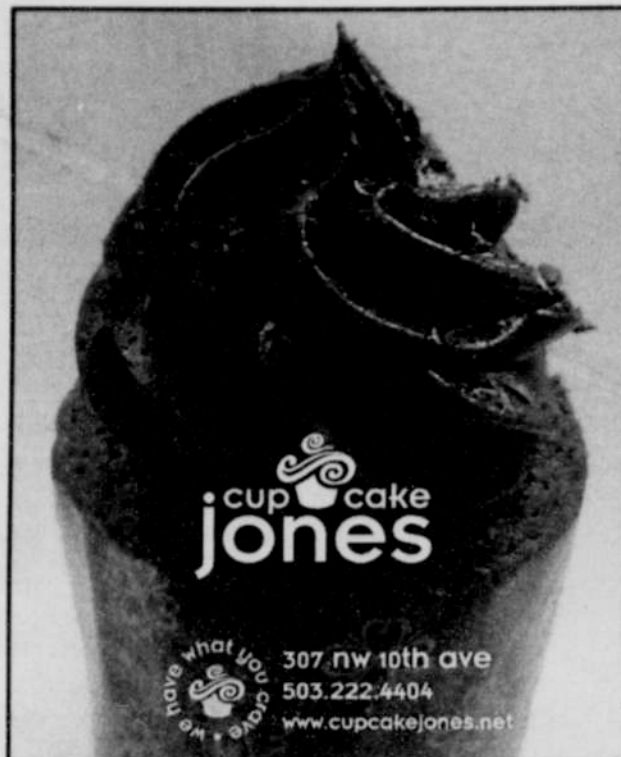


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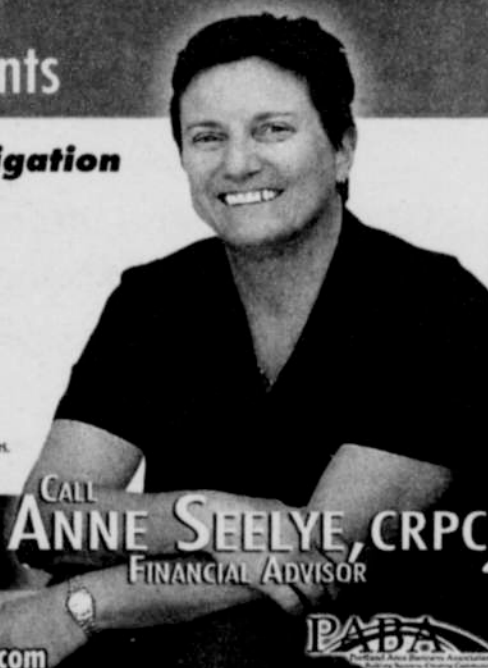
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northwest Scoring High

Portland law firm earns perfect score for equality

by Teresa Coates

Each year the Human Rights Campaign invites the country's largest and most successful companies to participate in the Corporate Equity Index survey. These include household names like S.C. Johnson & Son, Hewlett-Packard and the Walt Disney Company. There are hundreds more that participate but might not be so familiar, including Holland & Knight, a law firm with offices in more than 20 cities, including one in downtown Portland's U.S Bancorp Tower.

In its second year participating in the survey, Holland & Knight came out on top, scoring 100 percent for actions and policies toward sexual minority employees, as well as consumers and investors. This achievement also gives it recognition as one of the "best places to work for GLBT equality."

To achieve a 100 percent score, companies have to satisfy specific requirements, including offering diversity training to all employees; giving benefits for same-sex, as well as opposite-sex, domestic partnerships; and enforcing nondiscrimination policies.

According to Ed Cunningham, business manager for the Portland office, Holland & Knight does plenty to make its corporate environment pleasant for everyone. It's had a long history of welcoming diversity in its work force and continues to do so, encouraging its staff and lawyers to participate in diversity training through

Affinity Groups, staff get-togethers and invited speakers.

Affinity Groups are broken into subsets of race, gender and sexuality, although they are each open to anyone who wants to join. It's one way the company opens the doors to understanding.

Businesses like Holland & Knight that offer this enthusiasm and support for diversity tend to attract a mixed work force. Cunningham explained: "It's a cultural thing. If the firm's policies are supportive, it naturally evolves into a supportive environment" for all employees, regardless of race, gender identity or sexual orientation.

To score 100 percent on HRC's survey, some sort of diversity training is a requirement. Companies must also have a nondiscrimination policy regarding sexual orientation and gender identity, provide insurance for transitioning employees in one category (such as counseling, hormone therapy, disability or surgery), provide domestic partner health insurance and have a resource group or diversity council. Companies are also judged on their advertising and marketing to ensure that they are appropriate and respectful toward sexual minorities.

The businesses that satisfy these requirements are awarded a perfect score. Holland & Knight is one of the 195 to receive the honor, out of 519 businesses that participated this year. This is an enormous increase in businesses focusing on diversity.

HRC started the Corporate Equity Index in 2002, at which point only 13 employers received a perfect score. Every year the number of companies participating and the number of those improving their policies toward nondiscrimination increases.

Companies that satisfy all the requirements benefit by getting the proverbial feather for their cap, but it also helps business. "More businesses than ever before have recognized the value of a diverse and dedicated work force," said Joe Solmonese, president of HRC. "More importantly, these employers understand that discrimination against GLBT workers will ultimately hurt their ability to compete in the global marketplace." Cunningham agrees that the ratings give other companies "the impetus to support more diversity with formal policies."



Ed Cunningham, business manager for Holland & Knight's Portland office, says equitable policies are part of what makes the firm a pleasant place to work.

Knowing who supports equality is good for companies and consumers. The Corporate Equity Index lists the companies by industry, providing their scores and which criteria were satisfied (and, perhaps more importantly, where they were unsatisfied). At a glance, you can see which companies offer equality and which are lagging far behind.

Employers with perfect scores, like Holland & Knight, were given the recognition of being a "best place to work," while retail companies were ranked in "buying for equity." Companies that are meeting all equality expectations are marked as green, and consumers should avoid those marked with red. It's an easy code to follow when making purchases that will support those companies that support diversity. 10

The HUMAN RIGHTS CAMPAIGN has made the full report available for download at www.hrc.org.

TERESA COATES is a Portland freelance writer and devoted mother of two.

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