



# WILTON MANORS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## ***“The Story of JJ’s Den/The Otherside”***

by Mary Ulm, Adrienne Foland and Ron Ulm

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### MINI-ARCHIVE BACKGROUND NOTES

As part of Wilton Manors’ celebration of its 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, WMHS created a number of presentations citing various generally-accepted milestones in the city’s history. Amongst those were noting *Chardees Dinner Club* as the first gay establishment on Wilton Drive, and *Georgie’s Alibi*, as the first gay bar.

We’ve since learned that ***The Palms Restaurant/Cabaret***, which **opened in 1986** at 2209 Wilton Drive (current home of The Eagle), preceded Chardees in the same location. It was described in a restaurant review in the *Sun-Sentinel* as “catering to a largely homosexual clientele.”



*[Click to see an article about “The Palms” on page 2]*

Regarding the first gay bar, a longtime resident approached us after a presentation. She said that ***“JJ’s Den”***, a lesbian bar, **which opened in July 1981**, preceded any other gay business in the city by several years. We have since confirmed that not only was JJ’s Den the first gay bar in the city, but the second lesbian bar in all-of Broward County (It was preceded by a few months by the conversion of gay male *“Tops”* in Hollywood to a lesbian club).



*[Click to see a sample “Tops” ad on page 3]*

To uncover its story, we interviewed owners, patrons, residents and city officials of the era. We also reviewed state records, regional newspapers, and ads in gay publications--spanning its 16 ½ years at 2283 Wilton Drive (now home of The Pub).

As context, consider the demographics of Wilton Manors in 1981. It was a heterosexual community with small-town values. The Wilton Drive business district, for the most part, shut down at night.

It is in this unlikely setting that business partners **Jill Friedfeld, Jack Haas, and Beverly McMahon** opened a lesbian social club, *JJ’s Den*; using the space where Beverly had been running a straight bar called *Mr. C’s Pub* since 1975. The new club’s amenities included a pool table, jukebox, piano bar, giant screen TV to watch daytime soap operas, and a small kitchen for food service. Most Wilton Manors residents, busy raising their families, paid little attention to the new venture.



*[Click to see grand-opening photos and an early ad on page 4]*

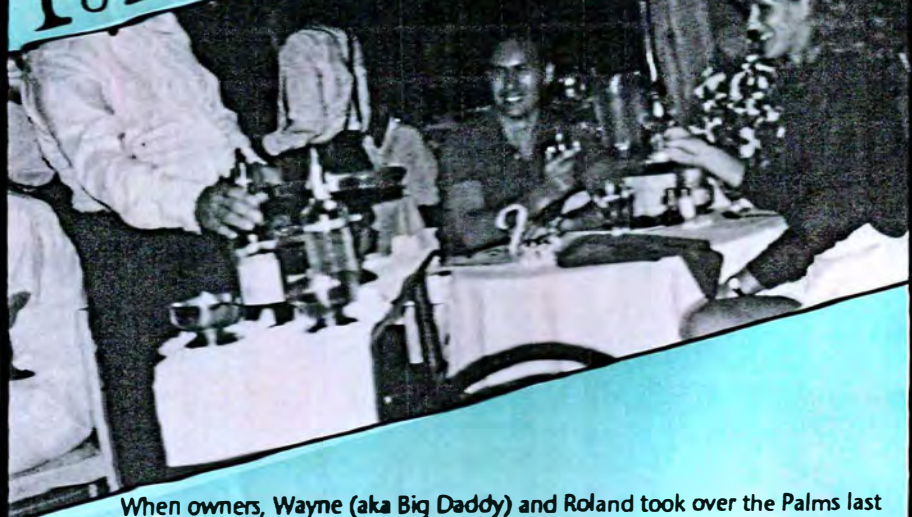
The *“J’s”* in the bar’s name incorporated various *“J’s”* associated with the bar during the 1980s. An early logo even featured the first names of owner Jill and her friend *“Jae”*; who served as a bar host. But soon *“Jae”* was replaced by *“MJ”*; a singer and musician. At owner Beverly’s urging, the bar became ***JJ’s Otherside*** in 1982. No names were made a part of the new logo.



*[Click to see ads illustrating different logos on page 5]*

## COVER STORY

### The PALMS



When owners, Wayne (aka Big Daddy) and Roland took over the Palms last January, they set out to create one of the finest restaurants around. In the eight months since then, their hard work and adherence to the strictest of standards has achieved just that. The Palms restaurant has become known for its' fine food, entertainment and super friendly staff. All of this set in an elegant yet relaxed atmosphere.

When you first walk in, you're made to feel very welcome. Your host, Joe, and manager Bob, always greet you with a smile. If you wish, stroll over to the cocktail lounge and say hi to bartenders Jimmy, John and Eddie. There's no attitude here, just fast and friendly service. Maybe that's why it's such a popular gathering spot.

Entertainment is provided to set the mood 7 nights a week. Love Overboard performs on the stage Thurs. - Sat. and Dennis plays at the piano Sun. - Wed. and Fri. & Sat. during happy hour.

Is anyone hungry yet? You better be. Their continental menu offers something for everyone. Your waiters, Carl, Jimmy, Russ and Brian work hard to make everyone's evening a special memory. And remember, it's the attention to detail which makes the difference here. The steaks are properly aged and hand cut by their chef. Other entrees include three veal dishes, five poultry, two seafood and two Italian. And what's their specialty? They boast the finest prime rib and surf'n turf in Fort Lauderdale. For those of you who enjoy a lighter fare, the Palms proudly serves a great Caesar Salad for two.

Are you full yet? Uh, uh, not allowed! Make sure to save room for desert. Your waiter will prepare Bananas Foster right at your table. What a great way to impress your date.

The Palms Restaurant is open 7 days a week from 5 p.m. till? It's located in Wilton Manors at 2209 Wilton Dr. You can reach them at 563-2033. If you are planning a party, contact their catering manager and he will ~~help~~ work with you to assure its'

TOPS LOUNGE - SOUTH FLORIDA'S BEST KNOWN WOMYN'S CLUB  
2027 Pembroke Road, Hollywood, Florida 921-6563  
Free parking for 400 cars, Tops customers only  
Winner of 1980 David Award for Best Disco of the Year

## Hollywood's Showcase



# Maxine Davis

## Appearing

## Saturday

## August 1, 1981

at



# TOPS Lounge

Appearing live  
Mon & Tues nights,  
direct from Boston...  
**NANNETTE**  
at the piano bar.

Friday & Saturday  
**PARTY TIME!**

Wednesday  
Talent show at  
Midnight.  
1st prize \$50.00 cash.  
If you can do it in  
Public - you can do it  
Here!  
"K.W." at the piano  
Lee leads the show.

Thursday  
**UNITY NIGHT**  
The Fabulous "Gypsy"  
& His Fire Dance

Sunday  
Free Buffet  
Neil Martin & Friends

and every night, it's  
WOMYN WIMMIN WOMYN WIMMIN WOMYN WIMMIN WOMYN

the weekly news, Jul 29, 1981

# GALA OPENING OF JJ's DEN



Photos by Tee Jay Johnston

WE WANT TO THANK EVERYONE  
FOR THEIR SUPPORT  
FOR MAKING OUR GRAND OPENING  
SUCH A SUCCESS!

# JJ's DEN

A PRIVATE RENDEZVOUS



A VERY WARM AND  
INTIMATE ATMOSPHERE  
FOR MEN AND WOMEN

Your bartenders Edith, Brenda, and Scott,  
and hosts Jill and Jae are here  
to serve the very best  
in Fort Lauderdale . . . YOU.

featuring  
ANIMAL CRACKERS  
Delicious food served by Lise.

Wednesday Night Pool Tournament

Giant screen TV Join us for the  
ABC daytime soap operas.

12:30 - 3:00 P.M.  
Bring your own crying towel, please.

JJ's Den  
2283 Wilton Drive  
Wilton Manors  
561-0242

MONDAY THROUGH FRIDAY 12PM - 2AM  
SATURDAY 12PM - 3AM  
SUNDAY 12PM - 2AM

the weekly news, Oct 14, 1981

# M & J's DEN

A PRIVATE RENDEZVOUS....

2283 Wilton Drive  
Wilton Manors 561-0242

A VERY WARM  
AND INTIMATE  
ATMOSPHERE  
FOR MEN  
AND WOMEN

**SANDI'S SUNDAY DINNER**  
GOULASH!  
AND CORN ON THE COB

featuring  
**SANDI'S**  
Yum-Yums  
Served noon til ?

Your Bartenders  
**SANDI, VAL and BARBARA**  
Your Hosts **JILL and M.J.**

LIVE ENTERTAINMENT  
EVERY SAT. AND SUN.

**WANNA PLAY BALL??**  
Meet here every Sunday - 10A.M.

MONDAY THROUGH FRIDAY 12P.M. - 2A.M.  
SATURDAY 12P.M. - 3A.M.  
SUNDAY 12P.M. - 2A.M.

CONGRATULATIONS TO  
**BARBARA AND SANDI**  
ON THEIR WEDDING  
OCTOBER 12, 1981

LOVE ALWAYS,  
JILL AND BEV  
MJ AND KATIE



[Click to return to Page 1](#)

In Town Exposure , (no date), 1989

The All New...

Memberships  
Coming  
Soon

a niteclub for  
women & friends

# OTHER SIDE

DON'T MISS...

**SENSIBLE  
PUMPS**

Rock N Roll  
Rhythm N Blues  
September 15 & 19



**ALL FEMALE BAND**

THE OTHERSIDE IS HERE WITH  
SUMMER GAMES AND MORE FOR YOU

# SHE

HAPPY HOUR DUO

LISA



DANCES FOR YOU!

COME SEE BEV'S NEW POOL TABLE AND JOIN DIETRA  
ING THE CHAMPAGNE ROOM

## "Just Jazz"

and BLUES  
SATURDAYS 5 to 8 pm  
**MAXINE LEMARR AND  
BETTY DICKSON**



PICK UP AN EVENT CALENDAR FOR DAILY INFORMATION

**2283 WILTON DR. (N.E. 4th AVE.)  
FT. LAUDERDALE FL 565-5538**

From the beginning the club sponsored sports teams for pool, softball, and flag football. The pool team was particularly strong. *JJ's Otherside* was in the Fort Lauderdale Division of the Gold Coast Pool League—an organization for bar-sponsored teams to play one another. *JJ's Otherside* was reported in the *Sun-Sentinel* as 1987 league champions. Furthermore, *gaygames.org* reports that its billiards team won gold, silver, and bronze medals in different billiards categories at the 1990 Gay Games in Vancouver.

Unlike pool, there were no organized leagues at that time for softball or flag football. The women recruited other patrons or friends who wanted to play, and the club provided financial support when needed. *JJ's Otherside* softball team was good enough to also compete at the 1990 Gay Games.



*[Click to see team photos on page 7]*

As the bar's clientele grew, so did its need for space. Over time it was extended from a single bay storefront of its first years to four bays. As it evolved, a dance floor and bandstand were added for live entertainment and dancing. In early 1987 a grand-reopening was held, presumably after one of these renovation expansions.



*[Click to see grand-reopening photos on page 8]*

Throughout its evolution the club served as a community space for female musical talent from jazz and blues duos to all-female rock bands. One particular all-female band, "*Pink Noise*", evidently caught the attention of the legendary Smokey Robinson—who came to one of their performances. Beverly recalls that the place was packed that night. Smokey ordered a bottle of Dom Perignon, and then a second for his entourage. When Beverley saw that they had no more bottles, she called Tony Dee at Chardees and got six more bottles for their special guests!

By 1989 *JJ's Otherside* had taken on a less low-key social club, more party bar vibe. The tone of its advertisements was overtly more sexual. For example, one ad read: "Dancing, Liquor, Excitement, Games, Dancers, Sex." Another advertised female oil wrestling – "Yes! Get in the ring with Lisa and the ladies".



*[Click to see ads illustrating same on page 9]*

When Jack died of complications from AIDS in 1989, **Dietra Fischer** purchased his equity. Jill left soon thereafter over a management dispute. With no "*J's*" associated with the business, the name became simply "***The Otherside***" in late 1989. The new logo was a long-haired woman's face in silhouette.



*[Click to see sample ad; and an actual interior bar sign with the logo (now on display at the Stonewall Museum and Archives) on page 10]*

In December 1990 a rare glimpse of the bar's interior is shown as part of a full-color photo-spread that appeared in *David* magazine. Men are included among the women on a packed dance floor, lending some credence to a claim made in just about every ad – in effect, "*that gay men are welcome*". However, several senior gay residents we spoke with said that was not quite true. From their personal experiences they would say that gay men were really only welcome if accompanied by a known regular patron of the club.



*[Click to see 1990 staff, guest, and interior photos on page 11]*


Whether made to feel welcome or not, there was a general acceptance of the venue by everyone we spoke to, gay or straight. No one perceived the bar as controversial. One straight business woman with a nearby shop said that the club did not call attention to itself and that she knew the owners to all be hard-working business women.

**FEATURE**

# **IN TOWN POOL**

**FEATURE**

**AND THE WINNERS ARE...**



**J.J.'s Otherside Ladies Tuxedo Tournament**

**WINNERS**

1st Place Tammy (Center)  
2nd Place Kim (Left)  
3rd Place Insie (Right)



the weekly news, Dec 31, 1986



Photos by Jack Sturdy

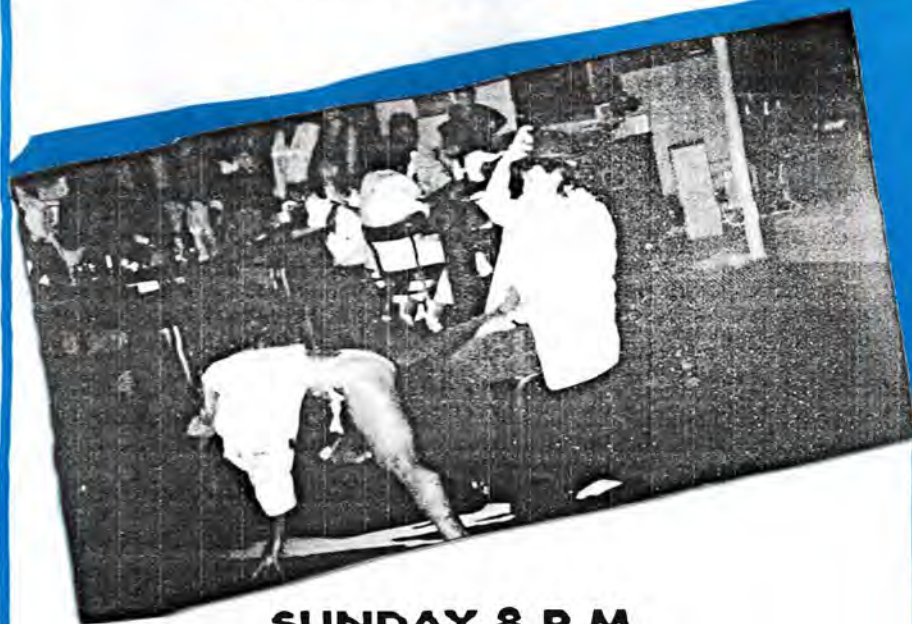


## J.J's Otherside In Ft. Lauderdale Is Changing!

**A slight face-lift is a great idea from time to time. J.J.'s Otherside is rolling toward a grand re-opening in January. Look here for further details.**



# FEMALE OIL WRESTLING



**SUNDAY 8 P.M.**  
★ **CASH PRIZES** ★

**Bar Tabs to All Competitors**

Yes - Get in the ring with Lisa and the Ladies  
Door \$3.00 8 p.m.

**FREE BUFFET**

Dance & Drink  
Support **The ONLY LADIES CLUB!!!**

2283 WILTON DR. (N.E. 4th AVE.) FT. LAUDERDALE, FLORIDA

**DANCING  
LIQUOR  
EXCITEMENT  
GAMES  
DANCERS  
SEX**

**W  
O  
M  
E  
N**

*it's*

**OTHER SIDE**

FOR WOMEN  
AND FRIENDS

**Pick up your  
calendar of events at door**

HOURS: SAT. - SUN. 1 P.M. • WEEKLY 4 P.M.

2283 WILTON DR. (N.E. 4th AVE.) FT. LAUDERDALE, FLORIDA

THE *Otherside*

**\$1,000.00 IN PRIZES FOR THE  
Greatest, Funniest, Scariest Costume**

**HALLOWEEN WEEKEND PARTY  
OCTOBER 28th  
SATURDAY COSTUME PARTY**

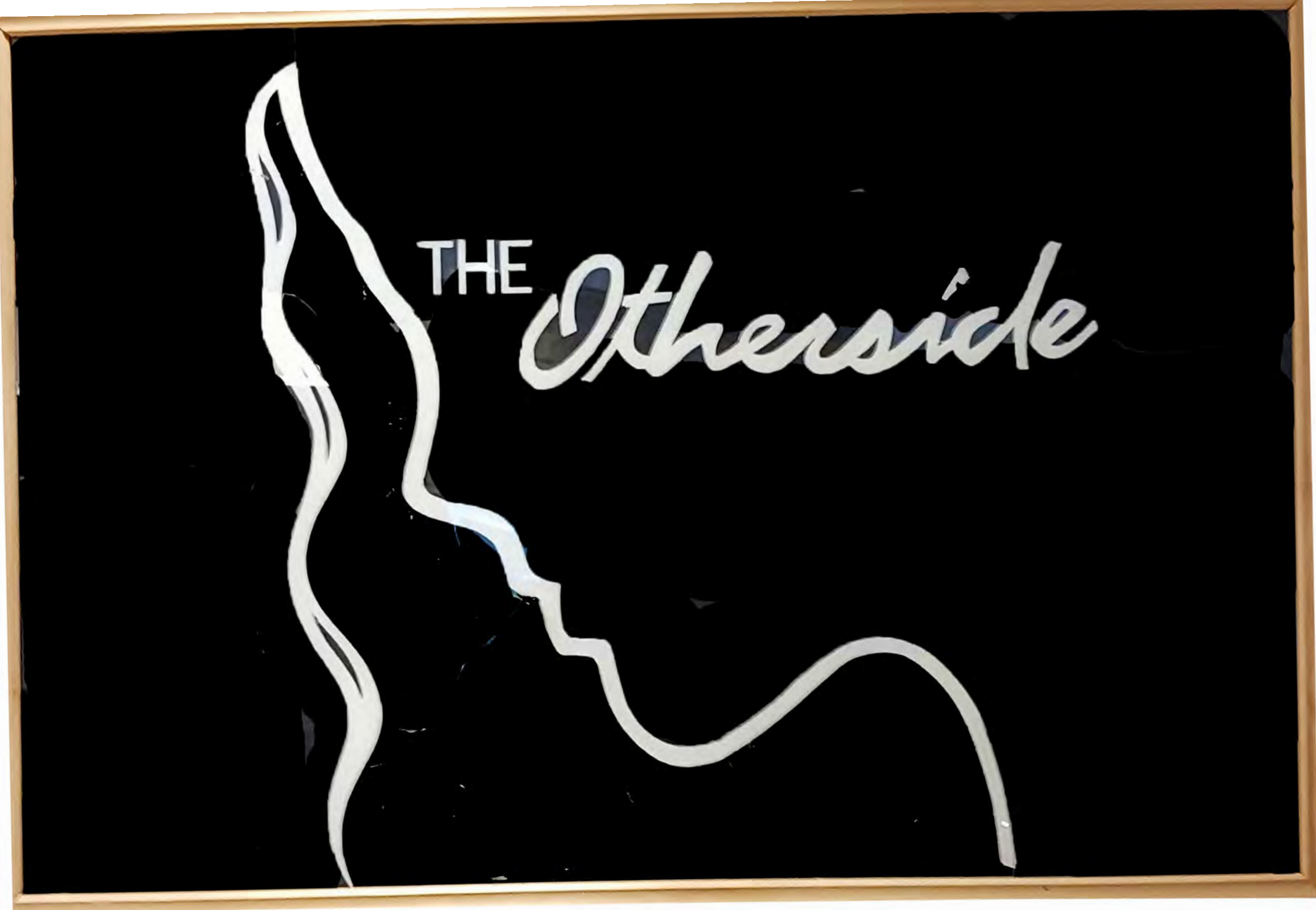
**LIVE 6 PIECE BAND  
& D.J. SALLY MOLASKY**

**MOST ORIGINAL, FUNNIEST  
"LADY" DRAG**



**and Don't Forget The  
SUNDAY FUN**

- **Dunking Apples** • **Marshmallow Contests**
- **Cidar Contests**



**The Otherside Bar Sign  
~1989-1990**

Originally called JJ's, *The Otherside* was the first LGBTQ bar in Wilton Manors until 1994 and was of primary interest to the South Florida lesbian community. This was a safe space where hundreds of women gathered and featured up-and-coming local lesbian bands.

Exhibit at Stonewall Museum & Archives



The OTHERSIDE is for Women and friends—  
the party bar of the 90's, with live bands,  
special entertainment, and fun for everyone.



However, there were indeed what might have been construed as over-zealous code enforcement inspections. This was perhaps more due to the club's popularity and acknowledged over-crowding. In that era, those inspections usually involved a team of five men made up of police, code enforcement, and the fire marshal. According to several former patrons, the inspection team would enter the bar after midnight, turn on all the house lights, and proceed to count the number of people in the space. It likely felt like a raid, even if it technically was responding to a potential public safety issue. There's no indication patrons were ID'd, photographed or arrested without probable cause.

Although *JJ's Otherside* now had a reputation as a party bar; it also had a softer side. The story goes that a patron was terminally ill with cancer. The woman's dying wish was to open a feminist bookstore, which Beverly financed. The **First Page**, located at 2219 Wilton Drive, operated for about 1 ½ years, beginning in 1989.

*The Otherside's* overall success led Beverly and Dietra to open a sister club in Atlanta in 1990—with the notion of ultimately franchising nationally. But in 1992, for reasons unclear to the writers, Dietra purchased Beverly's equity in the Wilton Manors venue and Beverly likewise purchased Dietra's equity in the Atlanta location.

Tragically in 1997 *The Otherside* in Atlanta became the second target of infamous Olympic Park bomber Eric Robert Rudolph -- resulting in five injuries, one of which was critical. The club never fully recovered after the bombing and closed in 1999.

Meanwhile, Dietra continued as the sole owner of *The Otherside* in Wilton Manors for the next five years. In 1997, **Debbie Blakely** joined her as a business partner. This was at a time when the Wilton Drive business district was undergoing a major revitalization.

*The Shoppes of Wilton Manors*, a derelict shopping plaza across the street from *The Otherside*, was rezoned as part of the city's new Arts and Entertainment District. Seeing the increased potential, **Redevco**, a noted mall development company, took over the property. By 1998, the revitalized plaza was nearly full and 90 percent of the businesses were gay-owned according to the *Miami Herald*. One was *Georgie's Alibi*--which has been widely cited as the catalyst for bringing other gay businesses to *The Shoppes* and Wilton Drive.

The influx of customers to *The Shoppes* meant less parking for the businesses along Wilton Drive--which had been using the once empty lot for their customers. That lack of parking became an issue for patrons of *The Otherside*. At the end of 1997, after a remarkable run of **16 ½ years**, *The Otherside* left Wilton Manors.

***But in that time hundreds of women enjoyed a safe space to interact, find refuge, combat social isolation, and celebrate their special moments.***

#### **-EPILOGUE-**

In 1997 *The Otherside* moved to 2509 West Broward Blvd and was renamed simply *2509 West*. An ad in the *Miami Herald* reported that the new space had ample parking and a better sound system. When the lease was not renewed in 1999, Dietra and a friend opened a new bar on Davie Boulevard. Its name reverted back to, in part, the club's original name -- "*J's*" (later "*J's-The Original*"). It appears Dietra soon left that business; but the bar, catering to a similar clientele, remained open until 2021.

Also in 1997, the **Big Dog Saloon**, a straight bar also owned by Debby Blakely, moved from the Shoppes into the former *Otherside* space. Big Dog Saloon remained in that location until 2009; then moved to "downtown" Oakland Park as **Big Dog Station**--where it remains as of this writing.

In October 2023, as part of LGBTQ+ HISTORY MONTH, the City of Wilton Manors honored Beverly McMahon as a forgotten trailblazer--celebrating her significant contributions to the history of LGBTQ+ people in our society; and to the community at-large.

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#### **-ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS-**

*Thanks to the Stonewall National Museum and Archives, and Collections Specialist Ben Smith, for making their materials available for our research project. And to our interviewees, who candidly shared their experiences.*