2010 has been a growth year for the Plexus Education Foundation. Incorporated in late 2008, we received our formal 501(c)3 exemption from the IRS in May of 2010, which will allow us to move forward with our mission.

For those not familiar with the Foundation, we are a separate organization from the Chamber, with a focus on improving workplace environments for LGBT individuals through education, research and advocacy that will result in enrichment for all people in the workplace and business environment in Northeast Ohio.

We are very excited to announce the addition of two extraordinary new board members: the Very Reverend Tracey Lind of Trinity Cathedral and Earl Pike, former CEO of the Greater Cleveland AIDS Taskforce. Their knowledge of the community and connections within the Northeast Ohio business community will be invaluable as we move forward.

We continue to recruit additional board members who can bring a history of commitment to diversity and access to resources. We hope to round out the board with a maximum of 11 members by the end of 2011. Our board recruitment process is intended to be open and transparent, and we welcome suggestions from anyone who believes they know talented individuals who can bring meaningful contribution that will assist in the Foundation's mission.

I'm also extremely proud of our recent award of a significant grant from the Key Foundation in December 2010. This grant will allow us to launch the Northeast Ohio LGBT Employee Resource Group Series, sponsored by KeyBank. Beginning in February 2011, we will bring nationally renowned speakers from across North America to provide support and information to regional LGBT Employee Resource Groups.

In closing, we have recently concluded a remarkable year of progress. There is much work yet to be done, but we are making steady progress towards the future and our goal of creating awareness and promoting inclusion.

Looking back on 2010 our theme for the year was "many voices for a common cause." It was a message that inspired hope and mindfulness in our members, sponsors and community partners.

Plexus continued to establish its role as an organization that is vital to the economic, business and organizational development of our region, by promoting our LGBT-certified businesses, delivering programming that built better businesses, and creating awareness around LGBT workplace issues. By positioning LGBT-certified companies for contracts within organizations, we furthered our mission of providing proactive business development for LGBT and allied members.

Plexus began 2010 with a streamlined agenda aimed at fulfilling our mission and supporting our membership, and in the coming pages, you will read about many of our highlights for the year. As our programming made its regional impact, our financial position is stronger than ever. Not only did we retain all of our sponsors, but we saw increased support from nearly a third. In 2009 we had no Silver level sponsors and by the end of 2010 we are proud to report that we now have five at that level. We also welcomed new sponsorships from MetroHealth, University Hospitals and Forest City Enterprises.

The progress that Plexus made in 2010 could not have occurred without the outstanding contributions of our board of directors. Our committees expanded and six new board members came on ready to work and contribute their talents to advance the Plexus mission. We also said good-bye to David Ream, Plexus co-founder and treasurer, who left the board after four years of devoted work and service. As the leader of this organization, I am grateful for this team and their individual and collective contributions.

In closing I am reminded that our many voices are being heard. We are making an impact both economically and socially on Northeast Ohio. As LGBT business owners and professionals, our presence demonstrates that we are here to contribute and share in the prosperity of many voices for one common cause.

Eric Lutzo
Chamber Board President

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Eric Lutzo
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Looking toward the future, the Foundation board has prioritized three areas as the focus of its programming and development.

**Employee Resource Groups**
In partnership with KeyBank, the Foundation will facilitate an ongoing series of forums of LGBT-focused ERGs in the regional business community. With support from a generous grant from the Key Foundation, this series will kick off in February 2011, and will involve bringing in expert speakers each year to share their expertise and best practices with ERGs from across the region.

The Foundation will also be a resource for organizations that aspire to develop LGBT-focused ERGs. The Foundation will help facilitate an open dialogue and knowledge-sharing between ERGs by facilitating regular meetings and events.

**Professional Development**
The Foundation is working with the Weatherhead School of Management at Case Western Reserve University to develop a management program for LGBT employees in the Northeast Ohio business community.

As many LGBT professionals know, it takes increased knowledge and support to be out and to climb the corporate ladder at the same time. This program will provide opportunities for out professionals to develop enhanced skills, personal knowledge and a network of out LGBT peers. This network will assist and support members in dealing with challenges, as they seek to deliver business results for their respective organizations.

Despite the need for considerable fund raising to support its development, the Foundation plans to launch the project in 2011.

**Leadership Series**
The Foundation plans to expand the Plexus Leadership Series in 2011, as it hosts a series of nationally & internationally renowned speakers to educate the Northeast Ohio business community about issues faced by LGBT persons around workplace inclusion.

The Foundation is exploring partnerships with other regional organizations, to highlight our efforts to inform and educate the community about these issues.

Looking toward the future, the Foundation board has prioritized three areas as the focus of its programming and development.

**2010 leadership series highlights**

**LGBT-Focused Employee Resource Groups**
Stephen Gould, Out & Equal Networks

In February, the Foundation sponsored a program for organizations with existing, expanding, or aspiring LGBT-focused Employee Resource Groups. Attendees were able to share information, best practices and lessons learned about implementing, maintaining and growing their organization’s ERG. Guest speaker Stephen Gould of the Out & Equal NETWORKS! addressed the issue of creating and growing vibrant ERGs. He focused on how they can add value to the organization, through identifying and engaging potential customers and suppliers, recruiting and retaining talent in an organization’s workforce, and creating and expanding an environment of diversity and inclusion.

**Diversity Management**
Michael Guest, Retired US Ambassador

In May, the Foundation hosted a visit by retired U.S. Ambassador Michael Guest, the first openly gay U.S. ambassador, to be the keynote speaker at the 3rd Annual Diversity Management Conference at Cleveland State University. In 2008, Mr. Guest co-founded the Council for Global Equality, a coalition of 18 human rights and LGBT advocacy organizations seeking stronger U.S. support for LGBT equality at home and abroad. He shared his experience as an out diplomat, as well as discussing the status of international human rights and U.S. foreign policy around LGBT issues.
In December 2010, Plexus and COSE announced a new partnership that will bring benefits to all members. Both organizations recognize the importance of supporting the development and growth of small business, as a foundation of Northeast Ohio’s economic sector.

The most exciting aspect of this new relationship is the option for members to obtain a joint membership that will make it easy for small business owners to take advantage of all the benefits offered by both COSE and Plexus. This includes opportunities for continuing education, and reduced rates on many goods and services.

In addition to the obvious financial benefits for members, this new COSE-Plexus partnership makes it even easier for members to demonstrate their commitment to a region that values diversity and inclusive business practices.

Joint Member Benefits
- $300 Annual Joint Membership Rate
- Discounted health and insurance benefits, including health, dental, vision, life & disability, and long-term care
- Discounted payroll services, including 401k and workers’ compensation
- Small business discounts on office supplies & shipping services
- Access to fully equipped, professional meeting spaces across Northeast Ohio
- Access to the “HR Answer Desk,” which provides information on employee relations issues
- Employee Perks Program provides discounts to employees of member companies

From the time of its inception nearly 40 years ago, COSE’s focus has been to make it easier for small business owners to connect to each other and to the resources they need to be successful. With more than 15,000 members today, COSE is known and respected as an effective advocate and resource for the needs of the small business community. We recognize that creating synergies among other small business support groups in the region is critical to the rejuvenation of our economy, and therefore over the last couple of years, we have been looking for ways to increase partnerships in the small business community.

In 2009, COSE, along with our partner the Greater Cleveland Partnership, decided that it was important to support Plexus’ first Diversity Summit. At that time, it was a way for us to experience what Plexus had to offer the LGBT community and allies. Then at the beginning of 2010, COSE and Plexus came back together to explore potential partnership opportunities. Initially we identified several COSE programs between August and December that we made available to the Plexus membership at COSE member pricing. We are now looking forward to a joint membership program in 2011. As a small business owner, our relationship will provide Plexus members access to two great organizations to support your success.

So why Plexus? We believe that Plexus brings a unique perspective to the small business community. Inclusion does not stop at ethnicity, and we are seeing a movement in the corporate world to support a more diverse marketplace. COSE believes that small business can and should be at the table for this. In fact, in July 2009, COSE and MMO changed our regulations to allow same sex domestic partners to apply for health insurance coverage. This is one step toward recognizing a need to make changes that better support the diversity that exists in the community we serve, and through our new joint membership, you can take advantage of this offering!

Whether it’s supporting small business owners to promote the diversity they bring to the marketplace or supporting small business owners to embrace the diversity in their own workplace, COSE believes its partnership with Plexus will help accelerate these opportunities.
Deba Gray and her partner Serena Harrigan are co-owners of Gray’s Auctioneers & Appraisers, an LGBT-owned auction house based in the City of Cleveland. They bring more than two decades of experience in the industry, offering buyers auction and appraisal services for fine art, antiques, jewelry, rugs and other décor items.

When Gray’s opened for business in June 2007, Cleveland and the entire Northeast Ohio region were arguably already in the midst of the Great Recession. So as a start up in one of the worst economic climates, we needed to show that we were different from the competition.

One ways to stand out was to join Plexus and become certified as an LGBT-owned minority business enterprise. We are proud to be a visible, gay-owned business in Ohio, which is a state that does not have the friendliest environments for LGBT individuals, and we also wanted to be able to compete for government and corporate business. Our certification helps us get a seat at the table when the trusts and estates departments of large banks and law firms are seeking bidders.

We also realized that by networking with other LGBT business owners and professionals we were able to share knowledge and learn from other members. The business environment is constantly changing and the monthly Plexus meetings are a great forum for discussion and new ideas. We also know how to enjoy ourselves!

Plexus hosted its second annual Supplier Diversity Summit in September at Case Western Reserve University’s Diversity Center. The event, sponsored by the Weatherhead School of Management, drew 90 business owners and corporate leaders, resulting in a nearly 30 percent increase in attendance over 2009. Event participants engaged in facilitated conversations on such critical topics as corporate best practices in supplier diversity, and LGBT certification as a key part of overall business strategy. This year’s expanded programming and networking grew in part from an increased collaboration with COSE and business ally partners such as Northern Ohio Minority Supplier Diversity Council, the Ohio River Valley Business Council and the Northeast Ohio Hispanic Chamber of Commerce.

The summit garnered much praise. “The morning panel dealing with getting into supplier diversity programs provided many good recommendations to the attendees, and it was effectively facilitated,” said Humberto Sanchez, the Director of Information Technology at the Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District. “I appreciated having speakers from larger organizations fly in for this event and having participated in establishing a supplier diversity program at the District, I think the suggestions were right on point.”

The summit also received national attention from the National Gay & Lesbian Chamber of Commerce (NGLCC). “The second annual Plexus Supplier Diversity Summit was a shining example of effective programming and networking for diverse businesses, corporations and non-profits that value truly inclusive procurement practices,” said Joanna Dees, senior manager at NGLCC. “It was exciting to see a NGLCC affiliate take a proactive role to welcome minority and women-owned businesses to the table alongside certified LGBT business enterprises and those interested in becoming certified.”

Plexus looks forward to increased collaboration among its business-development partners to continue to grow the success of this event for 2011.
Plexus facilitates regular networking nights that are open to everyone. These free events provide members and guests the opportunity to meet others who are interested in being active in the LGBT & Allied business community. Attendees can expand their professional network and gain important information and insight from decision-makers and trendsetters in Northeast Ohio.

Plexus member profile:

Bella Capelli Sanctuario

Bella Capelli Sanctuario is an LGBT-owned, full service salon & spa, located in the City of Westlake. They were honored by the city for their business contribution to Westlake and for their recognition in the “2010 Weatherhead 100” with a proclamation of January 6, 2011 as Bella Capelli Day.

We have been an active member of Plexus for three years, and find the information at the networking events very valuable. Meeting with other entrepreneurs and business owners from our local community has helped build relationships, share best business practices and continue to be connected to the gay business community.

With this partnership, Bella Capelli Sanctuario has continued to grow to its highest potential, and in 2010, we were recognized by the Weatherhead School of Management at Case Western Reserve University, as one of the “Weatherhead 100” showcasing the 100 fastest growing business in Northeastern Ohio.

It is very important in this political and economic climate to be aligned with Plexus and its mission of business and economic inclusion for the LGBT community and all individuals.

2010 network nights highlights

Ritz-Carlton, Cleveland - Plexus held its annual meeting to inform members and the public about plans for the coming year, followed by a discussion with Cleveland Councilman Joe Cimperman, who addressed the City’s dedication to LGBT equality issues, and upcoming legislative efforts.

Great Lakes Science Center, Cleveland - Executive Director of the Cleveland Film Commission & board member of the Cleveland International Film Festival Ivan Schwarz discussed the regional impact of the film industry and provided a sneak peek at films from the upcoming festival.

FIT Technologies, Cleveland - COSE President & Executive Director Steve Millard spoke about the value of small businesses to the Greater Cleveland economy and several new partnership opportunities between COSE and Plexus, to leverage greater benefits for members.

Playhouse Square, Cleveland - Plexus hosted this networking night in collaboration with the LGBT Center, GZH2 and WH2. Representatives from the newly formed Cleveland Special Events Group, provided an update on the 2014 Gay Games and what they mean to the City of Cleveland. Afterward, Managing Director of the Allen Theater Kevin Moore, led a special backstage tour.
In November, Plexus held its second annual Round Table Series for small business owners, sponsored by Chamber member and Bronze-level sponsor KeyBank. This day-long event was free to Plexus & COSE members, and was hosted by experts in banking, legal, and marketing practices. Facilitators led attendees through critical aspects of getting a new business up and running, or how to make an existing business more successful. The three sessions for this year included the following:

Session #1
BUSINESS PLANNING & FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT
Presented by KeyBank Business Banking and Finance Professionals

Session #2
LEGAL SERVICES: When should you engage an attorney, and copyright, why it is important to a business?
Presented by James Simon, partner at Buckingham Doolittle & Burroughs

Session #3
SOCIAL MEDIA: Is it right for your business and how can you make that decision?
Presented by Matthew Skallerud, President of Pink Banana Media

Sponsoring Plexus is a natural fit for University Hospitals, where we strongly believe that the diversity in our organization should mirror the diversity in the communities we serve. We recognize that diversity throughout our system is essential in order to achieve our most critical goal: providing the highest quality of care for our patients. Maintaining a diverse workforce ensures that our employees are able to relate effectively to our patients and family members in a warm, inviting environment. It also directly affects our ability to attract and retain the most talented healthcare professionals. We believe that diversity, inclusion and economic empowerment are integral to the success of our organization.

At University Hospitals, we value the unique contributions of each individual irrespective of religion, ethnicity, age, sexual preference or physical differences. We seek to create an environment where each and every employee feels valued, engaged and is high performing.

"Diversity and inclusion are woven into the fabric of our organization they are truly a part of who we are and how we work."

Thomas F. Zenty III, Chief Executive Officer, University Hospitals.

"Plexus is very important to University Hospitals as it allows us to get the word out to potential employees and patients that we provide a welcoming place where they can bring their whole selves to work or for care."

Edgar B. Jackson Jr., MD, Senior Advisor to the CEO, University Hospitals.

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Plexus would like to acknowledge and extend appreciation to its many individual members: professionals, retirees and students from all over Northeast Ohio.

*also a Plexus sponsor  †certified LGBT-owned business