A FOCUS ON ‘EQUITY AND INCLUSION’
Nonprofit veteran has a clear vision for the state’s new LGBT chamber of commerce

BY SEAN MCFADDEN
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Grace Moreo knows a thing or two about what it takes to run a successful nonprofit.

As the executive director of the recently launched Massachusetts LGBT Chamber of Commerce, a local affiliate of the National LGBT Chamber of Commerce, she brings 21 years of experience in the nonprofit sector. That includes such roles as national operations director for Neighborhood Assistance Corp. of America, deputy director of Health Care For All, vice president/executive director of national programs at The Community Builders Inc., and vice president of operations and finance at the Edward M. Kennedy Institute for the United States Senate.

The new chamber is the first of its kind in this region in some time — a predecessor of sorts, Greater Boston Business Council, ceased operations a couple of years ago — and will have a statewide focus. So far, the chamber — which is in a “soft-launch” phase right now, with plans for an official launch later this year — is off to a good start. It has 15 corporate sponsors to date, including SynergyShea, Boston Scientific, Burns & Levinson, JetBlue, Tekesha, State Street and Tufts Health Plan, and more than 30 small businesses have armed or founding members.

Moreo recently gave Business Journal Associate Editor of Research, Sean McFadden an overview of what to expect from the new chamber.

What’s the chamber’s mandate, and how might that be different from other LGBT organizations in the area? Our mandate is to help large companies make their way in the LGBT equity and inclusion sector. CASTING the spotlight on the human capital and human resources perspective, from a human resources perspective, from a perspective of hiring talent, from a supplier diversity perspective and who want to gain best practices of how to include LGBT in the equity and inclusion process, really are metric-centered. We want to be able to count how much money we are putting into small businesses and measure how much progress we’re making to help large companies make their way in the LGBT equity and inclusion sector.

What’s the process of lining up corporate sponsors been like, and what’s the reaction of the local business community been? It’s been easy — the corporate business community has been ready and eager and well-positioned to recognize their leadership role in this space. Companies like Harvard Pilgrim Health Care and Eastern Bank were the first to join as Corporate Founding Sponsors, and they did so because they know the role they can play in creating economic vitality and honoring their mission and recognizing their community. HTC joined third, and they did so because they saw our chamber as the next step in their own commitment to the LGBT community. So we have corporations at the table who have been waiting to get this chamber going and others who jumped at the opportunity right away.

What’s your vision for the first year of the chamber? The vision in year one after launch is to have a substantial number of small businesses that know that we’re here and can help them get to their next level of success. Right now, we have 30; I want to have 200 by this time next year. At the same time, we want to roll-out a robust programming agenda, solidify how we want to work with our corporate partners, and commit to how we want to work with small businesses in helping them to do business development. Year one is forming, and year two is going to be about growing. It is going to be staying very much in touch with what the business community needs and making that important to the corporations.

Harvard Pilgrim wins BBJ’s Corporate Ally Award

Harvard Pilgrim Health Care, this year’s Corporate Ally Award winner, has been a leader in supporting LGBT initiatives for more than two decades.

The nonprofit insurance company, which is one of a few remaining large same-sex partner medical benefit programs in the state, began offering employees the right to add a same-sex partner as a dependent in 1998. An OPEN volunteer in 1999 created an employee resource group for employees “that includes statistics of who we are and how we care about the LGBT community and the LGBT-owned businesses,” Moreo said.

Over the next three years, the company initiated surveys on staff satisfaction and diversity; created a list of 120 “gay-sensitive” suppliers; created a list of 120 “gay-sensitive” suppliers; and launched an email signature campaign.

In 2002, Harvard Pilgrim became the first company in the state to offer a comprehensive medical coverage plan that includes benefits for same-sex partners. Moreo credits a 2006 survey with finding that 75 percent of employees want their employer to offer same-sex partner benefits. The survey was conducted by PricewaterhouseCoopers, which the company hired as an outside consultant.

In 2010, Harvard Pilgrim Health Care also created a new voluntary pronoun inclusion policy on its intranet. The company also sought out new ways to partner with local LGBT organizations and other non-traditional business owners, can focus on success vs. survival.”

On her LinkedIn profile, Jennifer Pinck, president of Boston-based Pinck & Co. — an owner’s project management firm that provides planning, design and construction management consulting services — describes herself as a “haric problem solver with a laser focus on success vs. survival.”

A business trailblazer, Pinck launched her career in the late 1970s in the male-dominated field of the building trades as a commercial painter, and eventually rose to a role as construction supervisor for the George B.H. Macomber Co. in the 1980s. “It was really tough,” Pinck recalled in a 2011 interview with the BBJ. “I developed a thick skin and was very determined.”

A trailblazer throughout her career, Pinck in 1986 became the first woman to obtain a Boston ABC (builder’s) license.

Her vast professional experience includes working on two of the region’s most-observed mega-projects in the late 1980s and mid-90s. She served as a construction manager for the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority’s $250 million “Big Dig” Central Artery/Tunnel Project, aka the “Big Dig.”

Since its founding in 1978, her firm has served on a wide range of projects for public sector, institutional and nonprofit owners. Recent projects undertaken by Pinck & Co. include Castle Square, a 500-unit affordable housing development in Boston; and a $150,000-square-foot renovation and 20,000-square-foot addition for Norton High School.

Pinck also has a clear perspective on what it means to be an LGBT business owner in Massachusetts.

“Being an LGBT business owner in that state reflects the prevailing policies that the commonwealth, its citizens, its institutions and its businesses have embraced,” she said. “We have led the nation in extending rights to same-sex partners, domestic partnerships, marriage equality. This progressive outlook means that we’re creating a culture in which we’re safe to be ourselves. We’re also creating a workforce that is well positioned to be a leader in business and public policy. We’re talking to the businesses that are $100 billion companies in the state, and other non-traditional business owners, can focus on success vs. survival.”