Jewel Thais-Williams

Nightclub Owner & LGBTQ+ Activist

b. May 9, 1939
d. July 7, 2025

"Dare to dream, no matter how impossible … With patience and perseverance, you can accomplish anything …"

Jewel Thais-Williams was a community activist and, reportedly, the first Black woman to own an LGBTQ+ nightclub in the United States.

Thais-Williams was born in Gary, Indiana, and raised in San Diego, California. She worked her way through UCLA, holding various jobs and opening a clothing store with her sister. Despite multiple intimate experiences with women, it took years for her to accept her sexuality.

Turned away from most nightclubs due to her race and gender, Thais-Williams purchased the Diana Club in Los Angeles in 1973 as a sanctuary for people unwelcome elsewhere. She renamed the club Jewel's Catch One.

As the new owner, Thais-Williams faced continued discrimination, with both regulars and employees abandoning the business. She persevered and gradually built a new customer base, mostly of Black patrons. Eventually, news circulated that Catch One was run by a lesbian, and the LGBTQ+ community began patronizing her establishment. By the early 1980s, "The Catch"— as locals called it — was the most successful Black gay discotheque in L.A. Dubbed the "the Studio 54 of the West Coast," it featured performances by superstars of the day, including Donna Summer and Chaka Khan, and attracted diverse celebrities seeking a night away from the paparazzi.

She was a pioneering Black female LGBTQ+ nightclub owner.

During the late 1970s and early '80s, police raids of LGBTQ+ businesses were commonplace, and Catch One was no different. The period also brought the scourge of AIDS, and Thais-Williams became a committed activist in support of her under-resourced community. She cofounded the Minority AIDS Project, opened a food pantry, and in 1989, with her life partner Rue Thais-Williams, founded Rue's House to provide crucial services to women and children with HIV/AIDS. From 1990 to 1995, she served on the board of AIDS Project L.A.

In 2001, after earning a master's degree in Oriental medicine, Thais-Williams used profits from Catch One to open the Village Health Foundation, a low-cost holistic community health-care facility. In 2015, after 42 years, she sold Catch One to focus exclusively on the clinic.

Thais-Williams received the Dreams of Los Angeles Award in 2012 for community service and served as Grand Marshal of the L.A. Pride Festival in 2016. In 2019, the city named the intersection in front of her former club Jewel Thais-Williams Square.

After more than three decades together, Thais-Williams married Rue and finally came out to her family. She died at 86, survived by her wife.



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