

R.I.P. Jewel Thais-Williams, Longtime HIV and LGBTQ Activist and Nightlife Legend

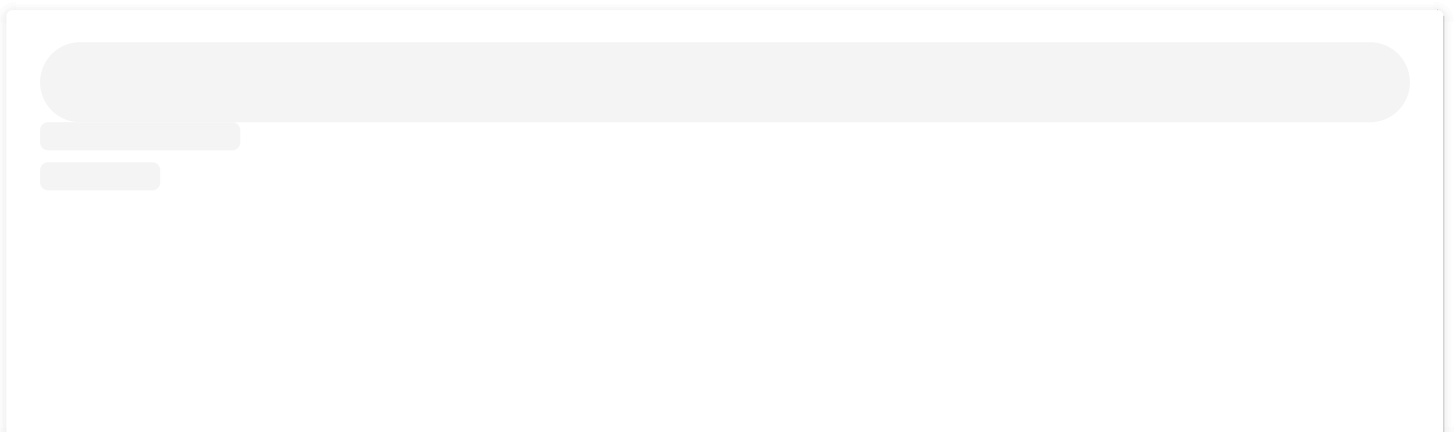
The founder of Jewel's Catch One nightclub in Los Angeles, Jewel Thais-Williams committed her life to LGBTQ and AIDS advocacy. [VIDEOS]

July 17, 2025 By Laura Schmidt

Jewel Thais-Williams, the trailblazing [AIDS](#) activist and Los Angeles nightlife legend, has died. She was 86. She founded Jewel's Catch One, the first Black-owned [LGBTQ](#) nightclub in Los Angeles and launched Rue's House, a shelter for women living with [HIV](#) and their children, as well as Village Health Foundation.

Thais-Williams was a “visionary, activist, healer and mother to many,” [reads an Instagram tribute by Catch One LA](#). “Her legacy transcends nightlife, reverberating through community health, advocacy, and the fight for acceptance and safety. She welcomed everyone under her roof and transformed our city. Today we honor her spirit and aim to carry forward her message of love, resilience, and unity at Catch One.”

“Jewel Thais-Williams was more than an icon; she was a guiding force for generations of Black LGBTQ+ people who longed to be seen, celebrated and safe. She was a tireless advocate, a revolutionary and the matriarch of a movement that has always depended on our ability to dance, love and survive,” said David Johns, MA, CEO and executive director of the National Black Justice Collective (NBJC) in [a statement](#).





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Thais-Williams was born in Indiana in 1939 and moved to San Diego as a child. She moved to [Los Angeles](#) shortly after high school and became a fierce and dedicated [advocate](#) for LGBTQ folks and people living with HIV and AIDS.

In 1973, in the face of widespread LGBTQ and racial [discrimination](#), Thais-Williams opened Jewel's Catch One, becoming the first Black woman to own a disco in the United States, according to [Windy City Times](#). For several decades, the inclusive nightclub was one of the most iconic venues in Los Angeles.

Known as "The Catch" and "Studio 54 of the West," the club was a safe space for Black, queer and marginalized people during a time of discrimination and hostility. The name, Thais-Williams has explained, stemmed from her queer male friends who would say they were going out on the prowl to "catch one," as in a hookup or boyfriend.

"[Jewel's] Catch One became a welcoming spot for the LGBTQ community and for many Hollywood stars and entertainers," wrote California Congresswoman Maxine Waters [via Facebook](#). "It became a safe haven for those who were not wanted in many places in our community. Not only did she provide a very hip and well-attended nightclub, but she also worked and created funding and resources to deal with HIV/AIDS when our country was in denial."

Donna Summer, Whitney Houston, Ella Fitzgerald and Bette Midler all frequented Catch One. In

2000, Madonna [hosted a release party](#) at Jewel's Catch One for her album Music.

In 1989, after witnessing the devastating impact of the AIDS epidemic, Thais-Williams and her wife, Rue, opened Rue's House, the first shelter for women living with HIV and their children in South Los Angeles. She also founded Village Health Foundation, a nonprofit dedicated to educating lower-income communities on nutrition and healthy living. The nonprofit also offered alternative treatments for HIV.



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In 2019, LA City Council President Herb Wesson [named the intersection](#) outside Catch One Jewel Thais-Williams Square in honor of her contributions. The club was sold in 2015 and renamed simply Catch One. The 2016 documentary [Jewel's Catch One](#) by filmmaker C. Fitz chronicled her life and that of the nightclub.

Watch the trailer for the documentary below and [on YouTube](#):

"NBJC honors Jewel's lifetime of service and the joy she made possible. We send our condolences to her wife, Rue, and all who carry forward her legacy of care and community. We will continue to

build the world she knew was possible—one rooted in Black freedom, love and infinite possibility,” Johns said.

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<http://beta.docker.realhealthmag.com/article/rip-jewel-thaiswilliams-longtime-hiv-lgbtq-activist-nightlife-legend>