

PHOENIX BUSINESS JOURNAL

JUNE 4-10, 2021

BUSINESS OF pride

Valley companies share their blueprint for creating diverse and inclusive cultures

BY ERIN EDGEMON
PAGES 14-17



ACBJ ILLUSTRATION; GETTY IMAGES; JIM POULIN | PBJ; SNELL & WILMER; INSIGHT ENTERPRISES

THE LIST LGBTQ-OWNED BUSINESSES, NETWORKING ASSOCIATIONS 18, 20

CONSTRUCTION

A Chicago developer is making its Phoenix debut with a 26-story apartment tower slated for downtown

ANGELA GONZALES, 3



JIM POULIN | PBJ

EXECUTIVE INC.

Meet Adrienne Fairwell, the new general manager of Arizona PBS who is relocating to the Valley with her family

ERIN EDGEMON, 21

REAL ESTATE

Home prices in the Phoenix metro jumped 20% in March, leading the nation for the 22nd consecutive month

ANGELA GONZALES, 10

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PHOENIX BUSINESS JOURNAL



Patricia Brum, an associate at Snell & Wilmer, participates in a Pride parade in Boston.

SNELL & WILMER



SNELL & WILMER



ARIZONA FEDERAL CREDIT UNION

Top: Snell & Wilmer teamed up with APS to walk in the Phoenix Pride parade in 2019. Above: Arizona Federal Credit Union participates in a recruiting event at the Rainbows Festival & Street Fair at Phoenix Pride.

TAKING PRIDE IN THEIR WORKPLACE

For these Valley companies, building diverse and inclusive cultures is in their DNA

BY ERIN EDGEMON | eedgemon@bizjournals.com

When Patricia Brum interviewed for an associate position at Phoenix-based Snell & Wilmer’s Los Angeles office, the Brazil-born lawyer didn’t want to hide that she is a lesbian. She talked about it during her interview. “When I went for my in-person interview, it was important to me to let them know that I was a part of the LGBTQ community,” she said.

Brum said the firm was supportive right from the first day of interviews. “It felt like there was an immediate connection, and I knew right then and there, like they made an offer within one hour after I left my interview, and I accepted right on the spot because I just knew that it was just the right place for me,” she said.

PHOENIX BUSINESS JOURNAL



INSIGHT ENTERPRISES

▲ Deb Murphy (back left) and members of Insight Enterprises' employee resource group, Insight Stands Out, celebrate during the group's launch party on Nov. 11, 2019, at Insight's corporate headquarters in Tempe.

Deb Murphy, left, who serves as executive sponsor of Insight Stands Out employee resource group at Insight Enterprises, with her wife, Kerri Armet, who also works at Insight.



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And, that wasn't by mistake. Snell & Wilmer, the largest full-service business law firm in the West, is one of a few Valley-based companies that scored the maximum 100 points on the Human Rights Campaign's Corporate Equality Index, a survey measuring LGBTQ equality in the workplace.

The firm, like many companies, including others that rank high on the index, Insight Enterprises, Arizona Federal Credit Union and University of Phoenix, have rich diversity and inclusion initiatives. They offer employee resource groups, or ERGs, for the LGBTQ+ community (and other minority groups), host Pride Month events, provide training and professional development and in some cases offer mentorship programs.

Executives from these companies say being diverse and inclusive is essential not only because it is the right thing to do; it also is good for business. Employee turnover is lower in diverse populations that take part in ERGs, which offer enrichment and engagement with co-workers, and workers are happy

and more productive in companies with inclusive cultures.

In its annual Pride issue, the Phoenix Business Journal is highlighting some of the Valley companies that get it right. They also share advice and best practices for other companies looking to start similar programs.

SNELL & WILMER

Brum was working at a smaller, boutique litigation firm in L.A. and doing "extremely well" when she started thinking about jumping to a larger firm.

"I started thinking that I wanted to be at a bigger firm, but being part of the LGBTQ community and being a foreigner, having English as my second language, and all of those things made me pause because my concern was, am I going to be able to make partner at those firms? Am I going to be able to shine and really reach my full potential?"

Brum turned down some positions she was offered because she didn't think they were a right fit for her. She found her place at Snell & Wilmer.

"It feels like I matter. I can breathe. I can be myself and give my all," she said because of the culture created at the law firm. "I am very ambitious. I am driven, and I want to succeed. And lawyers, we spend so much time at our work, just advancing the interests of others, of our clients (and the community)."

About six months ago, the law firm launched Leaders Empowering and Advocating for Protégés (LEAP), a sponsorship program for mid-level to senior associates who identify as a historically underrepresented minority including LGBTQ and pairs them with one of the firm's senior equity partners. The senior partners serve as sponsors who advocate for and help their proteges advance towards partnership.

Brum said she is working with her sponsor, Amy Sorenson, a litigation partner based in Utah, on how to pitch clients and create opportunities for her practice.

Joann Thach, the firm's director of diversity, inclusion and community outreach, said LEAP was formed based on a proposal from Snell's diversity and inclusion



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PATRICIA BRUM,
associate, Snell & Wilmer

community.

"They were able to recognize the need for sponsorship from senior partners for mid-level to senior attorneys who are at a very, I would say, important crux in their career and their development to matriculate into partnership," she said.

Additionally, the LEAP program is a way for the firm to disrupt the "majority culture," which is white male-centric, and create "pillars for diverse attorneys to succeed," Thach said.

Snell's ERG for the LGBTQ community and allies also is key to community building for the firm, which includes 884 employees and spans multiple offices in the West. The group, which is co-led by non-leaders in the firm, hosts monthly happy hours, special events such as trivia nights and Pride Month activities and sparks dialogue on important topics.

About 35% of the law firm's attorneys participate in one of the firm's ERGs, which it calls affinity groups.

"People literally talk about everything," said Patrick Tighe, a Phoenix-based associate active in the

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SNELLGBTQ group, which is open to attorneys and staff.

The group also prompted the law firm to create gender-inclusive bathrooms and is working to have pronoun fields added to attorney and staff signature blocks.

INSIGHT ENTERPRISES

Decades ago, Deb Murphy served time in the U.S. Air Force as a linguist specializing in Vietnamese. Her experience also included serving in the Philippines and working at the National Security Agency.

This was before the military's infamous "don't ask, don't tell policy," Murphy said. "It was like, just don't tell."

Ultimately, Murphy, who is a lesbian, left the military because she didn't want to take the chance of it being found out and potentially getting dishonorably discharged.

From then on, Murphy decided she didn't want to work in a company where she had to remain in the closet. Since she was living in the Bible Belt at the time in Tennessee, that wasn't always possible, but since joining Insight about eight years ago, Murphy has been able to be open about who she is. She now serves as a senior manager for Insight's global project management office and co-chairs the Insight Stands Out resource group for LGBTQ teammates and allies.

Later on, Murphy's wife was even able to get a job at Insight – in another department.

Insight's Senior Vice President of Human Resources Jen Vasin said the global tech giant based in Tempe strives to have a North American workforce that looks like the population. Insight has 11,000 employees worldwide and about 1,400 in Arizona.

But it is more than just have a diverse workforce, she said.

Insight wants every employee to feel included and comfortable at work, which will foster better working relationships and collaboration, Vasin said. This, in turn, will make employees happier and more likely to stay with the company.

It's also about giving employees a voice, and the power to help make change in the workplace. And

Gustavo Rodriguez is heavily involved in the Pride group at Arizona Federal. He wasn't out when he first started working there but came out later because of the culture of the credit union. ▶



“From that day on, something clicked, where I felt comfortable enough to be myself and it actually made me a better employee...”

GUSTAVO RODRIGUEZ,
research adjustments and quality
supervisor, Arizona Federal Credit Union

JIM POULIN | PBJ

because of this, turnover rates for Insight's diverse workers are one point better than Insight's North America workforce as a whole, she said. Teammate satisfaction scores also are higher in the diverse population.

Insight's LGBTQ ERG is doing more than just hosting social events. They are educating the workforce and the community at large. As this issue was still important to some members, the group also persuaded the company to reinstate domes-

tic partner benefits after they had been dropped after same-sex marriage became legal nationally.

Insight scored a 95 on HRC's Corporate Equality Index this year, only falling short five points because the company didn't do enough charitable giving to LGBTQ organizations.

That's something that Insight is rectifying. They are now working with an organization that provides LGBTQ children with technology, Vasin said.

ARIZONA FEDERAL CREDIT UNION

Gustavo Rodriguez was in the closet when he started working at Arizona Federal Credit Union in 2013. At his previous employer, he didn't feel comfortable saying anything that could make any of his co-workers realize he is gay; he didn't think anything would be different at his new job.

He was wrong, though he was still reluctant to come out at first. He was afraid his co-workers, boss-

PHOENIX BUSINESS JOURNAL

ens and his Catholic family as well would treat him differently.

But when a co-worker inadvertently mentioned something in front of a group at work that made it obvious that Rodriguez was gay, he said no one flinched.

That's when he realized that everyone already knew.

"From that day on, something clicked, where I felt comfortable enough to be myself and it actually made me a better employee because I didn't have that thing in the back of my mind of like hide your mannerisms or hide the way that you are," Rodriguez, a research adjustments and quality supervisor, said.

The existing culture also helped Dax Quinn, a desktop support technician, feel more comfortable at work.

"I had very large amounts of social anxiety and being part of the ERG has helped bring me out of my shell especially within the group," Quinn, who identifies as non-binary, said. "They can't get me to shut up sometimes."

ERGs are a key aspect of building community at Arizona Federal. Nearly 200 of the credit union's 530 employees participate in at least one of these groups. And turnover is lower for employees that are a part of at least one of the credit unions many ERGs, said Juan Ruiz, senior vice president, chief people and culture officer at the credit union.

"For us it is a business decision, at least when we started, but it also is a very personal one," he said. "Our culture at Arizona Federal is one that is very inclusive. We don't just say the words, we live by those. We strive to be the best every single day when we show up. I know that firsthand from my own experience. If our employees are sitting there worried about who they are and they can't bring their full selves to work, they are not going to bring their best.

He said the credit union puts its money where its mouth is and pays employees to attend ERG-sponsored events (except for social activities) and professional development and gives each group a budget for that.

Arizona Federal also actively works to recruit a diverse workforce by attending such events as Rainbows Festival & Street Fair hosted by Phoenix Pride and a job fair hosted by ONE Community, a coalition of businesses, organizations and people looking to build equality.

Ruiz said Arizona Federal even promotes its diversity and inclusion efforts and its ERGs at recruiting events.

UNIVERSITY OF PHOENIX

Four years in a row, the University of Phoenix

has scored a perfect 100 on the HRC's Corporate Equality Index.

"We want to be the employer of choice especially in the education industry," said Julie Fink, vice president of human resources at the for-profit online college headquartered in the Valley. "To do that, we need to show not only our employee candidates but our current employees that we are LGBTQ friendly."

Displaying that HRC logo on its website and marketing materials makes that immediately known to candidates. They also promote it within the organization "because we need to be recruiting our employees every day," she said.

Also, it's important because the University of Phoenix has a diverse student population, Fink said.

Fink said the university goes above and beyond to be inclusive by making sure any mandatory federal training on campus safety, internal ethics and compliance training and a wide range of professional development and leadership training addresses the LGBTQ community or issues related to the community.

For example, a portion of the required federal training is on how to recognize violence, domestic violence, threats and intimidation that may be going on in the classroom or on campus. The university makes sure any training packages it buys includes same-sex couple scenarios in addition to ones with opposite-sex couples.

The university also hosts inclusive cafes where such serious topics as racism and challenges still faced by the LGBTQ community are discussed. ❧

Advice for creating company PRIDE

Starting employee resource groups or other diversity and inclusion initiatives from scratch isn't easy. Some of the companies that do it right offer this advice.

Jen Vasin, senior vice president of human resources at Insight Enterprises, said buy-in for the initiatives has to start from the top — the owner or CEO of the company.

"You can't just say we are going to have these employee resource groups and think it is going to get done," she said.

Plus, Julie Fink, vice president of human resources at the University of Phoenix, said emotions should be taken out of the equation. Diversity and inclusion efforts for any diverse group should be considered part of the business strategy.

"We plan our business strategy; we plan what we're going to do. We plan what we are going to do three years from now, five years from now," she said. "We need to do the same thing for our workforce and how do we get, how do we attract and retain an engaged workforce. Calling things out very clearly is one way to do that. Build your business case as to why we should do this. Do your research."

Know what your company's core values are and how implementing ERGs, inclusive training and other policies aligns with them, Fink said.

And start slowly. When University of Phoenix first launched ERGs about six years ago, people were unsure about them, so they started with one for women and one for allies of the LGBTQ community. Plus, Fink said the university made

sure each group had its own bylaws, charter and elected positions.

"We put in a lot of structure around what they will do and what they won't do," she said. "A lot of companies probably are worried that this is a place where employees can talk about their grievances with the company. That is not what these are, so you need to clearly spell that out."

Buy-in and engagement from employees also are critical.

"Whatever you do you have to get buy-in from the employee because they are the ones driving it," Juan Ruiz, senior vice president, chief people and culture officer at Arizona Federal Credit Union, said. "You'll really be surprised if you get employees engaged, the things that they will come up with."

Before Arizona Federal launched ERGs, the credit union did an employee survey to ask what kinds of groups they would want to join.

Deb Murphy, who co-chairs Insight's LGBTQ ERG, said employees need to be encouraged to be a part of ERGs or other initiatives. Also, time has to be allotted, in some cases, in workers' schedules to make time for professional development and ERG meetings.

"You have to give them the space to be a part of it," she said. "This is volunteer work. We are doing this because it is something we are passionate about."

— Erin Edgemon

