annual report 2013

plexus
The Chamber of Commerce for the LGBT Community and its Allies in Northeast Ohio
In 2013, the Plexus Education Foundation marked its third year of programming to meet the needs of existing and emerging LGBT employee resource groups (ERGs) in Northeast Ohio’s business community. The foundation seeks to assist LGBT individuals in the workplace and empower them to bring their entire self to their work. The Foundation’s programs and initiatives are based on the precept that to create awareness is to promote inclusion.

This year the ERG events focused on creating forums for the leadership of ERGs to share common issues and best practices. Hosted by PNC and EY, these events resulted in a deeper understanding of each ERG’s accomplishments and impact in their respective organizations. The series began with roundtable discussions on operating plans and strategies to gain support at the corporate level. At later meetings, attendees discussed the role of allies in an LGBT ERG and how to build and sustain member engagement. The forums culminated in a deeper look at the complexity of managing an ERG’s multiple audiences, including corporate leadership, ERG members and other employees.

The Foundation appreciated the contributions and participation of the ERG leaders from American Greetings, Cleveland Clinic, EY, Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland, KeyBank, Morgan Stanley, PNC, and Progressive. Without their candid conversations and insights, these programs would not have been a success.

The Foundation also continued its work to create awareness and promote inclusion by presenting at the Cleveland Society of Human Resource Managers and the Greater Cincinnati Human Resource Association on the importance and impact of LGBT workplace inclusion. The Foundation also participated in the Louis Stokes Veterans Administration Hospital’s inaugural “Coming Out for Allies” event. In addition, the Foundation has taken an active role with the Diversity Center of Northeast Ohio in the development of the LGBT cultural competency training to prepare businesses and volunteers for the Gay Games in 2014. The Foundation and Plexus members will be on the training delivery team for the Games.

Finally, the Foundation ended the year by hosting a holiday celebration sponsored by the ERGs of KeyBank, Morgan Stanley, PNC and Progressive. This gathering provided a setting to thank all who had participated in a Foundation event or initiative for their continued support and encouragement of Plexus’ work.

Thomas Hawn
Foundation Board President

Plexus (noun) (plek’sis):
A networked structure, or combination of interconnected parts.

The Plexus Education Foundation was founded in December 2008 as a 501(c)3 charitable organization. The mission of the Foundation is to improve the workplace environment for LGBT individuals through education, research, development, and advocacy, resulting in enrichment of the entire community and region.
While headlines touted 2012 as the “Gayest Year in U.S. History,” 2013 set the bar even higher for progress in many areas. From the overturn of DOMA, the dismissal of the Prop 8 appeal, marriage equality in a total of 16 states, to the campaign wins for openly gay politicians, support in unprecedented numbers from allies all over the country, and the potential for passage of ENDA, the momentum toward human rights and LGBT awareness continues.

Plexus is proud to be a part of this momentum, creating our own successes for LGBT professionals, business owners, and allies in Northeast Ohio. The Chamber refocused its efforts to determine the ways in which we would work to connect the business community, expand economic development, and provide resources and programming. The board believed that Plexus could best execute on our external goals by focusing on the Chamber’s internal processes. Concurrently, we developed and executed a meaningful leadership transition to provide continuity for the organization as outgoing President and Co-Founder Eric Lutzo focused his energies on other pursuits.

Up first, was a thoughtful redesign to our membership process to ensure our systems and data were supporting our efforts to recruit and retain members. Challenged with a bold goal, dedicated board and committee members increased membership by nearly 100%. We actively sought to engage members in new ways through quarterly lunches and other personal outreaches throughout the year. Similarly, we turned attention to our corporate and small business sponsors to explore ways to align mutual needs and collaborate on mission which resulted in greater support and in the diversity of activities.

With the addition in 2013 of the first paid staff, Plexus tackled organizing the organization—not the sexiest of achievements—but work that is critical to the efficiency and scalability of the Chamber as we look to expand our relevance and effectiveness in serving our region.

Network nights and the 5th Annual Supplier Diversity Summit highlighted the programming calendar, appealing to hundreds of stakeholders, including some first-time attendees and others reconnecting with the Chamber after making career changes. Feedback from the community reinforced the need for Plexus to host both social and educational sessions to connect people to each other and to business opportunities.

Plexus realized the power of collaboration to meet its mission by teaming locally with COSE on several initiatives, by presenting with the National Gay and Lesbian Chamber of Commerce at national conferences, and by committing to a role of Lead Community Partner with the Gay Games.

Leveraging the momentum for LGBT progress in the upcoming year relies on continued collaboration with our members, volunteers, supporters, and sponsors. The Plexus board is eager to have your participation as we work toward an aggressive plan to boost economic vitality and build a stronger LGBT business environment.

Michelle Tomallo
Chamber Board President
Plexus regularly hosts networking nights throughout the year that are open to the LGBT & Allied business community. These free events, hosted in a variety of unique venues, provide an opportunity for members and guests to network and can feature a speaker or special activity. Attendees expand their professional network and gain insight from decision makers and trend-setters in Northeast Ohio.

2013 Highlights

**January**  
COSE offices | PlayhouseSquare

Plexus started the New Year with its annual meeting to celebrate accomplishments, learn about the plans for 2013 and network with other Plexus supporters.

**March**  
Key Tower | Public Square

Always popular, Plexus’ sneak peek of the 37th Annual Cleveland International Film Festival (CIFF) showcased one of the region’s acclaimed cultural events where attendees learned more about the festival and the much-anticipated films.

**May**  
Transformer Station | Ohio City

Attorney James Gemelas presented “Bridging LGBT Legal Concerns” to provide attendees with strategies for overcoming the legal challenges facing the LGBT community in the aftermath of the DOMA decision.

**June**  
Voinovich Park | East 9th Pier

To mark the 25th Anniversary of the Cleveland Pride Festival, Plexus celebrated the anniversary and Pride Month along with the LGBT community and allies.

**August**  
Lago | East Bank of the Flats

Plexus members and guests gathered at the newly-constructed hot spot to experience firsthand how this re-imagined business and entertainment center is contributing to Downtown’s vitality.

**October**  
Society Club | East 4th Street

For this “Bring a Straight Ally” event, Plexus welcomed speaker Christine Zust who shared insights for LGBT professionals about networking, coming out to colleagues and interviewing.
The 5th Annual Plexus Supplier Diversity Summit had many new faces this year. The September 26th event drew corporate representatives and individuals from all over Northeast Ohio and beyond. University Hospitals kicked off the Summit the evening before by hosting a reception at the Ruhlman Conference Center atop the Lerner Tower. The evening provided ample networking with procurement officers, suppliers, and special guests while enjoying beautiful views of the city and University Circle.

The Summit continued on Thursday morning on the campus of Cleveland State University. Rockwell Automation, the Summit’s presenting sponsor for the second consecutive year, offered support that allowed more than 80 diverse business owners and supplier diversity professionals from across the region and nation to attend. The day’s agenda offered a variety of topics and presentation formats.

The Summit started with an introduction about supplier diversity from Sam McClure of the National Gay & Lesbian Chamber of Commerce (NGLCC). This interactive session spotlighted the importance of business certification and the impact of LGBT-owned businesses. The Summit continued with Tom Grote of Green Biologics sharing his emotional story of coming out to family, friends and colleagues to underscore the importance of being open in the workplace.

Maia Beatty, The Powerful Presence Coach, then moderated a panel that included business owners Malcolm Riggle of Call Management Resources and Kim Martinez-Giering of KLN Logistics, and corporate supplier diversity professionals Scott Hardwick from Rockwell Automation and Tom Hopkins of Sherwin-Williams. The panel spoke about profiting from failure and building capacity and partnerships to win new business.

Over lunch, Nationwide’s Amy Anderson offered insight on how to sell your business capabilities when working with supply chain professionals and how to build relationships that lead to success.

The Summit concluded with remarks from Eric Lutzo, President and Co-Founder of Plexus, about the organization’s history, the power of making connections within the business community and the role of supplier diversity in Plexus’ evolution.

Plexus extends special thanks to our presenting sponsor Rockwell Automation and Summit sponsors—Cleveland State University Diversity Management Program, Consolidated Solutions, Forest City Enterprises, Linear Creative, Nationwide, University Hospitals and Wells Fargo Advisors.

Supplier Diversity:
A business program that encourages contracting with businesses that are owned by individuals belonging to groups that have been historically disadvantaged in the competitive procurement marketplace.
Sponsorship can take many forms. The Council of Smaller Enterprises (COSE) has captured many of them. From organizational and member support to pro bono and in-kind services, this regional small business organization has been a key contributor to Plexus’ success.

“Over the last few years, COSE has made it a priority to partner with local chambers of commerce and other business support organizations so we can help them help local businesses succeed,” says Steve Millard, president and executive director at COSE. “We are thrilled to be working closely with Plexus to help benefit its member businesses.”

In 2013, COSE provided support of Plexus in several critical areas. COSE secured Silver-level sponsorship for Plexus, most notably by providing Plexus with its first permanent office space within COSE’s Playhouse-Square headquarters. COSE also provided staff support for Plexus’ Supplier Diversity Summit and provided funds to support Plexus’ outreach in the community.

“Partnering with Plexus gives us access and relationships with business owners we might not otherwise reach,” adds Millard. “Our investment in Plexus is an investment in every business owner that it serves.”

COSE’s support of Plexus also extends to the LGBT chamber’s members. COSE offers a dual membership allowing business owners to join both Plexus and COSE simultaneously. Dual members enjoy access to twice the benefits and resources while strengthening their presence within the LGBT community and supporting the economic development of the whole region.

In addition to being a chamber of commerce, Plexus is like a small business itself, with the same challenges any small business faces,“ says Millard. “Great office space and support for their staff help Plexus better serve and represent its members.”

Joint Membership:
_Double the benefits of membership by joining both Plexus and COSE for one low cost to double the impact, resources, and support for your business._
When you walk into Nightsweats & T-cells you’ll be greeted first by Andy, a five-year-old Rhodesian Ridgeback who thinks he’s still a puppy. Gil Kudrin, co-owner of the custom screen printing business that also helps to raise awareness of AIDS, will tell you how Andy was abandoned because he lacked the traditional markings of his predecessors; he was deemed inferior.

Just as Andy thrives here, in a more deeply profound way, so do many people living with HIV/AIDS. If you scan their website (www.nightsweats.com) you’ll applaud the philosophies which have fueled over 20 years of success, including the all-caps statement, “Every penny of profit from the sales of our products goes directly into the hands of persons living with HIV/AIDS in the form of a paycheck.”

It is apparent from the moment you arrive, this is a place where creativity happens. Gil even announces, “Most days I’m like a kindergartener, coloring at my desk with my dog lying below.” You can tell this makes him happy. What also makes him happy is knowing that he and his business “do good in the world while doing good business.” Perhaps one of their most recognizable LGBT clients is Broadway Cares, an organization that has “raised over 3/4 billion dollars and we’ve printed every garment they’ve sold for the last seventeen years.”

So what led Gil to join Plexus when they’ve experienced so much business success?

Gil saw this membership as a natural progression; an opportunity to expand horizons.

When asked what he’s gained from membership, the list is long, but the most vital quickly surfaced. After 20 years of creating a big footprint in the nonprofit world, it was time to enter what he calls the ‘big business’ sector. But the corporate market has an entirely different business language and after years of having doors closed for being an out gay business owner, he needed help. Plexus has not only opened doors, they’ve provided guidance for what to do next, “Of course, what you do after is up to you,” he says with a knowing smile.

“When you attend Plexus events, you’ll see there’s a lot of talent in one room,” he pauses in thought, “They all have different life experiences but a passion for business.”

Gil’s response of how Plexus has helped grow their business is inspirational: “It made me re-learn our story and remember how proud we are of our accomplishments...and it made me want to get back on planes.”

After 20 years things had gotten stale and venturing into new markets also meant traveling to corporate headquarters in other cities, a daunting task to say the least. “Plexus re-inspired us!”

Certified LGBT Business Enterprise:
A business that is 51% owned, operated, and managed by LGBT individuals and has been designated as such by the National Gay & Lesbian Chamber of Commerce, the sole certifying body in the United States for LGBT-owned businesses. Plexus is proud to showcase its members who held certification in 2013:

- 925 Hire, LLC
- Cygem Solutions
- Felty and Lembright, LPA
- FIT Technologies
- Forward Thought
- Full Color Printings, LLC
- Gray’s Auctioneers
- Leverage Technologies, Inc.
- Linear Creative
- Nightsweats & T-Cells
- Outsmart Office Solutions, Inc.

For more info on certification, visit www.nglcc.org/get-certified or contact president@thinkplexus.org
This fall kicked off a campaign to welcome the tens of thousands of members of the LGBT community and allies to the Gay Games in August 2014. Organizers are expecting about 10,000 people from around the world who will be participating in over 35 sports and cultural events in the region.

The WELCOME campaign, a grassroots initiative, invites individuals and organizations to sign cards which will then be mailed to all 2014 Gay Games registrants. The campaign also offers opportunities to get involved like hosting a WELCOME card-signing party, posting banners in offices, storefronts or neighborhoods, recording a video or snapping a photo to promote GG9 online.

Michelle Tomallo, Board President, said “this campaign is one way to show the inclusiveness and heart of our region. We want visitors to know that our cities are safe and welcoming and we’re hopeful that the person in France or Japan or Brazil who receive a handwritten note from a resident of Northeast Ohio will feel that.”

The event also marked the launch of the Gay Games Partner program where organizations opt to serve as liaisons between the greater regional community and the 2014 Gay Games. Presenting a large-scale, week-long event takes extraordinary effort from staff, volunteers, and other stakeholders. Plexus, along with the LGBT Community Center of Greater Cleveland, and CANAPI in Akron act as the Lead Community Partners for the 2014 Gay Games. Executive Director of the LGBT Center, Phyllis Harris, said, “We look to attract many other community, faith, arts and neighborhood partners in the upcoming months.” The primary role for the partners will be in communicating with its members, recruiting volunteers and participants, promoting events, and showing off our cities to visitors.

For more information on the Community Partners program, contact drobinson@gg9cle.com.
Volunteer at a Plexus event

Many people are surprised to learn that Plexus is almost completely volunteer-operated. Its success over the past seven years is due to the dedication and hard work of hundreds of people across Northeast Ohio, who have given countless hours to make Plexus’ events successful.

Join a Plexus committee

For individuals who can commit to ongoing participation, Plexus has a number of committees where you can help make an impact on the future of our growing Chamber. From events, to marketing, to membership, and other committees, Plexus can benefit from your expertise.

Host a Plexus program

Whether it’s a Network Night, a member luncheon or an educational session, Plexus draws LGBT and allied professionals from many sectors and organizations. By hosting an event or location, you not only raise awareness about the services you provide, but also demonstrate that you value LGBT customers and support an inclusive business environment.

Get certified as an LGBT-owned business

As an affiliate of the National Gay & Lesbian Chambers of Commerce, Plexus can assist LGBT business owners in obtaining official certification as a minority business enterprise. We work with NGLCC to help certified businesses get access to corporate procurement opportunities at the regional, national and even global levels. Certification can be a catalyst for revenue and make a statement about the importance of LGBT-owned businesses and supplier diversity.

Become a Plexus sponsor

In addition to the many volunteer hours that drive chamber operations, Plexus relies on the generous support of its sponsors to execute on our mission. We work with organizations to determine the best option—from monetary contributions, to event sponsorship, to in-kind donations of products and services—to show the support and advocacy for the LGBT business community.

For more information about getting involved with Plexus, visit us online at www.thinkplexus.org or email us at info@thinkplexus.org.
Businesses Represented by Chamber Members

Plexus would also like to acknowledge and extend appreciation to the many business and individual members who represent professionals, retirees and students from all over Northeast Ohio.

925HIRE, LLC
Abode Modern Lifestyle Developer
Ambiance, The Store For Lovers!
American Greetings
Ameriprise Financial
Baldwin Wallace University
Bounce Café Bar Club Lounge
Buckingham, Doolittle & Burroughs, LLP
Buffalo Lodging Associates
Call Management Resources
Ciuni & Panichi, Inc.
Cleveland Action to Support Housing
Cleveland Cinemas
Cleveland Clinic
Cleveland International Film Festival
Cleveland Museum of Art
Cleveland Public Theatre
Cleveland State University
Clevelandclassical.com
Commission on Economic Inclusion
Communication Express LLC
Compass Consulting Services
COSE / Greater Cleveland Partnership
Creativechange.biz
Cuyahoga Community College
CyGem Solutions
D’Anniballe Houston Group
DesignWyse Interiors, Inc.
Discover Your Powerful Presence
Dr. Kay Potetz & Associates
Eaton
Every Blooming Thing
Executive Caterers
EY
Fabo Enterprises
Fairmount Properties
Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland
Flex Hotel, Spa & Gym
Flourish, Inc.
Forest City
Fowler Center for Sustainable Value
Freedom Valley
Fresenius Medical Care
Global Diversity Consulting
The Greenhouse Florist
Heights Driving School, Inc.
HRC – Cleveland Steering Committee
ICNS
InterContinental Hotels – Cleveland
Joan Burda, Attorney
Kairos Consulting, LLC
KeyBank
Kolita & Company, CPAs
Kuhn Computer Solutions
Legacy Business Cultures
The Legacy Group
Linear Creative
Makes Cents, LLC
Malrite Company
Maria L. Shinn, LLC
Market Development Consultants
Marsh & McLennan Companies
Medical Mutual of Ohio
MetroHealth
Mindful Healing
Money Tree Tax Services, Inc.
Morgan Stanley
New York Life Insurance
Northwestern Mutual Financial Network
Organizational Architecture Inc.
Outside The Lines Creative Group
OverDrive, Inc.
Pet-tique
Planning & Design Solutions
Progressive Insurance
Quez Media Marketing
R J Cansler & Associates – Cruise One
Re/Max – Crossroads
Re/Max – Trinity
Ritz-Carlton – Cleveland
Skylight Financial Group
Snazzo Productions
Snyder Bros. Painting, LLC
SpoonDrawer Media Group
Streat Mobile Bistro
Thompson Hine LLP
Wells Fargo Advisors
Witherspoon Enterprises Training & Consulting Company
University Hospitals
The Urban Orchid
Xerox
Plexus Chamber Board of Directors and Officers  2013-2014

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Todd Lloyd, Vice President  Wells Fargo Advisors
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Served on the Chamber Board from 2012 into 2013:

Eric Lutzo, Ex Officio President  Forward Thought
Ana Fluke, Treasurer  EY
Jonah Weinberg  Northeast Ohio Hispanic Center for Economic Development

Plexus Foundation Board of Directors  2013-2014

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Special thanks to Plexus sponsor and supporters American Greetings, graphic designer Justin Raines, and writer Gail Palmer for their contributions to this annual report.