Presidents’ Message

As we head into our 10th year, we reflect on many milestones, not the least of which is this summer’s Supreme Court landmark case, granting the right to marry in Ohio and the rest of the country. We joined the world in celebrating this human rights victory.

While the Supreme Court’s action is and was a significant step for the LGBT community, it is indeed just a step on this path to equality. Important initiatives still need our attention and efforts to provide protections for all LGBT individuals in the community—whether as business owners, employees or customers.

One of the most critical is that Ohio, along with 28 other states, lack discrimination protections in employment, housing and public accommodations. Plexus continues to work with the National Gay and Lesbian Chamber of Commerce, corporate partners, Equality Ohio and others to strategize how we can be part of making progress. To that end, Plexus promotes Ohio Competes to pass statewide nondiscrimination protections and Cleveland’s Ready to improve the city’s municipal code by removing discriminatory language impacting transgender Clevelanders.

Plexus focused on outreach in 2015, leading to greater participation in educational conferences and presentations locally, regionally and nationally. The Game Change Conference in Akron, the National Minority Supplier Development Conference in San Diego, and the Mayor of Columbus’ Small Business Expo were a few of those highlights. In addition, Plexus held workshops sponsored by PNC to build LGBTQ Competency for local businesses to foster better customer service, employee relations and business opportunities. Finally, Plexus and a dozen local corporations coordinated the first-ever series of events for National Coming Out Week, garnering attendance from hundreds of LGBT and allied professionals and leaders.

Plexus served on the “2014 Gay Games Lessons and Legacies” panel at the City Club of Cleveland to announce donations of $120,000 to the LGBT Legacy Fund at the Cleveland Foundation and $27,000 to the Gay Community Endowment Fund of the Akron Community Foundation, making GG9 the most profitable event in the Games’ 32-year history. Later in the year, Plexus reported on the spend of the Gay Games as a way to showcase that buying diverse and local boosts economic equality. Building on this news, Plexus partnered with the 2016 RNC local host committee to promote inclusion of diverse vendors and increase economic impact.

Plexus continued our Supplier Diversity series, with the generous support of Rockwell Automation and Nationwide, to educate LGBT entrepreneurs on the power of LGBT Certification and business development resources. We have cultivated more relationships with local corporate procurement and supplier diversity professionals to make supply chain introductions for our members. We’re proud to report a 27% increase in certified businesses over last year.

2015 was indeed successful and our 10th anniversary year of 2016 looks as promising. Plexus has been fortunate to receive a grant from the Cleveland Foundation to help us strategize the best ways for us to serve the community to advance inclusion and equality in Northeast Ohio. As Harvey Milk said, “Rights are won only by those who make their voices heard.” We invite you to be part of this process and join us in making our voices heard and our lives visible.

Michelle Tomallo
President
Plexus LGBT & Allied Chamber of Commerce

Thomas Hawn
President
Plexus Education Foundation

The Plexus Education Foundation was founded in December 2008 as a 501(c)3 organization. The mission of the Foundation is to improve the workplace environment for LGBT individuals through education, research, development, and advocacy.

The Plexus Chamber of Commerce, created in 2006 as a 501(c)6 organization, made its debut at Cleveland Pride. Its mission is to promote and advocate for LGBT and Allied businesses and act as a catalyst for economic vitality in Northeast Ohio.
Plexus By the Numbers

Members:

63% Small Business
18% Corporate Professionals
19% Non-Profit/Government

61% LGBT
39% Allies

47% Women
53% Men

Membership:

27% New Members
73% Renewals

Growth in total membership
Increase in attendance at Plexus events
Increase in Certified LGBT-BEs in Northeast Ohio
Affiliate Chambers of the National Gay and Lesbian Chamber of Commerce across the U.S.

THANK YOU for your support of Plexus

1 of 52
100%
Plexus was pleased to host sessions and events as part of our Supplier Diversity Summit for the 7th consecutive year. Plexus again adopted a series format to allow for greater exposure to supplier diversity education for more stakeholders and for greater collaboration with other organizations. We presented to groups varying in size from 12 to 250 as part of the Summit Series.

**LGBT Business Owner Workshop**
We launched the series with a workshop targeted to LGBT Business Owners to educate them on the importance of LGBT business certification and how it can be leveraged locally with programs through the City of Cleveland and Cuyahoga County as well as nationally with corporate partners. Attendees received resource information, guidance on next steps and insight from a senior procurement/sourcing rep from Nationwide.

**Corporate Supply Chain Development**
Plexus developed relationships with corporate procurement and supplier diversity professionals through presentations at the quarterly meeting convened by the Commission on Economic Inclusion and at the Diversity and Inclusion conference along with other affinity chamber leaders.

**Corporate Matchmaker Event**
We promoted the Corporate Matchmaker offered by COSE and the U.S. SBA, an event that pairs LGBT-certified business owners with corporate reps for individualized meetings to explore their supply chain and review capability statements.

**Supplier Diversity Series**

**Plexus Members with LGBT Business Certification in 2015:**

925 Hire, LLC  
Affordable Working Websites  
Branches and Roots  
Call Management Resources  
Cory Electronics  
David Phillips & Associates  
Felty and Lembright, LPA  
FIT Technologies  
Forward Thought  
Full Color Printings, LLC  
Gray’s Auctioneers  
Greenrock Lighting  
IM Creative, Inc.  
Leverage Technologies, Inc.  
Linear Creative  
Nightsweats & T-Cell  
Olga Starr, Business and Financial Planning  
Outsmart Office Solutions, Inc.  
Professional Business Associates  
Ray LaVoie Photography  
Reddy or Knot Design  
Thinking Habitats  
Witherspoon Enterprises

27% increase

**Certified LGBT businesses: 51% owned, operated, and managed by LGBT individuals.**

Suppliers Diversity: a program that encourages contracting with businesses that are owned by individuals belonging to groups that have been historically disadvantaged in the competitive procurement marketplace.

Presenting Sponsor: Workshop Sponsor: Rockwell Automation  
Nationwide
Making the Business Case for Equality

Throughout the year, Cleveland's business publications took note of the national focus on LGBT rights to spotlight local issues and impact. Plexus worked with writers, editors, our members and partners to lend insight and content for these stories.

CBC Magazine
As National Coming Out Week approaches, Plexus builds on the momentum created by last year’s Gay Games

Inside Business
2015 Northcoast 99 Shades of Great: Recruiting diverse employees impacts bottom line

Crain's Cleveland
Niche chambers zero in on member needs

LGBT small businesses getting a diversity boost with corporate vendor support

Crain's Cleveland, Cleveland Plain Dealer, WKSU
2014 Gay Games spend report shows the power of buying local and diverse

Crain’s Cleveland
Marriage Equality may affect current company’s domestic partnership policies

Crain’s Cleveland
LGBT workplace policies should become front burner issue

Cleveland.com
Plexus partners on panel for Lakewood’s level of equality

Crain’s Cleveland
Editorial: Right fight

Buying Local & LGBT-Owned Makes Big Impact

The 2014 Gay Games presented by the Cleveland Foundation was a success in so many ways and established dozens of “firsts” in the Games’ 30-year history. Plexus is proud to have worked with GG9 on another of those firsts—their commitment to an inclusive supply chain. Early on, Plexus established our goal to promote local, LGBT- and minority-owned vendor opportunities and also to produce a report on GG9’s spending. The analysis showed that buying local and diverse paid off for our region.

$288,894 (12%)
spent at LGBT-owned businesses or organizations

$296,531 (13%)
spent at women-owned businesses

$564,094* (24.5%)
spent at LGBT and women-owned businesses

$1,375,244 (59%)
spent at Northeast Ohio and Ohio-based businesses

*Analysis of data was completed six months post-Games with best efforts made to assign business ownership categorization. Results understate the diversity of ownership

LGBT and allied professionals lead discussion on business opportunities

LGBT Center Exec Director Phyllis Harris, Plexus board member Todd Lloyd, HRC leader Suzanne Hamilton and LGBT business owner Gail Palmer engage at the Annual Meeting
Community Connections & Education Outreach

Whether hosting National Coming Out Week, celebrating Pride or riding the Euclid Carousel, Plexus provided opportunities to build business connections. Over 1,100 people attended networking events in 2015 at unique venues like the Western Reserve Historical Society, Paladar’s newest Bomba, scenic Merwin’s Wharf and the grand Tudor Arms.

Plexus delivered the most presentations at conferences and educational programs in the chamber’s history. With audiences ranging from a dozen to 250, Plexus presented to local, state and national audiences.

2015 Highlights

LGBT Cultural Competency Business Development Sessions
» Delivered to neighborhood business owners and CDC leaders

Three Critical Steps to LGBT Workplace Inclusion
» Presented as part of the Game Change Conference

Building LGBT Cultural Competency
» Presented to the Union Community Activist Network

Diversity & Inclusion Summit: Power of Business Certification
» Presented with other affinity chamber leaders and the Commission on Economic Inclusion

Navigating Employment and Discrimination: LGBTQ Rights in the Workplace
» Presented by CWRU School of Law

Supporting LGBTQ Diversity & Inclusion
» Presented to the LGBT employees and leadership at KeyBank

Exploring the Legend: Is Equality Alive in Lakewood?
» Facilitated this panel for Lakewood Alive Development Corporation

Telling Stories of LGBT Diversity & Inclusion
» Presented to the LGBT ERG at Westfield Insurance

Representing LGBT Diversity: Women Business Owners
» Presented at the National Minority Supplier Development Council’s national leadership meeting
Chamber Support

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Plexus Chamber Board of Directors 2015-2016

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Gina Dalessandro
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The Very Rev. Tracey Lind
» Trinity Episcopal Cathedral

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