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SEPTEMBER 9 - 22, 2026

QUEER

40 YEARS IN BLACK & WHITE

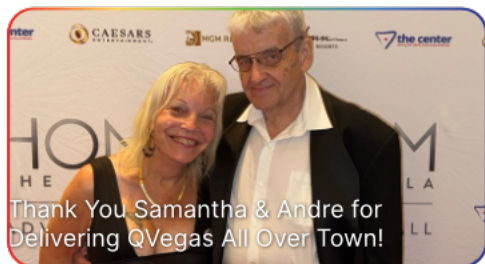
Morgan McMichaels headlines,
Miss Ruby reigns, and AFAN steps
into its next chapter.



With a proud publishing legacy that dates back to 1978, QVegas has been at the heart of Las Vegas' LGBTQ+ community for over four decades. What began as a grassroots newsletter has evolved into a dynamic weekly publication that informs, celebrates, and amplifies queer voices across Southern Nevada. QVegas is available in print at over 30 LGBTQ+ establishments, community nonprofits, and partner advertiser locations, making it a vital part of the local scene.

Beyond the printed page, QVegas connects with readers through a robust digital presence—on the web, across all major social media platforms, in our dedicated iOS app, and through weekly email blasts that keep the community in the know. Our coverage spans nightlife, entertainment, politics, health, advocacy, and the everyday stories that make up the diverse LGBTQ+ experience in Las Vegas.

As an advertiser-supported publication, QVegas is the most effective way to reach LGBTQ+ locals and visitors alike—offering unparalleled access to one of the city's most loyal and engaged audiences. In an era where equality rights are under attack nationwide, QVegas stands as a strong and unwavering community partner, committed to visibility, representation, and celebrating the power of queer voices.



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A Touch of Ruby: For the first time in forty years, the dress code bends — and Andrew Ryan explains why the party still matters at all.

Six days apart this month, this community does the two things it has always had to do at once.

On Sept. 19, AFAN's Black & White Party turns 40 at KAOS. On Sept. 25, Silver State Equality hands out its annual awards at The Vanderpump. One traces back to a Henderson apartment where about 25 people brought canned goods instead of birthday gifts — the black-and-white labels on those generic cans accidentally naming a Las Vegas institution. The other exists because a 47-candidate endorsement slate doesn't build itself.

Both of our lead stories are, underneath, the same question: what makes a promise outlast the people who first made it?

AFAN's answer this year involved a balance sheet. The organization now sits under The Center's umbrella alongside Golden Rainbow — brands intact, charters intact, fundraising earmarked so a dollar raised at Black & White lands where the person who spent it intended. John Waldron makes a persuasive case and the filings mostly back him. We also think it's fair to keep watching what happens when one organization becomes the dominant provider of both LGBTQ+ and HIV services in Southern Nevada. Reporting honestly on our own institutions isn't disloyalty; it's the only version of loyalty worth anything.

Silver State Equality's answer runs through the ballot. André Wade's slate spans Congress to school board — and



school board is where this fight actually gets waged here more often than not.

Fittingly, Larry Edwards — Hot Chocolate, a Las Vegas fixture for as long as most of us have been going out — appears at the party as Miss Ruby, the anniversary stone made flesh. Forty years of showing up, embodied by someone who did.

Buy a ticket. Wear your ruby. Then find out who's actually running in your district.



Russ White & Garrett Pattiani
Publishers, QVegas & QLife Media

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Virgo
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September 2026

Honey, August is YOUR month to absolutely slay! Venus is serving looks in your romance sector—if you're single, strut into that coffee shop like you own it, because someone's about to be mesmerized. Career-wise, Mercury's got your back for that promotion, darling. Trust your instincts and speak up! Financially, be smart with those coins. Take care of yourself, queen—meditation and self-love are non-negotiable. You're a star, and this month, everyone needs to see it!

via QVegas

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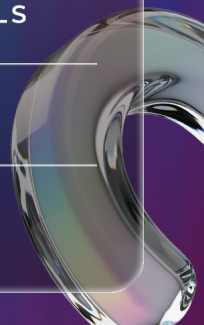
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He Inherited a Legacy. Then He Had to Top It Every Year. **A decade inside the Black & White Party with AFAN's Andrew Ryan.**

Andrew Ryan has spent a decade producing Las Vegas's most anticipated night out. This year, AFAN's Black & White Party turns 40 — and enters a new chapter under the Center.

The first time Andrew Ryan walked into a Black & White Party, he was not carrying a clipboard. He was in drag.

He'd been invited by his castmates from a show he was performing in, and the group decided to go together. He knew enough about the event's reputation to understand it wasn't the HRC gala and it wasn't the honorarium — the theme ran a little more risqué, the room a little looser, the costumes a lot more committed. So he committed.

"I remember I was wearing a very revealing costume," Ryan says now, more than a decade later. "Looking back at the pictures, I'm glad it was more than a decade ago, because I don't think I have the body for it now."

That was Ryan the attendee. Ryan the producer arrived a few years later, and he arrived at the deep end.

The Aria year

Ryan marked ten years with Aid for AIDS of Nevada in June. This year's Black & White Party is his tenth — and his first, on the production side, happened to be the 30th anniversary edition, held at Aria. It remains the only time in the party's history it has been staged there.

"Because it was the 30th anniversary,

they really went all out," he says. "Everything was bigger, everything was better than it had been before." There was a sprawling roster of liquor and food vendors. The Las Vegas Weekly put the party on its cover — the kind of mainstream placement that most LGBTQ+ fundraisers in this town spend years chasing. For a young event producer, watching that level of community support land in real time was thrilling.

It was also, he admits, terrifying.

"It raised the bar for every event that came after. And me getting into it not knowing that I was going to be responsible for a piece of that was exciting, but also really scary — because it's a legacy event that people have really come to know and love in the community."

That's the particular burden of inheriting something that already works. Nobody hands you a Black & White Party and asks you to fix it. They hand it to you and ask you not to break it, then quietly expect you to make it better anyway.

A year to build one night

Ten years later, that anxiety has become a working method.

Ryan describes the annual cycle as a full twelve months — brainstorming, then close collaboration with the small group of people who make the event physically possible, then what he calls a slow build: a pyramid of staff, volunteers and supporters assembled underneath the party until it can hold the weight of a thousand expectations.

The pressure, fittingly, comes from the people having the best time.

"The most feedback I get is usually when I'm at the door at the end of the event and people are, shall I say, stumbling out," he says. They mumble their excitement. Best one ever. Can't wait for next year. "Which sort of sets the expectation that you always have to outdo yourself."

In a decade, he says, there has never been a serious complaint about the party — remarkable for an open-bar event of this scale. What he gets instead are suggestions. Things people would love to see. Ideas they've had since last October.

That's the design problem he's been solving for ten years. The cause doesn't change. HIV doesn't take a year off. So the reinvention has to happen everywhere else — in the theme, the room, the run of show, the reason someone who came last year needs to come again.

"We have to reinvent ways to keep people interested and excited about it," he says. "It takes a lot of time and a lot of collaborative work and a lot of creative thinking to reinvent the wheel every year."

The night the room went quiet

Ask Ryan for the moment that has stayed with him and he doesn't reach for a headliner or a sold-out room. He reaches for a silence.

Two years ago, at the Palms, AFAN marked the organization's own 40th anniversary — an occasion that arrived two years ahead of the party's. The team



decided the night needed to do more than raise money. It needed to remind the room why the room existed.

"A lot of people want to go out and have a drink and party," Ryan says. "But when you forget the purpose behind that, it can dilute the energy in the room."

What they built was a video package. It opened with a recorded ballad that transitioned into a live vocal performance, then moved through the global history of HIV and AIDS — imagery Ryan describes as genuinely painful to look at, and honest about what the era actually was. From there it cut to AFAN's own archive: the AIDS Walk on the Las Vegas Strip, the party's migration into larger and larger properties, the themes growing more ambitious year over year.

The timing of that decision matters. Each year, a larger share of the people in that ballroom did not live through the crisis. They came up in an era of PrEP and single-tablet regimens, where an HIV diagnosis is a manageable chronic condition rather than a death sentence — which is a triumph, and also a kind of amnesia. AFAN used its own 40th to pull the room back toward the thing that made it necessary.

"There was a moment I remember very vividly, looking around, where everyone had their eyes glued on this giant screen and had tears in their eyes," Ryan says. "As an event producer, that's a moment I'll never forget. It reminded me of the power we hold to impact people's hearts

and minds and inspire them to make change."

It's the same thing he wants from every AFAN production — Black & White, the AIDS Walk, Blue Christmas. After ten years, he says, the DNA of those events is more or less indistinguishable from his own.

What he wants out of them comes in two parts. First, that anyone attending for the first time leaves inspired to make an impact, whatever that means for them: a donation, a volunteer shift, or simply a sharper instinct toward generosity.

Second — and this is the one he repeats — that the people AFAN serves recognize themselves in the room.

"The people we serve are at the event," he says. "It's equally important for them to look around and see they're surrounded by a community that will stand up for them, walk for them, cheer for them, support them, and fill their heart with a sense of hope. The person you're impacting might be someone you'll never meet. But they also might be standing right next to you."

Powered by the Center

This year's party is the first since AFAN and Golden Rainbow came under the umbrella of the LGBTQIA+ Community Center of Southern Nevada — a consolidation of three of the most established organizations in the valley, now operating as one.

Ryan's read from the events side is



If You Go

AFAN's 40th Annual Black & White Party
Saturday, Sept. 19 | KAOS Nightclub,
Palms Casino Resort

VIP reception 7 p.m. | General
admission 8 p.m. | Event ends 11 p.m.

Tickets: afanlv.org

The dress code, officially: as much black and white as you like, or as little as you can get away with — plus a touch of ruby for the milestone year. Ruby is the fortieth-anniversary stone, and this is the first time in the party's history the palette has expanded to include a color.

Hosts: Freddy Godinez and Alexander Stabler of Fredric Alexander return.

On the lineup: Morgan McMichaels ("RuPaul's Drag Race"), FANTASY, Melody Sweets, Nicky Saturn, Jennifer Romas and Sexxy the Show, Vegas! The Show, DJ Lexto, Dale Blackheart Production with the cast of Monday Mania, and casts from Piranha Nightclub, Gipsy Nightclub, The Phoenix and Taste the Show! Larry Edwards — Hot Chocolate — appears as a living ruby. Complimentary food and beverage samplings run between sets.

The Right to Wear Red: ten community leaders are honored each year with permission to break the dress code entirely, standing out in red across a room of black and white. This year: Brett Pruneau; Christopher Melton (Las Vegas Sands); Collin Martin (Piranha & Gipsy); Heather Smith (Gilead); Jennifer Romas (Sexxy the Show); Jessica Beesley (Breakthru Beverage Group); Maria Montes-Mendoza (Las Vegas TGA Planning Council); Randee Stewart (Las Vegas Men's Chorus); Sean VanGorder; and Tina Yan, former AFAN board president.

Presented in collaboration with Love! Live! U=U. More on Undetectable equals Untransmittable and local resources at uequalsulas.com.



straightforward: more room to grow, and a bigger audience to grow into.

"These are three beloved organizations in the community, and the feedback has been overwhelmingly positive," he says. "It's all about figuring out ways to make the line from diagnosis to care a very straight and easy line for anyone, regardless of their access."

That line, he argues, has gotten harder to walk over the past decade, not easier. The obstacles between a person and the organizations built to help them have multiplied — in eligibility paperwork, in transportation, in the simple problem of knowing which door to knock on first. A single point of entry, covering general health rather than HIV and AIDS alone, is his answer to that.

"Seeing the availability and access to care streamlined, becoming more of a one-stop shop for all health — I think that's really important for our community, especially in these challenging times," he says. "We're now powered by an organization with wonderful resources and an incredible team who are already out there making a huge difference. I think you'll see very quickly a much bigger impact in the way we're able to serve the community."

What's new: a touch of ruby

Which brings us to the 40th. Ruby is the stone of the fortieth anniversary, and while red is historically reserved for honorees, the dress code is bending to accommodate a color.

Black and white ensembles still rule the night. But guests are now invited to enhance them with a touch of ruby — and Ryan expects the room to take that invitation and run with it. Ruby jewelry. Ruby shoes. Ruby clutches. A great deal of sparkle in a room that has spent four decades in monochrome.

"We've had themes, but we've never expanded with a color," he says.

The bigger swing is that the ruby isn't staying on the guests. This year it's being embodied — by Las Vegas legend Larry Edwards, better known as Hot Chocolate, who will appear as the Ruby itself. Edwards factors into the run of show, anchors a photo op that stays live through the evening, and then leads the crowd out to the official afterparty at Piranha and Gipsy.

Ryan is clear-eyed about why that matters beyond the gag. Even a decade ago, he says, the future of events was



already Instagrammability — the vignette, the backdrop, the shot that leaves the room and keeps working all week. A theme is fun. A theme that generates twenty distinct photo opportunities is a marketing budget.

"What's exciting about this year is that you're going to have so many different photo ops that stand alone outside of the theme," he says, "but still wrap in the black and white elements people have come to know and love."

The fiftieth

So what does the 50th look like?

"The goal of anybody working in a nonprofit space is to put yourself out of work," he says. "It would be the ideal situation that you've done all you could do for your community, and your job doesn't need to exist anymore. And that's true of everyone in the nonprofit sector."

Short of that, he wants expanded access to PrEP, and he wants U=U to keep doing what it has already done. The shorthand — Undetectable equals Untransmittable — refers to the now well-established finding that a person on effective treatment with a sustained undetectable viral load cannot transmit HIV sexually. It has reshaped prevention messaging, and, Ryan argues, it has reshaped something harder to measure.

"It's changed the way that people look at HIV and AIDS," he says. "I think we've seen it come so far so quickly."

His asks for the next decade follow from that: access pushed deeper into the communities disproportionately affected, and sustained government support to keep that messaging reaching the people who most need to see it. In a funding environment that has grown considerably less friendly to exactly that kind of outreach, neither is guaranteed.

Which may be the strongest argument for a party that has survived four decades of politics without missing a year.

"People are already planning their outfits for next year, and the people who didn't get to go are having major FOMO," Ryan says. "Regardless of what happens on the politics side of HIV and AIDS, you're always going to see the community rallying behind these events."

Forty years in, that's not nostalgia. It's a business plan.



When The Center announced on July 22 that it had acquired both AFAN and Golden Rainbow, the first question in a lot of living rooms was whether the community was about to lose them. CEO John Waldron's answer was no, and the structure of the deal backs him up. AFAN — founded in 1984, the oldest HIV/AIDS service organization in Nevada — keeps its name and its federal charter, now governed by The Center's board. Every dollar of HIV prevention, treatment, education and outreach work continues to carry the AFAN brand.

"We didn't want to lose the brand, and we didn't want to lose the legacy of AFAN," Waldron told QVegas.

The conversations date back to 2019, Waldron's first year as CEO, but accelerated over the past twelve months into full due diligence on both sides. He points to the federal funding environment as the driver — organizations across the sector asking where they can combine rather than each chasing the same shrinking pool of grants. AFAN's own recent audits had carried going-concern findings, though Waldron rejects the rescue framing. "None of the organizations involved were necessarily sinking," he said. "But we saw a clear path forward of strength by all of us working together."

For anyone buying a ticket this year, the most relevant commitment is where the money lands. Proceeds from AFAN's fundraising traditions are earmarked, not pooled into a general Center fund. The AIDS Walk and the Black & White Party will continue to fund the work under the AFAN name — covering the needs that grants don't reach.



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JON RALSTON

Founder & CEO of The Nevada Independent
Equality Advocate Award

Nevada's statewide LGBTQ+ civil rights group has endorsed from the governor's race down to the Clark County School Board — and taken a position on two ballot questions.

Silver State Equality has built out a 2026 slate that now runs 47 candidates deep, from the top of the statewide ticket to two school board seats, plus recommendations on a pair of ballot questions.

Nevada's statewide LGBTQ+ civil rights nonprofit rolled out the last of the endorsements across late August and early September, capping a cycle of announcements with five races on Sept. 1. Three weeks later, on Sept. 25, the organization holds its annual Silver State Equality Awards at the Soleia Beach Rooftop Pool at The Vanderpump Hotel on the south Strip.

State Director André C. Wade has framed the slate as a response to conditions in Washington, saying the Trump administration is advancing an aggressive anti-LGBTQ+ agenda and that Nevadans need officials at every level willing to stand up to discrimination.

Top of the ticket

Governor — Aaron Ford. The two-term attorney general faces Republican incumbent Joe Lombardo in what the Cook Political Report rates a toss-up, one of the most competitive governor's races in the country. Wade praised Ford for putting people before politics. Ford, in a statement, pledged to keep defending civil rights and said discrimination has no place in Nevada. If he wins, he'd be the state's first Black governor.

Lieutenant Governor — Sandra Jauregui. The Assembly majority leader and Oct. 1 shooting survivor was a driving force behind the constitutional amendment enshrining marriage equality in Nevada — a point both she and Wade emphasized. Jauregui didn't pull punches at her opponent, accusing incumbent Lt. Gov. Stavros Anthony and what she called his MAGA allies of running a culture of corruption.

Attorney General — Nicole Cannizzaro.

The state Senate majority leader is running for the seat Ford is vacating.

Secretary of State — Cisco Aguilar. The incumbent is seeking a second term.

Treasurer — Dr. Tya Mathis-Coleman.

Deputy treasurer of college savings and administrator of the Millennium Scholarship, she won the June primary with 55% and carries the endorsement of her termed-out boss, Zach Conine.

Congress

Silver State Equality endorsed all four Democratic House candidates: Dina Titus in CD1, Susie Lee in CD3 and Steven Horsford in CD4, plus Teresa Benitez-Thompson in the open CD2 seat. The former Assembly majority leader is chasing a Northern Nevada district Democrats have never won — Cook rates it R+7 — but it's open for the first time in 15 years with Rep. Mark Amodei stepping aside.

Ballot questions

The group recommends yes on Question 6, which it frames as protecting reproductive rights, and no on Question 7, which it describes as a voter suppression measure.

The Legislature

The bulk of the slate is legislative: seven state Senate candidates and 25 in the Assembly. Three are openly LGBTQ+ — Sen. Melanie Scheible in Senate District 6, Cecelia Gonzalez in Assembly District 16 and Ryan Hampton in Assembly District 9. The Assembly list runs from downtown Las Vegas to Reno and includes returning names like Selena Torres-Fossett, Venicia Considine, David Orentlicher, Elaine Marzola, Shea Backus and Tracy Brown-May.

Local races

Clark County Commission, District E — Tick Segerblom. Mayor of North Las Vegas — Daniele Monroe-Moreno, the Assembly speaker pro tempore and state Democratic Party chair. Mayor of Reno — Kate Marshall, the former lieutenant

governor and state treasurer who took 45% of the June primary and faces vice-mayor Kathleen Taylor. Washoe County Commission, District 5 — Brian Wadsworth, who is openly LGBTQ+.

Two Clark County School Board seats round it out: incumbent Brenda Zamora in District D, who is openly LGBTQ+ and faces David Gomez, and incumbent Linda Cavazos in District G, a family therapist on the board since 2017 who faces Paul Casey. Both races skipped the primary — only two candidates filed in each — and go straight to Nov. 3.

Those two seats carry weight past the obvious. School boards set the policies governing curriculum, restroom access, and name and pronoun practices, and they decide how a district responds when LGBTQ+ students are targeted. In a state whose Legislature meets every other year, trustees make the consequential calls in between.

Silver State Equality's published criteria are strict: a candidate must be 100% in support of LGBTQ+ equality, must be viable, and must complete a questionnaire and interview. In local races, the group says it endorses only exceptional LGBTQ+ candidates, with the aim of building a bench for higher office — which makes the two straight incumbents on the school board list a deliberate exception.

The awards night

The Sept. 25 reception honors two people who have shaped how Nevada talks about LGBTQ+ issues from very different chairs. Las Vegas Mayor Shelley Berkley receives the Equality Ally Award. Jon Ralston, founder and CEO of The Nevada Independent, receives the Equality Advocate Award — a nod to a journalist whose Carson City coverage has been required reading for most of four decades.

Doors open at 6 p.m. at 3595 Las Vegas Blvd. South. Tickets and sponsorships are at silverstateequality.org.

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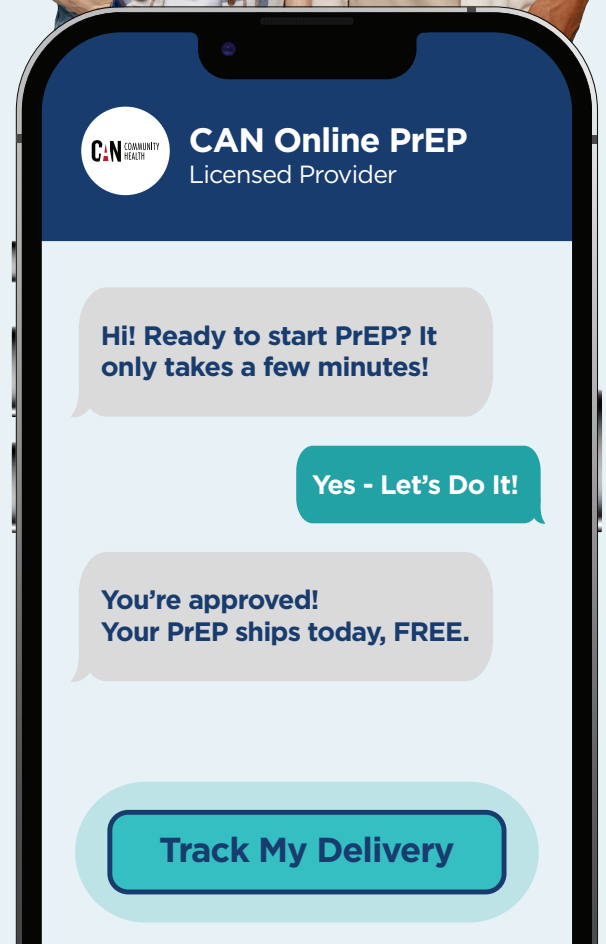
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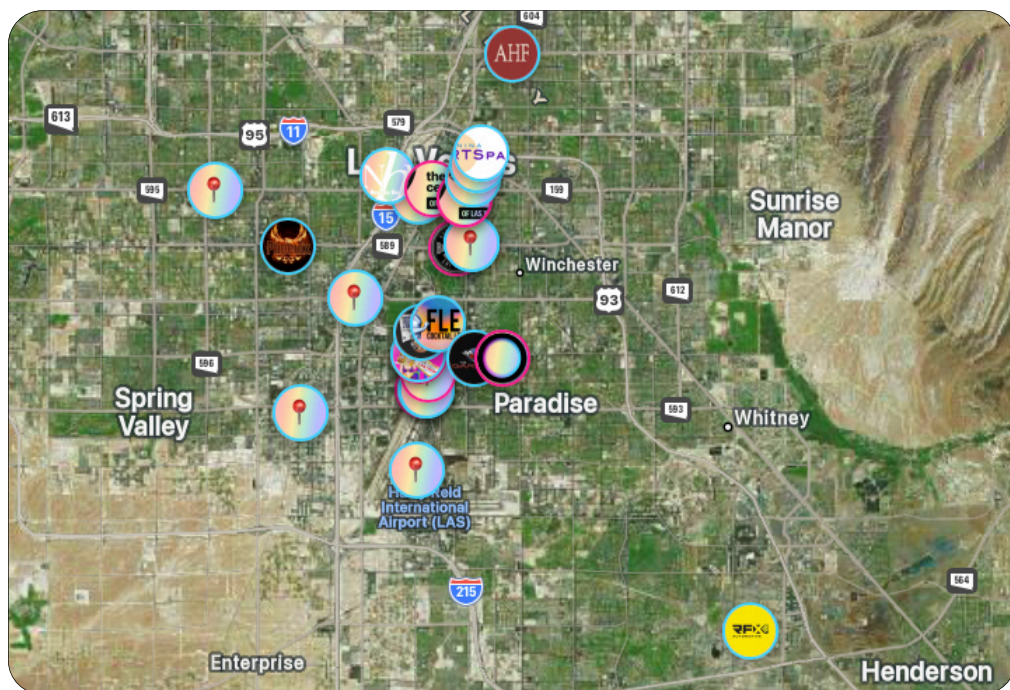
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