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Developing the pink economy

'We want to provide a bridge to corporate Canada'

Presented by



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Few organizations look forward to the day when they will be irrelevant. But for Bruce McDonald, the ultimate success of the organization he cofounded a half-decade ago will only be celebrated when its existence is unnecessary. That time, however, is far off.

Whatever progress the gay-rights movement has made over the past four decades, and however much more tolerant society has become, there is still a need, says Mr. McDonald, founder of the Canadian Gay and Lesbian Chamber of Commerce (CGLCC).

"We're still not on an equal footing," says Mr. McDonald. "Special-interest chambers of commerce are bringing people together to get them that equal footing."

In Canada, there are several regional gay and lesbian business organizations, including the Ontario Gay and Lesbian Chamber of Commerce, the Quebec Gay Chamber of Commerce, the LAMBDA Business and Professional Association of Manitoba, the Gay and Lesbian Business Association of Greater Vancouver as well as informal groups in Halifax and Saskatchewan.

Along with co-founder Darrell Schuurman, a former tourism executive, Mr. McDonald established the CGLCC in 2003 to provide a national umbrella group to unite the regional chambers and advocate on their behalf.

"We wanted to provide a bridge to corporate Canada," says Mr. McDonald. For example, the CGLCC initiated a supplier-diversity program funded by IBM. "It's similar to other supplier-diversity programs that recognize women-owned business or aboriginal-owned businesses. So, when they're out looking to purchase goods, they give access to these diversity groups, which may not be as represented in their supply chain," says Mr. McDonald.

The CGLCC estimates there are 80,000 gay-and lesbian-owned businesses in Canada and that the gay economy is in the neighbourhood of \$75-billion.

More "straight" businesses are tapping into this community, says John Kenyon, president of the Ontario Gay and Lesbian Chamber of Commerce, which has roughly 100 members.

Lynette Latinsky, president of Latinsky Financial Services in Toronto, joined the Ontario Gay and Lesbian Chamber

of Commerce about five years ago as a show of support for the GLBT community.

Several years ago, Ms. Latinsky's husband, a renovator, met a client who told him that he had been turned down by several other renovators who had declined to work for him because he was gay. Ms. Latinsky was appalled.

"This is Canada. This shouldn't be happening," she says. "So I got involved [with the CGLCC] and have been a member ever since."

Michael Bach, a former member of the CGLCC's board of directors, says that joining a regional gay and lesbian chamber of commerce is not an either/or decision for business owners. "I don't think that anyone would say, 'I'm going to join the CGLCC or the Ontario Gay and Lesbian Chamber of Commerce versus joining the Toronto Chamber of Commerce.' ... It is just another opportunity for them to advance their business opportunities."

Mr. McDonald acknowledges that Canada has made huge strides towards human rights in recent decades, but that is no reason to become complacent.

"We have these rights here in Canada, but that doesn't mean the fight's over."

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