

AWARD NOMINATION

Award Category
Business of the Year

2021
Business & Community
EXCELLENCE
AWARDS



Nominated Business: **Dallas Wings**

DETAILS

During the last 12 months the Dallas Wings WNBA Basketball team has gone through many changes like all of us have had to do due to COVID-19. To be nominated for the North Texas LGBT Chamber of Commerce's Business of the Year Award is both humbling and reiterates that the work that we are doing is vital to the DFW Community and that there is still so much more that needs to be done.

When the world stopped back in March of 2020 for all of us, we were uncertain if we would have a season. During that time, I knew that no matter what, myself and the Dallas Wings would need to pivot and still be in the community (virtually) and still assist as much as we could. During April of 2020 when it looked like we wouldn't be playing games in our home arena, the Dallas Wings & I decided to move all our Pride Events for the month of June to a virtual format. We hosted multiple events throughout June from happy hours before Wing's games with the North Texas LGBT Chamber of Commerce where one chamber member each week would get the opportunity to talk about their business and what they are doing within the community to fundraising events for both The Greg Dollegener Memorial AIDS Fund (GDMAF) and the Coalition for Aging LGBT, that featured both live and silent auctions, Del Shores as the emcee for GDMAF's event with multiple performers, including Dallas's very own Rose Room cast, to Q&A's with players and coaches. Overall, we raised more than \$5,000 total for both fundraising events for both non-profits. We also hosted our Annual Pride Speaker Series with members from Toyota, HRC, and League at AT&T, AT&T's LGBTQ+ ERG group.

However, our efforts did not just stop at the end of June. As we continued to work from home and out of the office, we looked at ways that we could continue to help the community as whole in DFW. We provided lunches to frontline workers, we hosted virtual basketball clinics with at-risk youth and Special Olympic Texas athletes, we also continued our pre-game virtual happy hours with multiple different groups and organizations. We also hosted our Clear the List event virtually, where we asked people to nominate teachers and tell us why we should clear their school supply list. One of our corporate partners also helped us with this event. We were able to not only send supplies to these

teachers but also sent much needed cleaning supplies and sanitizer to help them start off the school year. In total we helped over 80 teachers throughout the metroplex. The Wings set up another online auction during this time where a portion of the proceeds went directly back to Bonton Farms in Dallas and when the snowstorm hit in February, we raised over \$100,000 that we donated back to help our neighbors in need.

When we started to return to work in the office (socially distanced of course) the Wings & I continued to look for ways that we could continue to help our communities, specifically my goal was to see how we could help the LGBTQ+ community even more as we saw more bills and legislation come through the Capitol than ever before. Internally we started our Sideline Conversations where we would bring in outside speakers from different communities that are marginalized to help educate our staff on different topics each month. One of the most memorable speakers that was brought on was Stacey Chosed, the CEO of League at AT&T. I brought Stacey in at the beginning of Pride Month and her presentation on Representation in the Workplace was one of the most engaging conversations we had. Prior to our annual Pride Game on June 25, 2021, we hosted our Pride Speaker Series with members from Toyota, HRC, Resource Center, and a Civil Rights Lawyer from Jeter Melder, LLP representing the panel. Topics included Transgender rights & the fight that we are still facing, the Equality Act, what diversity, equity, & inclusion really looks like in the workplace for LGBTQ+ individuals, and the Bostock v Clayton County case. Following the virtual speaker series, we hosted our annual Dine with Pride Courtside virtually benefitting The Human Rights Campaign. This virtual event included messages from Alphonso David, Dallas Wings players and coaches, a speaker panel featuring members from the local LGBTQ+ community, along with a silent auction where proceeds were donated to HRC.

Following our virtual events over the last year and a half, we were finally playing live basketball again. On the 6th Anniversary of Marriage Equality, the Dallas Wings hosted their 6th Annual Pride Game. This year we broke more barriers for our Pride game and included some elements that had never been done or seen before at a Pride game in professional or collegiate sports. Working with a locally owned LGBTQ+ small business, Pride Basics, we were able to have a 5' x 10' Inclusive Pride flag hang next to the American Flag & Texas Flag in the arena. As this was the first time that a team did this, we were not done yet; we also hung 10 different Pride flags that represents our unique and diverse community throughout the arena, 40 flags in total hung throughout the arena and line the concourse. One of the pillars of the WNBA this season was transgender inclusivity. As we all know the violence against the transgender community is still very much a problem and unfortunately murders of trans people are still not reported accurately. Knowing that DFW is one of the top cities in America for violence against our trans brothers and sisters, I knew we had to continue to show up for them but also help educate our fans and have a call to action as well. Since 2015, 9 transgender men and women have been murdered in DFW (that has been reported accurately) and chose to reserve 9 seats near the court and draped a Transgender pride flag and black Dallas Wings Pride t-shirts over them. We also had a station in place that read the names and ages of each life that was tragically lost as well as having a moment of silence in the game for them. Also, during the Pride game we recognized different individuals and companies/organizations that have helped the LGBTQ+ Community over the years in DFW, we also raised money through ticket sales to the game for the following organizations: North Texas LGBT Chamber of Commerce Foundation, GDMAF, Inc., Coalition for Aging LGBT, HRC, Cathedral of Hope, and Dallas Hope Charities. We celebrated anniversaries as this game was being played on the 6th Anniversary of Marriage Equality, we celebrated recent engagements, and even enjoyed the National Anthem being sung by Voices of Hope.

Dallas Wings

After the game we encouraged many of the groups to head into Dallas and enjoy some time at Sue Ellen's to also help bring some business back to them as they had just recently opened back up from being closed during the first couple of waves of this pandemic. At the end of the day on June 26, 2021, to say that the Dallas Wings were the first team to not just say we are hosting a Pride game, but we truly wanted each individual who walked into our arena to feel seen, heard, accepted, and loved is what our mission was for that day. I believe that we accomplished that and more. The outpouring of letters, texts, calls, and e-mails from people who attended our game, we will not forget. To continue to be able to give back to the community that has done for so many is also something that I am grateful for. Overall, it was not just a historic day but a day of celebration and love.

Being a part of the Dallas Wings is so much than just basketball. It is about being inclusive, giving back, showing love and acceptance, and continuing to put our hand to help our DFW community. To see and meet the number of youth and even adults that we help is inspiring, and we would not change that for anything. Even though Pride month has ended, that does not mean that our work here at the Dallas Wings is done. We know how much more work still needs to be done and we will continue to reach out and help as a team and organization. We are committed to the Dallas/Fort Worth Community. Onward & Upward.