-year-old resident at Catholic Charities during one morning meal. He’s been at the facility for five months, where he has sought to gain new skills, find employment, and get back on his feet. “The people who aren’t coming here or aren’t going to the Rescue Mission are out there hungry, begging for food, and probably stressed out. When they’re stressed about how they’re going to eat, they can’t think about getting a job.”

While they don’t know each other, both chefs are bonded in one commonality. Both are tasked with feeding the multitudes despite dealing with sporadic supplies, sometimes limited resources, and stringent daily deadlines. “Working in this kitchen is like constantly being on an episode of *Chopped*,” Lao says. But unlike the Food Network show (on which chefs make a meal from a basket of mystery ingredients), he has to cook for more than three judges. “You know when you go into your
Go ahead. Take your best shot.

There are hundreds of signs (and a hundred times that many shots) waiting for your artistic touch at the Neon Museum Boneyard.

Amateur photography tours are held twice a month. Both dusk and nighttime tours are available. For more information and to purchase tickets, visit us at neonmuseum.org/photography-tours.

Photos are for personal use only, no models, portraiture or assistants allowed.

Catholic Charities serves three meals a day: breakfast from 7:30-9 a.m., a community meal from 10-11 a.m., and lunch from noon to 2:30 p.m. The community meal is free and open to all while the other two require a nominal cost. The Las Vegas Rescue Mission has three meals open to residents who are part of its program and one community meal open to the public at 5 p.m. “The way it’s set up works out,” Wilson says. “I know guys who come here in the morning and then head to the Rescue Mission in the evening. I’ve never had to do that, but many people do.”

But these chefs aren’t just dishing up sustenance. Each day, they figure out how to make their meals as satisfying and flavorful as possible. “This is far more than a meal for people,” Chong says. “This sends a message that they matter.” Long gone are the days of simple, turn-around meals such as turkey a la king, shredded turkey on top of peas and carrots. “Why would you shred a perfectly good turkey or cook it until it’s completely dry?” Chong wonders. “You have to cook something you would want to eat.”

‘YOU’D BE AFRAID TO TURN AROUND’

Lao didn’t learn culinary arts through a school or a program. Beginning as a dishwasher at a Mexican restaurant in California in the mid-’90s, he climbed through the ranks as a busser, server, and line cook before becoming an executive chef. After mastering that menu, he switched to a Hawaiian restaurant for three years. Then Indian. Finally, Italian. “Mastering Italian sauces is the hardest one,” he says.

When his wife wanted to move to Las Vegas to be closer to her family, he thought entering the culinary industry here would be easy. He was wrong. “We moved here in 2008 when things were getting bad,” he said. He eventually found work in the kitchen at Centennial Hills Hospital. Then he landed at Catholic Charities, where he continued learning under the previous executive chef before eventually replacing him in October.
Working in restaurants, Lao says, was tiring. “You would be staring at all these tickets and just be thirsty,” he says. “You’d be too afraid to turn around and grab water because you know when you turn back, you’d be lost.”

At the same time, he admits he misses the straightforward nature of cooking to a set menu, and thinks he might consider a part-time job as a night cook at a restaurant willing to work with his Catholic Charities commitment.

Chong doesn’t have a degree in culinary arts, either — he is a former chemist with a degree from the University of California, Berkeley. His dad was a cook, which allowed him to learn about the industry. “But being an immigrant, everyone wanted me to be doctor,” he says. He worked his way through his degree by being a cook. After working as a chemist for a few years, he realized he didn’t like the profession and found his way back to the kitchen. He started as a chef for the Hyatt Regency San Francisco, learning various cuisines from Italian to Southwestern. “Then (my family) had this crazy idea to pick up and move to Las Vegas in the late 1980s,” he says.

Chong bounced around at casino properties, including Excalibur, MGM Grand, and Station Casinos locations. He spent eight years as the corporate executive chef for the Riviera before becoming an executive chef for the frozen-food company Overhill Farms, based in California.

Eventually, he left that job to move back to Las Vegas, and has been at the Rescue Mission about a year and a half.

‘IT LOOKED HORRID. IT WAS DELICIOUS’

Restaurants have set menus, predetermined ingredients, and a rigid structure. In these kitchens, the chefs have to think on the spot and be more creative with the resources they have. Despite his best efforts to plan menus, there are just too many variables, Lao says: “Every day I come in here and don’t know what I’m going to cook.”

On one March morning around 4:30, his usual start time, he looks at a large package of red beans and says, “That could be Cincinnati Chili” — a meaty sauce usually served on top of spaghetti noodles. “Instead of spaghetti we are gonna do penne noodles,” he says. “It’s easier for our volunteers...
to scoop and serve.” The community meal for the day is decided.

Chong makes meals of items that have been collected through food drives and donations, purchases the nonprofit has made, and supplies provided by Three Square Food Bank. Sometimes a restaurant or casino will send over last-minute food items, changing the menu or the plan. One Wednesday afternoon, before the cooks begin preparing dinner, the rescue mission receives hundreds of leftover sandwiches that were premade for a corporate event but went untouched. Instead of scrapping dinner, Chong will set the sandwiches out for guests to take with them.

Lao has been in charge only a few months but has already made changes. For years, he says, if there were leftover items at the community meal, they would just incorporate it into the lunch. Since coming on, he has worked to make each meal distinct, perhaps adding Indian flair or Mexican inspirations. He has also tried to bring back some requests, such as biscuits and gravy, or be more creative by, for example, making frittatas for breakfast. “It might be more time consuming, but it’s worth it to see their faces,” he says.

Chong also strives for diverse meals. “We did curry hamburgers one day,” he says. “We’ve tried Asian dishes, Hispanic dishes. On those days, we always have fried chicken on the side, just in case.”
He wants to get to a place where each day is a type of cuisine. “We would stick to that theme and just make different meals,” he says. Catholic Charities resident Wilson admits he’s been wary of some of the dishes. “One time, they had this Spanish dish,” he says. “It looked horrid. They put it on my plate, and I gave it a try. It was delicious.”

**IT WAS SIMPLE, BUT IT LOOKS LIKE THEY ENJOYED IT**

In the span of 30 minutes during meal prep one morning, Lao has started several tasks, from chopping fresh dill and fine-tuning the chili to starting a gravy and stirring potatoes. While the staff in the front of the kitchen is preparing the day’s cuisine, workers in the back are prepping, wrapping, and storing Meals on Wheels entrees to be frozen and delivered another day. In the middle of a task, Lao spots a cart full of recently donated brisket. He glides over to the meat and imagines all the things he could do – ideas for a meal another day this week.

The clock inches closer to the community meal deadline, and each cook finishes as “Bennie and the Jets” plays in the background, not that anyone can hear the music through the roar of overhead vents, the grill, and the banging of pans.

However many tasks he’s juggling, Lao keeps making his way back to the chili. Periodically, he takes a clean, unused plastic spoon from his pocket to take a taste.

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**Cracked Freekeh Bowl**

**At Panacea**

750 S. Rampart Blvd. #15, 702-684-5562, facebook.com/panacealv

Whether you completely eschew meat or are looking to up your veggie-to-viand ratio, Panacea in Boca Park is your new meatless hotspot. Consider the cracked freekeh bowl. Protein-rich green wheat — something akin to a pilaf — forms a base for roasted red peppers, tahini, chickpeas, grilled eggplant, carrot ribbons, radish slices, pickled cucumbers, jalapeños, and locally made vegan feta cheese. And arugula, cilantro, and mint. Tomato water and Kalamata olive tapenade bring it all together. Whew! It’s a dramatic collection of flavors. Dig into one while gazing at the distinctive owl mural and other attractive West Coasty décor all about. Bonus tidbit: The eatery’s lovely, rustic crockery was imported from London. Greg Thilmont
“More salt,” he says.

Over at the rescue mission, lunch is being prepared. Chong walks past his workers, overseeing their duties. “Add a little more water,” he says to one resident of the mission. “The rice looks a little dry.”

One challenge both chefs face is making sure they have the right amount of food at each meal. “At the beginning of the month, the numbers are less,” Chong says. “Our numbers pick up the last of the month.”

At Catholic Charities, the meal of Cincinnati chili is being made on the third week of the month, which Lao says averages 500 to 550 people for the community meal. The chili is about 60 gallons. “Take out a 12-ounce ladle for the chili,” Lao says. As long as a server isn’t heavy handed, and the numbers match up, it should work out precisely.

These meals have been sources of nourishment for the disadvantaged, but also have provided other services to those in need.

Take Dennis Mitchell at the Las Vegas Rescue Mission, a lifelong cook who lost his way because of a meth addiction. As a resident of one of the rescue mission’s programs, he works in the kitchen, putting his skills back to use. “It’s great working under Chong because of all the experience he has,” Mitchell says.

Both the rescue mission and Catholic Charities help train interested residents and teach them about the culinary industry. Their time at the nonprofits might vary, but Chong says some should be equipped with skills that can help them find employment.

Like clockwork, the countdown ends, the meal begins, and the chefs must start the process all over again. After the 30-minute lunch rush, Chong grabs two of the remaining drumsticks and a scoop of rice and comes out to the dining hall to eat with some of the people. After his rush, Lao strolls into his dining room, as well. “Hey chef,” one of the regulars says.

When the meal is over, Lao says, the number of empty plates will let him know whether it was a good meal — as will the trash. “My trash is going to be light today,” he says. “It was simple, but it looks like they enjoyed it.”
From 1952 to 1962, crowds of tourists and locals would gather on famous Fremont Street, gazing northwest at mushroom clouds rising from nuclear weapons tests deep in the desert. That explosive hullabaloo gave rise to Atomic Liquors, the oldest free-standing bar in town. Fast forward to the past year or so, leading up to early April, as hip Downtown denizens and suburban foodies in the know were fixated on a more culinary boom: the opening of the Kitchen at Atomic. Finally, the beloved watering hole would serve grub.

If you judge by fervent crowds, there was a pent-up demand for more quality dining off the Strip. As for the menu, it's almost a perfect metaphor for the revived establishment itself — a time-tested foundation fused with a new wave of experimentation. Not surprisingly, informal, bar-centric offerings dominate, beginning with impressive snacks such as Fat Man Fries, piled high with chili, hot dogs, beer cheese, bacon, onion, peppers, and a literally bomb moniker. More elevated are Mama John's Mac Bites, rich mouth-openers studded with poached lobster and roasted peppers in a blanket of Gruyère béchamel sauce.

The house burger is nicely composed in the classic mode, with lettuce, tomato, red onion, and a bump of zesty aïoli. The BBBLT beckons triply with the promise of pork, turkey, and duck bacons. Duck bacon! Served on toasted focaccia, it’s a notably vertical sandwich, and it gets slippery and wobbly from a bit too much avocado and other veggies. I wound up picking it apart with a fork and using the bread to mop up the last drops of soup — but I finished everything.

The soups are perhaps the menu’s most surprising offerings. I sampled bowls from both sides of the meat/no-meat spectrum and was impressed each time. For instance, a beef-barley pottage was filled with rich bovine flavor. It’s filling, yet light enough to be warm-weather friendly. On the vegan side, a duo of zucchini-curry and squash-coconut purées were artfully poured into a single container to form a whimsical yin-yang pattern. Again, it was invitingly savory and fulfilling without being heavy.

Enter salads, especially the Caesarette, which, the staff joked, some call the “Caesaresque.” I agree. This is no variation on a puritanically proper Tijuana-born Caesar. It’s more like a rogue cousin. Shredded Romaine lettuce is tossed with carrot escabeche, slivers of cactus pads, and crispy hominy bits (yes, think craft-made Corn Nuts)
in a chile-laden vinaigrette with a subtle touch of anchovy. It’s a mysterious, almost uncanny umami experience, one that’s definitely not for newbies or those with sensitive palates. It is a must-do for me, though. The Wedges + Blue is a more trad steakhouse blue cheese job, with prosciutto for a bacon upgrade.

It’s with the entrées that the creativity really kicks in. A plate of broiled sea scallops takes an avant-garde direction with a topping of salt plum chutney, puffy miso barley crunch bits, and drizzled ponzu sauce atop discs of Japanese eggplant. Here, the base is the weakest link, with its overly seedy texture — eggplant sometimes takes true commitment. But it’s worth it, with the puckery chutney cutting the sweetness of the scallop nicely. Another fragrant offering is a chicken

Table 34

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thigh with vermouth (hello, hints of martini!), turnips, and fried hen-of-the-woods mushrooms.

The dish that’s been making the rounds as a local fave is the ribeye crown with smashed potato, carrots, and pink peppercorn-shallot relish. With its robust, mineral-laden beefiness punched up by the piquant topping, I’m looking forward to ordering it again — except that I also have my eye on the house’s deluxe option, a succulent-looking surf & turf: beef tenderloin and lobster with truffled asparagus and foie gras butter. In a casino resort, either of these choices would run a good $20 more, so there’s a definite value proposition in the Kitchen’s prices.

The dessert menu is sparse but has highlights such as lemon-ricotta donuts with blueberry coulis and locally made lavender-honey gelato. The bar program is advanced and comprehensive, right down to an impressive collection of fine Madeira wines with their nutty, caramel-like profiles.

Housed in a former auto garage, Kitchen at Atomic has plenty of retro industrial-chic bona fides. In a town once tied to nuclear explosions, the giant radioactivity logo out front is tongue-in-cheek apocalyptic fun, while the interior is firmly in the brick-walled, gastropub genre, with a handsome dark-wood bar and black-and-white photographic Vegas shout-outs.

While restaurant service is not available on the wide and extremely popular Atomic Lounge patio along Fremont Street, the Kitchen does have its own open-air space, with glowing lights strung above. It’ll surely be a better setting for dining during the sweltering, gusty summer evenings to come. Here’s hoping that the Kitchen at Atomic has a long and radiant half-life.
Pub Crawl around Tivoli Village

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Our fifth annual photo contest was our noisiest yet: Whoa. Oh! Nice. Wow! Hm! Whaat?! Those are just a few of the exclamations from our judges who came to the Desert Companion offices to help us select the best of the 1,109 photos submitted this year. It wasn’t easy, but (wow!) was it ever fun — a sort of exhilarating wormhole ride through the collective optic nerve of Nevada’s most avid and creative photographers. The pages that follow feature the best. The subjects range from people to pets to panoramic landscapes, but each photo offers a fresh perspective on the place we call home.
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1st Place
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MATT KUEHL
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JOHN DAVIS
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EVAN MOHR
AMATEUR/STUDENT
1st Place
WILL D’ANGELO
SEMI-PROFESSIONAL

2nd Place
NATALIA PRUDNIKOVA
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Honorable Mention
JASON OGULNIK
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ERIC WRIGHT
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2nd Place
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Honorable Mention
MATT KUEHL
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VIVA LAS SELFIE

1st Place
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Honorable Mention
HUGH BYRNE
AMATEUR/STUDENT
Nevada at Work & Play

1. **JASON OGUJNIK**
   PROFESSIONAL

Nevada at Work & Play

2. **EMILY WILSON**
   PROFESSIONAL

In The Moment

3. **ALEX CANONIZADO**
   SEMI-PROFESSIONAL

Landscape

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PHOTO ESSAY

YES MAYBE NO

In a city built on illusion, two photographers consider abundance and absence, authenticity and artificiality

B&W HEATHER PROTZ  •  Polaroids BRENT HOLMES
Here you have a guitar virtuoso and powerhouse singer who can ransack every corner of the blues, rock ‘n’ roll and hip-hop in pursuit of a transcendent sound. Best way to set your summer on fire.

7p, $35-$60, brooklynbowl.com

Juneteenth celebrates June 19, 1865 — the day the last slaves were freed. Celebrate with food, entertainment, storytelling, and more, while remembering that the struggle for equality continues.

6p, free, june19lv.com

Nice mask, fella.

2p, 7:30p, The Smith Center, $29-$127, thesmithcenter.com

To highlight the lack of transgender and gender-queer roles in theater, this production of the madcap Shakespeare comedy employs a transgender cast and even strips the gender specifics from the Bard’s title.

7:30p, free, lvccld.org

Opening reception June 16.

Through July 13, 702-455-7340

Hardwired to seek patterns, our brains often “see” human features in other objects. It’s called pareidolia. Photographer Salgado will give shots of suggestive rock formations from the Basin & Range National Monument to local artists. They’ll overlay the pictures with art they’ve pareidolia’d from those stones. A face-saving exhibit will result.

Opening reception June 16.

Through July 13, 702-455-7340
**ART**

**WENDY CHAMBERS:**
**EXPLORATORY SURGERY**
**THROUGH JUNE 1**
Chambers investigates the material connection between painting and the human body. The exhibition is comprised of paintings that emphasize the qualities of both paint and flesh. Free. Winchester Gallery, 3130 McLeod Drive, clarkcountynv.gov

**LAS VEGAS ELKS HELLDORADO ART SHOW WINNERS OF THE JURIED EXHIBITION**
**THROUGH JUNE 9, MON–FRI 7A–5:30P**
Artists of all ages and backgrounds were invited to enter and have their artwork displayed in the show, judged in categories, and bid on in a silent auction. This exhibit showcases the winners in multiple categories. Free. Las Vegas City Hall, second floor outside City Council Chambers, 495 S. Main St., elkshelldorado.com

**LOVE’S LAST LOOK**
**THROUGH JULY 7**
New work from artist Jennifer Henry featuring wearable sculptures crafted from new and reclaimed materials and set in lush environments that capture the forlorn fantasy of fictional lost loves’ very last moments. Free. Clark County Government Center Rotunda Gallery, clarkcountynv.gov

**BEADS AND THREAD**
**THROUGH JULY 13**
The artwork in this exhibit was gathered by a national call for art that uses beadwork and thread predominately and creatively. Free. Las Vegas City Hall Chamber Gallery, 495 S. Main St., second floor. artslasvegas.org

**COLORADO RIVER:**
**ARTFULLY ENGINEERED**
**THROUGH JULY 23, 9A–5P**
Explore the style and function of Art Deco design in water facilities across the western United States through the stunning black and white pinhole photography of Cody Brothers. Free for members or included with paid general admission. Big Springs Gallery, Springs Preserve, springspreserve.org

**EXHALE**
**JUNE 15–AUG. 29**
Melissa Gaudet’s artwork uses photographic methods to explore the function of memory and the interaction of life and death. Free. Art Gallery at West Charleston Library, ccvld.org

**OUTSIDE THE BOX**
**JUNE 15–SEPT. 7**
This exhibit highlights artists who use cardboard as the main medium source for their artwork. Free. Las Vegas City Hall Grand Gallery, 495 S. Main St., first floor, artslasvegas.org

**RARA AVIS**
**JUNE 27–SEPT. 17**
The award-winning artists of the West Coast Drawing collective present their original drawings. Free. Art Gallery at Sahara West Library, lvccld.org

**MUSIC**

**ERIC DARIUS**
**JUNE 3, 6P**
Saxophonist, composer, producer, and vocalist Darius joins in the Jazz in the Park series. Picnics, blankets and low-back chairs (6" or shorter) are welcome. Free. Clark County Government Center Amphitheater, clarkcountynv.gov

**GOOD VIBRATIONS: A CELEBRATION OF THE BEACH BOYS**
**JUNE 3, 7P**
Good Vibrations celebrates the legacy and spirit of the legendary California icons by recreating the timeless music, youthful appearance and excitement of seeing the original Beach Boys lineup in their mid-1960s prime. $20. Starbright Theatre at Sun City Summerlin, scscai.com

**FRANK LASPINA**
**JUNE 4, 2P**
Based on the soundtrack of the smash TV sitcom Happy Days, you will relive the magic of the music from the late 1950s and early 1960s from such iconic artists as Elvis, Ray Charles, Lesley Gore and the Everly Brothers. $25. Cabaret Jazz at The Smith Center, thesmithcenter.com

**GONZO**
**JUNE 4, 7P**
Los Angeles-based Gonzo blends a wide variety of musical influences and love-inspired messages to create a unique sound he refers to as “Roots-Reggae-Soul.” Special guest Aloha Radio. $10–$12. Brooklyn Bowl at The Linq. brooklynbowl.com

**VOCAL RECITAL**
**JUNE 5, 5P**
St. Viator Catholic School presents their best voices in concert. Free. Main Theatre at Clark County Library, lvccld.org

**EASY STAR ALL-STAR**
**JUNE 5, 8P**
Blending musical versatility, instrumental prowess, beautiful vocal harmonies, and a premier rhythm section, the Easy Star All-Stars have established themselves as one of the top international reggae acts on the scene today. With special guests the Late Ones and The Elovaters. $20–$22. Brooklyn Bowl at The Linq. brooklynbowl.com

**SOMO: THE ANSWERS TOUR**
**JUNE 8, 7P**
Known for his song “Ride,” Joseph Somers-Morales offers smooth and intimate R&B. $20–$278. Brooklyn Bowl at The Linq, brooklynbowl.com

**THE MUSIC OF ROBERT GOULET:**
**BROADWAY & BEYOND**
**JUNE 8, 7:30P**
Randal Keith is one of few actors to have played every major role in Phantom and is currently the star of the Phat Pack. $20–$30. The Space, 3460 Cavaretta Court, thespacelv.com

**OPERA LAS VEGAS PRESENTS RIGOLETTO**
**JUNE 9, 7:30P; JUNE 11, 2P**
Tragic forces shape this world-famous opera about a father’s love, a Duke’s debauchery, and an Italian court’s thirst for brutal revenge. Giuseppe Verdi’s masterpiece features some of opera’s most beloved melodies. $85.50–$95. Judy Bayley Theatre at UNLV, operallasvegas.com

**DAVID PERRICO POP STRINGS ORCHESTRA – “SONGBOOK OF SOUL” CONCERT**
**JUNE 9, 8P**
Perrico is an award-winning trumpeter, composer, and conductor who will be joined by vocalists Skye Dee Miles, Michelle Johnson, Serena Henry, Lily Arce, Ken Fletch Walcott, and Eric Sean. $20–$40. Cabaret Jazz at The Smith Center, thesmithcenter.com

**PETER, PAUL & MARY ALIVE!**
**JUNE 10, 1P**
Re-experience the 1960s as this pre-eminent tribute revives and recreates the songs, sounds, and message of one of the most beloved folk groups. $20. Starbright Theatre at Sun City Summerlin, scscai.com
G’DAY LAS VEGAS
JUNE 10, 7P
With his rich voice and sizzling trumpet, Aussie powerhouse entertainer Greg Bonham is joined by Ryan Ahern, award-winning pianist and entertainer, for a feel-good concert that will leave you smiling and tapping your toes. $30–$40. Cabaret Jazz at The Smith Center, thesmithcenter.com

LAS VEGAS BRASS BAND IN CONCERT
JUNE 11, 2P
Founded in 1994, the Las Vegas Brass Band is a traditional British-style ensemble made up of talented professional and amateur musicians from Southern Nevada. Directed by Dick McGee, the ensemble will take to the stage in celebration of 23 years of concerts. Free. Main Theater at Clark County Library, lvccld.org

CLAUSE BOURBON MEDIEVAL & SPANISH BLUES GUITARIST
JUNE 11, 4P
Bourbon is known throughout Europe and America for amazing guitar performances that take blues, Spanish, Middle Eastern and Russian stylings into uncharted territories. Multipurpose Room at Sahara West Library, lvccld.org

THESE SANGIN DIVAS — RIGHT HERE
JUNE 11, 6P
Mocha Blue Blaze and Toscha Comeaux are a joy to the soul. Their harmonies will move you with emotion and rock your body. $15. Baobab Stage Theatre, 6587 Las Vegas Blvd. S., baobabstage.com

JONATHAN KARRANT
JUNE 13, 8P
From classic selections of The American Songbook to his own jazzy twists of contemporary songs, this engaging young singer will thrill you. $20–$35. Cabaret Jazz at The Smith Center, thesmithcenter.com

THE PHAT PACK
JUNE 14, 7:30P
Four Broadway performers join together to sing some of the best music of Broadway while sharing their personal stories from their individual journeys in this intimate, funny, and entertaining evening of music, laughter, and dreams! $20–$30. The Space, 3460 Cavaretta Court, thespaceelv.com
THE GUIDE

PHOENIX
JUNE 14, 7:30P
Playing their latest album, Bankrupt!, the French foursome will combine their pop and synth melodies with their unique, uncomfortable style. $35–$65. Brooklyn Bowl at The Linq, brooklynbowl.com

THE COMPOSERS
SHOWCASE OF LAS VEGAS
JUNE 14, 10:30P
Founded and hosted by Keith Thompson (Jersey Boys) and Michael Brennan (Le Rêve), this showcase focuses on uniting the theatre community of Las Vegas and giving creative spirits an outlet for artistic expression. $20–$25. Cabaret Jazz at The Smith Center, thesmithcenter.com

FOLIAS FLUTE AND GUITAR DUO
JUNE 15, 2P
This unique performer/composer duo was founded in 2003 by husband and wife Carmen Maret and Andrew Bergeron. In performance, Folias combines their classical music training, their experience as tango dancers and bandleaders, their love of Astor Piazzolla, and their knowledge of the jazz idiom. Free. Laughlin Library, lvccld.org

DIANE SCHUUR
JUNE 16–17, 7P
One of contemporary jazz’s leading vocalists, Schuur is as eclectic as she is brilliant. With a distinguished recording career spanning three decades, she explores every corner of the classic American Songbook with her talented quartet. $39–$65. Cabaret Jazz at The Smith Center, thesmithcenter.com

ZOZO – THE ULTIMATE LED ZEPPELIN EXPERIENCE
JUNE 16, 8P
Formed in 1995, Zoso is the most accurate and captivating Zeppelin live show since the real thing. $10. Brooklyn Bowl at The Linq, brooklynbowl.com

SPYRO GYRA
JUNE 17, 5P
Since the 1970s, the band has built an enormous following via their rare blend of virtuosity, stylistic range, and accessibility. They grace the stage at the Jazz in the Park series this year. Free. Clark County Government Center Amphitheater, clarkcountynv.gov

MICHAEL MONGE
FEATURING REVA RICE
JUNE 17, 7P
Monge delivers songs from old Vegas greats to hits by Billy Joel and John Legend. Backed by a six-piece band, the show also features Las Vegas headliner and star of Vegas, the Show! Reva Rice. $20. Starbright Theatre at Sun City Summerlin, scscai.com

TIMELESS, STARRING E’CASANOVA
JUNE 17, 8P
Known as the best of the best tribute artists, E’Casanova will deliver a Michael Jackson experience like none you have ever imagined. $57–$70. Brooklyn Bowl at The Linq, brooklynbowl.com

SISTER HAZEL
JUNE 18, 7P
For more than 20 years, these five friends have built the kind of musical communication that comes only with time, talent, and commitment. Special guest, The Brevet. $25–$30. Brooklyn Bowl at The Linq, brooklynbowl.com

GARY CLARK JR.
JUNE 20, 7P
The Austin-born virtuoso guitarist, vocalist, and songwriter is an amalgamation of his myriad influences and inspirations. His music meshes blues and hip-hop with a Marleyesque message of hope and faith. $35–$60. Brooklyn Bowl at The Linq, brooklynbowl.com

THE REVOLUTION
JUNE 21, 8:30P
Merging funk, rock ‘n roll, rhythm and blues, pop, and psychedelia genres, The Revolution is considered to be one of the most successful music acts of all time. They are best known as the versatile band behind the music icon Prince. $30–$60. Brooklyn Bowl at The Linq, brooklynbowl.com

THE BLACK SEEDS
JUNE 24, 6P
Long established as one of New Zealand’s finest bands, The Black Seeds have carved out their reputation on the back of multiplatinum-selling albums and a masterful live show: $12–$15. Brooklyn Bowl at The Linq, brooklynbowl.com

THE TAMMY GRAHAM SHOW
JUNE 24, 7P
Graham’s show is a combination of amazing singing, musicianship, storytelling and a wide variety of music including country, rock, gospel, and her chart-topping hits that will keep you excited and entertained the entire show. $20. Starbright Theatre at Sun City Summerlin, scscai.com

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COLORS OF THE RAINBOW
JUNE 25, 2P
The Las Vegas Men’s Chorus performs many different types of music — from songs for the Broadway baby to pieces that appeal to the serious music aficionado — as they celebrate LGBT Pride Month. Free. Main Theater at Clark County Library, lvccld.org

STREETLIGHT MANIFESTO
JUNE 25, 7P
Seven guys, seven different musical backgrounds, one band, one unique and unmistakable voice, one part rock, one part ska, with influences from Latin, klezmer, folk, world, funk, jazz, and classical thrown in. $27.50–$40. Brooklyn Bowl at The Linq, brooklynbowl.com

I JUST WANNA SING
JULY 1, 7P
East Coast native CC Spencer built a loyal following in Las Vegas through regular appearances at various lounges, supper clubs, and as a former member of the Las Vegas Tenors. $20. Starbright Theatre at Sun City Summerlin, scscai.com

THEATER AND COMEDY

THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA
THROUGH JUNE 11, TUE–SUN 7:30P; JUNE 1, 3–4, 10–11; 2P
Cameron Mackintosh’s spectacular new production of Andrew Lloyd Webber’s beloved show features new scenery, new choreography, new staging, and many exciting special effects — including the show’s legendary chandelier. $29–$127. Reynolds Hall at The Smith Center, thesmithcenter.com

PERFECT ARRANGEMENT: A STAGED READING
JUNE 9, 7P
This play by Topher Payne is set during the communist/lavender scare of the 1950s. Department of State employees Bob Martindale and his secretary Norma marry each other’s partners to hide in plain sight in this comic tale about closeted lives. The performance is intended for mature audiences. Free. Jewel Box Theater at Clark County Library, lvccld.org

VEGAS FRINGE FESTIVAL 2017
JUNE 9–18, TIMES VARY
A celebration of theatre that features an exciting roster of multiple plays, each less than an hour and a half, with everything from family-friendly productions and musicals to improv shows and edgy debuts. Single ticket, $12; festival pass, $110. Las Vegas Little Theatre, lvlt.org/fringe2017

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I HEAR YOU! I'M JUST NOT LISTENING
JUNE 10, 6P; JUNE 11, 4P; JUNE 15, 6:30P; JUNE 16, 8:30P
Cardio Spider presents a musical sketch comedy about life in modern America. $12. Las Vegas Little Theatre, lvlt.org

THE JOURNEY TO LIFE
JUNE 24, 3P
An original musical theatre performance sharing the stories of youth in our modern day and the challenges they face as they come of age and discover their identity and life purpose. Free. Theatre at West Las Vegas Library, lvccld.org

DICK & DELORIS
JUNE 28, 8P
A hilarious homage to the husband and wife lounge-act duo, the DelRubios share their stories of celebrity, love, life and entertaining. $25. The Space, 3460 Cavaretta Court, thespaceclv.com

INCognito BY NICK PAYNE: A STAGED READING
JUNE 30, 7:30P
Four actors play a combined 21 characters in three interwoven stories. A pathologist steals the brain of Albert Einstein, a neuropsychologist embarks on her first romance with another woman; a seizure patient forgets everything but how much he loves his girlfriend. Free. Jewel Box Theater at Clark County Library, lvccld.org

TWO ***** OF VERONA
JUNE 30, 7:30P
Lysander Abadia and Sam Murphy have adapted William Shakespeare’s Two Gentlemen of Verona and gathered a cast consisting of local transgender actors. Six actors will play all of the characters within this romantic comedy filled with gender-bending characters, silly balcony scenes, and exiled outlaws. Free. Lecture Hall at West Charleston Library, lvccld.org

DANCE
SNOW WHITE
JUNE 3, 6P; JUNE 4, 1P
See the magic unfold in this ballet performance of the classic fairytale — an event your whole family will remember happily ever after! $20. The Performing Arts Center at Summerlin Library, nevadaballet.org

KOREO WERX
DANCE SHOWCASE
JUNE 4, 6P
This all-ages event will host a high-energy and exciting atmosphere with vendors, DJs, and some of the best dance performances you have ever seen. $10-$15. Main Theater at Clark County Library, lvccld.org

BURLESQUE AT THE BAOBAB
JUNE 9, 9P
The lineup features some of the most beautiful ladies in burlesque as well as amazing Cirque-style acts. You never know what’s in store for the evening: hand-balancers, aerialists, or a seductive temptress in rhinestones and sequins. $20 online, $25 at the door. Baobab Stage Theatre, 6587 Las Vegas Blvd S., baobabstage.com

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NEVADA SCHOOL OF DANCE SPRING RECITAL
JUNE 10, 6P
The culmination of a year of training in multiple dance forms, students look forward to this performance all year. Free. Performing Arts Center at Summerlin Library, lvccld.org

MOVE – BEYOND
JUNE 16, 7:30P
The Hough siblings will be joined by the Move Company Dancers for group performances in styles ranging from ballroom and tap to salsa and hip-hop, and everything in between. $39.50–$125. Reynolds Hall at The Smith Center, thesmithcenter.com

DANCE CONCERT
JUNE 17, 1P
Captivation Dance Affiliates presents multiple forms of dance. $12–$15. Main Theater at Clark County Library, lvccld.org

THE PATCHWORK GIRL OF OZ
JUNE 17, 3P
Inspired by L. Frank Baum’s characters in this book and the Wizard of Oz, the magical fable has colorful costumes, a multimedia set and spectacular modern dance to make this a dazzling journey into the Land of Oz. $12–$15. The Auditorium at Windmill Library, lvccld.org

HUMANITY
JUNE 22–23, 6P
B. Sharp School of Dance presents a dance recital. $15–$20. Main Theater at Clark County Library, lvccld.org

TRAVIS WALL’S SHAPING SOUND: AFTER THE CURTAIN
JUNE 29, 7:30P
Through his work on So You Think You Can Dance, Wall has established himself as one of America’s favorite choreographers. His visual musicians tell the story of a man fighting to find his creative voice after the death of his one true love. $39–$99. Reynolds Hall at The Smith Center, thesmithcenter.com

DISCUSSIONS AND READINGS

PLAY WITH SWORDS: A STAGE COMBAT CELEBRATION
JUNE 3, 7P
Watch certified instructors from The Society of American Fight Directors as they demonstrate and discuss multiple stage-weapon styles and systems in an exciting, fast-paced production. $10 in advance; $15 at the door. Charleston Heights Arts Center, 800 S. Brush St., artslasvegas.org

AN EVENING WITH RICHARD ZOGLIN: BOB HOPE – ENTERTAINER OF THE CENTURY
JUNE 5, 7P
Hope was a dogged worker, gracious with fans, and indiscriminate womanizer. Zoglin discusses the gifted but flawed subject of his book Hope: Entertainer of the Century and shares his writing process. Free. Jewel Box Theater at Clark County Library, lvccld.org

HISTORY OF GAY LAS VEGAS
JUNE 17, 2P
Dennis McBride’s Out of the Neon Closet recounts the personal struggles and political successes that have made Nevada’s queer community what it is today. Book talk followed by book sales and signing. Free. Lecture Hall at West Charleston Library, lvccld.org

FAMILY AND FESTIVALS

DANIEL TIGER’S NEIGHBORHOOD BE MY NEIGHBOR DAY
JUNE 10, 10A–2P
This event enables families with young children to help others through community-focused acts of kindness; information booths from Raising Las Vegas partner organizations; a meet-and-greet with Daniel Tiger; tours of fire department and Las Vegas Metro police vehicles; and more. Free. Windmill Library Auditorium, lvccld.org

A CENTURY OF CHAPLIN
JUNE 10, 8P
Celebrate 100 years of laughter with a few of Chaplin’s classic silent movies made in 1917. Lawn seating; bring chairs or blankets to be more comfortable. Free. Garehime Heights Park, 3901 N. Campbell Road, artslasvegas.org

14TH ANNUAL SENIOR IDOL TALENT SHOWCASE
JUNE 15, 3P
Professional and amateur performing seniors from across the valley who were selected from auditions will showcase their talents in individual and group dance, vocals, comedy, and musical instrument performances. $5, available at all City of Las Vegas senior centers, while they last. Charleston Heights Arts Center, 800 S. Brush St., artslasvegas.org

DJANGOVEGAS! GYPSY JAZZ FESTIVAL
JUNE 17, 5P
Enjoy cocktails and the music of Django Reinhardt and other gypsy jazz greats. The Django Festival All-Stars (of France), the Biel Ballester Trio, and The Hot Club of Las Vegas are featured performers this year. $20. Historic Fifth Street School Auditorium, 401 S. Fourth St., artslasvegas.org

FUNDRAISERS

ROMANIAN RHAPSODY GALA
JUNE 3, 6P
The Las Vegas Philharmonic Guild honors Lia Roberts, Honorary Consul General of Romania. Musical performances will include a welcome salute by T.A.P.P.S. (Trumpeters Alliance to Perform Patriotic Services), the Romanian Children’s Choir, and other special guests. Proceeds benefit the Las Vegas Philharmonic’s Youth Programs. $195. Westgate Resort and Casino, lvphil.org

GRANT A GIFT AUTISM FOUNDATION BENEFIT
JUNE 11, 4P
The world-famous Blue Man Group will host a sensory-friendly show suitable for those affected by autism spectrum disorders. Half the price of each ticket goes directly to the foundation. $36. Luxor Hotel and Casino, blueman.com/grantagift

23RD ANNUAL GOLFER’S ROUNDUP
JUNE 13, 7:30A
HELP of Southern Nevada will host its famous competitive golf tournament. The event benefits low-income families and homeless teens and adults to become more self-sufficient through direct services, training, and referrals. Singles, $375; foursomes, $1,500. Cascata Golf Course in Boulder City, helpsonv.org

HEROES WITH A HEART
JUNE 16, 6P
The event honors five members of the emergency response community who have been carefully selected for their acts of kindness to our fellow citizens at scenes of tragedy and during times of crisis. Proceeds benefit the Trauma Intervention Program (TIP) of Southern Nevada, Inc., a non-profit organization dedicated to ensuring that those who are emotionally traumatized in emergency situations receive the assistance they need. $75. The Orleans, tipoflasvegas.org/heroes
We saw more hot-air balloons among this year’s entries than usual. Is it a coincidence that the Legislature — another gathering of colorful gasbags — is in session? Aw, probably no connection ...

Rainbow photos rarely win — not even the double rainbows we saw plenty of this time — but they sure add a pop of ephemeral beauty to the judging process!

Bees!

“Can you dangle precariously from that rock just a few more minutes? Gotta change lenses.” At least it’s for a good cause: Shots of rock climbers often do well in our contest.

The desert bighorn sheep, with its Spiderman ability to walk on sheer rock, seems genetically engineered to be photographed.

We chalk up the prevalence of owls every year to the culture’s ongoing uncertainty about exactly how many licks it takes to get to the center of a Tootsie Pop.

Junkers, preferably abandoned and graffiti’d, represent the enigmatic detritus of civilization, and are therefore irresistible to photographers.
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