

# It's time to saddle up and ride — a camel, that is

**KEN HOFFMAN**  
Commentary



Saturday night I will jump on a real-life spitting camel and race against a TV weather person, a disc jockey and a sports-talk host.

Like the song, it's just another Saturday night. Sam Houston Race Park is holding its annual Camel and

Ostrich Races. Don't worry, there will be a full card of thoroughbred horse races, too.

Horse racing starts at 6:30 p.m. The ostriches are set to run at 8 p.m. The camel derby is at 9 p.m.

Last year, the Camel and Ostrich Races drew 13,000 people to the track. It was the second biggest crowd of

the year. Only opening night packed in more fans.

I like my chances. The betting line has me a strong 2-1 favorite — even though there's no betting on the ostrich or camel races.

Channel 11 weatherwoman Chita Johnson is the second choice at 4-1. She's wrong about the weather at least half

the time. It wouldn't surprise me if she pointed her camel in the wrong direction.

Anson Ainsworth, a producer for sports-talk station ESPN 97.5, is 10-1. Sports-talk guys are notoriously tubby; that's why they're always doing commercials for weight-loss

*Hoffman continues on E2*

# STAR

In 29-95

Music: New album by singer-songwriter couple.

HOUSTON CHRONICLE | houstonchronicle.com and chron.com | Thursday, March 7, 2013 | Section E \*\*\*

ART

## Practicing the art of living



Billy Smith II photos / Houston Chronicle

Nikki Araguz is a familiar name to some. The transgender woman whose firefighter husband was killed in a fire in 2010 is now owner of the Starving Artist.

Nikki Araguz has been in the public eye for several years. Now the gallery owner just wants the world to see how normal her life is.

By Alyson Ward

Art covers the walls from floor to ceiling at the Starving Artist, a new Montrose-area gallery. Tables and glass cases display jewelry, sculpture and trinkets. Sunlight beams through big windows in the converted house on West Alabama, and a toy poodle named Bentley greets visitors at the door.

Last week, one of the gallery's owners — petite, with big blue eyes — welcomed some first-time shoppers.

"We have 67 local artists," she said.



A tiger ring created by Nikki Araguz

"Everything is handmade; you're welcome to look around the studio. My name is Nikki."

They didn't seem to recognize her. But since the Starving Artist opened in December, several customers have realized she's *that* Nikki: Nikki Araguz, the widow of a Wharton County firefighter who has spent the past three years at the center of a high-profile court battle over the legitimacy of her marriage. She has courted reality TV, become a public speaker, ridden in the Houston Gay Pride Parade. And now, while she waits for the case to wind through the appeals process, she's running an art

gallery with her new fiance in the heart of Houston.

Araguz, 37, was the transgender wife of Thomas Araguz, who was killed in 2010 fighting a massive fire at a Wharton County egg farm. When he died, his mother and ex-wife filed a lawsuit to keep Nikki Araguz from receiving any benefits; they want the entire amount — more than \$600,000 — to go to the fallen firefighter's two young sons. They argued that the marriage wasn't legally binding because Nikki Araguz was born a man, and in 2011, a judge agreed. Araguz has appealed the case and believes it will be heard in the state's 13th Court of Appeals later this year.

*Araguz continues on E3*

### ENTERTAINMENT

## Booker T wrestles the future

By Mike Damante

Five-time pro champ Booker T of Houston traded his wrestling briefs for a suit and tie, but he's still portraying a role on "WWE SmackDown," this time as the "general manager." In addition to traveling with WWE, Booker T runs a wrestling promotion company and school in

Houston. His new autobiography, "Booker T: From Prison to Promise: Life Before the Squared Circle," reveals his early life — from being orphaned at 13 to time in prison time for armed robbery. The WWE star — whose real name is Booker T. Huffman — took time to talk about his book and this weekend's anniversary show for his Reality of Wrestling

promotion.

**Q: Your autobiography, "From Prison To Promise," came out last year.**

**A:** It's my life story about how I actually came up as a kid. For over 20 years, people have been seeing me on television and gravitating to that character and wanting to be like that person, not

knowing what I went through to be that person. ... The book is about not giving up and not quitting and growing up and

*Booker T continues on E2*

»Booker T gives backstage insight and talks about his favorite things in Houston at [HoustonChronicle.com](http://HoustonChronicle.com).

Booker T



Michael Paulsen / Houston Chronicle

**STAR**

# Araguz considers herself an 'accidental activist'

*Araguz from page E1*

"My life has been very, very public," Araguz said last week.

That's an understatement. Even as a teen, she made the rounds of talk shows — "Jerry Springer," "Maury Povich" — to disclose that she was born a boy but developed, physically and emotionally, as a woman. She legally changed her name to Nikki in 1996 and had sex reassignment surgery in 2008, two months after she married Thomas Araguz, who was her second husband.

After his death, she was featured on "20/20." Transgender activists took up her cause. In August 2011, Out magazine published a 6,000-word profile of Araguz along with a glamorous photo of her draped in the Texas flag.

But Araguz wasn't an ideal poster child for any cause; for months after her husband's death, her life looked like a train

wreck. She moved in with a boyfriend in San Francisco until he took her car one night and totaled it in a crash that killed the other driver. Araguz returned to Texas and landed in more trouble: She spent nearly a month in jail last year for stealing a woman's Rolex at a local bar. (She still insists, as she did to police, that it was a drunken swap and not a theft.)

When she was released, Araguz planned to move far away from Texas and never come back. But something made her stay.

"The day I got out of jail, God had a different plan for me," she said. "I rented an apartment that week here in Houston and decided to plant roots. It was not 30 days later I met Will."

That was last spring. William Loyd, 33, says he met Araguz online. Her dating profile included a link to her website, which spilled the whole story.

Instead of being scared away, Loyd was intrigued.

"I just thought that the more I saw about her," Loyd said, "the more interesting and amazing she was."

The couple first met in person last May. Now they've moved into a townhome just around the corner from their new business.

"You don't get to pick who you fall in love with, and I can testify that to anybody," said Loyd.

Loyd, the father of two, is a self-taught artist who has always dabbled in creative work. When they got together last spring, Araguz urged him to focus more on his art.

"The next thing you know, our apartment was filled up with paintings," she said. "So then, I was like, well, I guess we need a gallery."

Last fall, the couple cashed out a 401(k) from Loyd's former job as a roughneck for an offshore drilling company. They rented space near the corner of Shepherd and West Alabama and started inviting local artists to sell their work.

When the gallery opened Dec. 1, the Starving Artist featured four artists. By last week, Araguz and Loyd had made deals with 67 artists. Almost all are local; their ages range from 8 (that's Loyd's daughter, Charlotte) to 83.

The Starving Artist will work with just about any artist who wants to sell some work.

"Most of our artists are trying to get their name out there," Loyd said.



Billy Smith II photos / Houston Chronicle

**Nikki Araguz and her fiancé, William Loyd, have launched the Starving Artist gallery, which includes some of his paintings and her jewelry.**

Almost nothing costs more than \$500, and the merchandise moves fast, they say; the gallery recently sold 30 pieces in a single weekend.

Loyd's own work is scattered here and there on the gallery's walls; they're the pieces with a shiny surface, a new medium he's developing and describes as "oil-based watercolors on steroids."

Araguz paints a bit,

but mostly she designs jewelry — big, sturdy necklaces and rings full of bright garnet, citrine, topaz. A pair of her ruby and amethyst earrings sells for \$150; an amethyst and biwa pearl necklace is \$385.

Araguz and Loyd want to open multiple Starving Artist galleries in cities across the country, starting with The Woodlands and Austin. They also offer 200 of the gallery's

paintings for sale on their website, thestarvingartistgallery.com.

"I will be able to sit back and relax when we've opened our 15th store," Araguz said.

Araguz still gets recognized around town — and of course, in her own gallery. The woman who calls herself an "accidental activist" is making the most of her controversial celebrity.

She earns extra cash by accepting calls to DialAStar, a phone service that connects callers to celebs such as Michael Lohan (father of Lindsay) and rapper Waka Flocka Flame. Callers pay \$10 a minute to chat with her.

"It's flattering when people want to (talk)," Araguz said. "It can be uncomfortable at times; it depends on how people want to reach out, and how aggressively."

Araguz has talked with a producer about a movie about her life, and she plans to write a book to tell her story. She wants to be on TV, too. Later this month, she says, she'll fly to Los Angeles and meet with a producer about a reality show that would feature her with Loyd and his children, at the gallery and at home. After the chaos of the past three years, she wants to show people how normal her life is, after all.

A reality show would "put the 'regular family' aspect on what's already been sensationalized," she said. "We're just an American family."

alyson.ward@chron.com



**Araguz models a necklace she created that is on sale at the Starving Artist gallery.**

## BIRTHDAYS

TV personality **Willard Scott** is 79. Auto racer **Janet Guthrie** is 75. Entertainment executive **Michael Eisner** is 71. Actor **John Heard** is 67. Pro Football Hall-of-Famer **Franco Harris** is 63. Pro and College Football Hall-of-Famer **Lynn Swann** is 61. Actor **Bryan Cranston** is 57. International Tennis Hall-of-Famer **Ivan Lendl** is 53. Singer-actress **Taylor Dayne** is 51. Opera singer **Denyce Graves** is 49. Comedian **Wanda Sykes** is 49. Actor **Peter Sarsgaard** is 42. Actress **Rachel Weisz** is 42. Actress **Jenna Fischer** is 39.



**Cranston**

## LOOKING BACK

**1876:** Alexander Graham Bell received a patent for his telephone.

**1926:** The first successful trans-Atlantic radio-telephone conversations took place between New York and London.

**1965:** A march by civil rights demonstrators was violently broken up at the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Ala., by state troopers and a sheriff's posse in what came to be known as "Bloody Sunday."

## JOKES ON US

Wife texts husband on a cold winter morning: "Windows frozen."

Husband texts back: "Pour some lukewarm water over it."

Wife texts back five minutes later: "Computer's completely not working now."

Walter E. Welsb, Brookside Village

Send jokes to jokes@chron.com.

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## HEALTHY LIVING

Advertisement

### Botox for managing migraine pain

**Q:** Can Botox injections help relieve my chronic migraines?



**AHMED SEWIELAM, M.D., F.I.P.P.**

**A:** "In my own practice, Botox injections have shown to be effective in treating migraine pain and decreasing the incidents of migraine attacks," says Ahmed Sewielam, M.D., F.I.P.P., chief of the Spine Center and Interventional Pain Management at Kelsey-Seybold Clinic. "The treatment doesn't promise to put an end to the migraines, but the injections have certainly shown to mitigate them."

Dr. Sewielam says Botox injections, which he administers to the patient's scalp and upper neck, do not necessarily offer immediate relief.

"Depending on the individual, it usually takes between three and eight days for the injections to offer relief and decrease the number of weekly migraine attacks," he says. "Most of the time, the patient will require repeat injections about every three months for the Botox to remain effective."

Long known for the cosmetic advantage of smoothing wrinkles, researchers believe that Botox injections help to settle nerve endings which can trigger a migraine attack.

"For patients to qualify for Botox injections, they need to be experiencing at least three attacks per week and fail to find significant relief from more conservative measures with a neurologist," he says.

Dr. Sewielam says other treatment options include prescription medications and doctor-monitored lifestyle strategies that can help decrease the pain and frequency of migraines.

"If you're a migraine sufferer, you should first see a neurologist for a physical assessment to evaluate medical conditions that could be causing your attacks, and to discuss treatment options," advises Dr. Sewielam, who is accepting new patients for Botox injections (only by physician referral) at Kelsey-Seybold's Fort Bend Medical and Diagnostic Center, and Main Campus near the Texas Medical Center.

Call 713-442-7587 to schedule an appointment or to find a physician at Kelsey-Seybold Clinic.



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