

Pride 6x6 Art Commerce Conversations

Video Transcript

My name is Jay Johnson. I'm a senior video producer for the internal communication team at Commerce Bank. And about four years ago, I helped launch the Pride Employee Resource Group here at Commerce. We have these employee resource groups at Commerce Bank for all of us to join and build this stronger bond with each other and work on our culture together.

Pride was the fourth employee resource group to start here at Commerce. A few of them had been established for years before we ever got off the ground. And one of my big motivators was what can we do that stands out? What can we do that's a little different?

Every one of our groups had different volunteer events and different fundraisers they were already kind of owning, but we had a pandemic. We couldn't go volunteer places. We couldn't go to a soup kitchen and work. Nothing was happening in person at the time. So the idea that we could do something tied to our community this way that was very unique to the bank was really exciting.

So we got to own a whole new kind of process and a whole new way to raise funds and a way to get We send out six by six inch canvases, to artists that volunteer, And their pieces are auctioned off at an art show, and then we, donate the proceeds to LGBTQIA plus organizations, across our footprint.

On top of that, we got together with our community relations group, who work with nonprofits already on behalf of the bank, and they were able to pull some funds in. So the prizes for first place, second place, third place, and audience choice, they got to donate on behalf of the bank to a charity of their choice. Again, with the with the guidance that it was something tied to the LGBTQIA plus community.

You have one constraint. It has to fit within six inches by six inches. So we've had people make quilts. We've had people do paintings on canvas.

We've had people paint on stone. And we have one person who makes stained glass, another who makes woodworking pieces. And we measure them all. They're within six inches by six inches.

It makes it a lot easier to manage. It keeps everybody on an even playing field so nobody can say, well, of course they won. They made a six foot tall you know, canvas, but I only made like a twelve inches painting. So everyone's just got that one thing that they have to stay within, and then all their creativity happens within that little space.

It's grown every year. But this year's event, the fourth annual, we raised over three thousand dollars with twenty eight pieces of artwork, to an online and in person audience. So everybody got to bid on it. The very first year, that was only around a thousand, so it's just increased and increased and built up every year.

I was overwhelmed by the creativity. We had accountants, bankers, we had people working in the mail room who submitted some of the most amazing pieces of art. I was blown away by the creativity. I wasn't expecting there to be finger paintings, but I had no idea the level of skill and talent that we were going to be bringing in for this.

I was amazed. It's still to this day every year I look forward to certain people sending in those stained glass pieces, sending in that woodworking piece that one of our people do. It's been incredible.

I know the artists, I mean, we have a lot of the same artists come back every year, and then, a lot of our newer employees love to get involved in this way. I think it's a great way, for employees to, you know, feel more connected to the ERG.

And then, of course, like I said, the bidding wars, between people bidding on these pieces, always, you know, it can get intense and, we've got MCs that are, you know, kinda mediating that and it's always really fun.

So when I started at Commerce, I quickly found out that culture wasn't just words on a wall, like they really believe in it here. We really believe in it here. So it's really important to feel safe, especially when you're a LGBTQIA plus person. It's really important to know you have allies, you have friends, you have people who align with you.

And when this employee resource group started, what I thought of was, wow, we have a whole bunch of people stepping forward and joining and saying, yes, I'm your friend. Yes, I'm here for you. And that's huge. That's huge for our community, and I really appreciated that I finally worked somewhere where that's taken so seriously and really not just appreciated, but encouraged.