

POWER PLAYER

Former city council candidate looks ahead

Candy Marcum doesn't look upon her failed bid for the District 14 seat on the Dallas City Council as something negative but as something positive.

"I learned so much about this city and about the good people in my district," she says. "I learned about how this city is governed. Dallas has some problems - every big city does - but we've also got big-hearted people who care about this city, so I'm confident that we'll tackle our problems."

She offers as an example the city's recent effort to receive and place thousands of evacuees from the regions affected by hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

"That was impressive," she says. "We can be proud of ourselves."

The longtime psychotherapist, businesswoman, speaker and author also is proud of Dallas' GLBT community.

"There are a lot of GLBT people involved in Dallas - in preservation, in city government, in fundraising," she says. "The GLBT community is very important to Dallas. The campaign for City Council helped me see that very

clearly."

Marcum says one of the most important ways the GLBT community can have a positive impact on the citizens of the region is by working for equal marriage rights.

"The single biggest threat to families isn't allowing gays to marry," she says. "It's divorce. Half of all marriages end in divorce, and that takes a heavy toll on society. Whenever you have unstable families, or increasing demands on a family's time, money and energy, it has a ripple effect that may not be immediately recognized but is still profound."

She says extending the institution of marriage beyond its traditional terms to include gays would bring much-needed emotional stability to same-sex couples.

"People become emotionally stable when they feel safe, when things are in place," she says. "A lot of people who are married take for granted the things that can stabilize a relationship - things like visiting a spouse in the hospital, inheriting property, receiving Social Security and health-care benefits.

These things give couples confidence, and confidence stabilizes a relationship. That's why I consider making marriage more inclusive a mental health issue."

She hastens to add that marriage equality also would encourage more people to live open, honest lives.

"My partner, Carolyn Hall, and I have been together almost 20 years," she says. "It's my proudest accomplishment. And both personally and professionally I can attest to the fact that not being able to be who you are is bad on your self-esteem. When you hide, you think less of yourself. You feel invisible, demeaned. Society works much better when the people in it like themselves and feel good about the contributions they make."

Marcum, originally from Big Spring, has made many contributions to the city of Dallas for more than 30 years. She co-founded a nonprofit community counseling and community services agency, served on city boards and commissions, and served as national co-chair of the Human Rights Campaign, the nation's



Candy Marcum

largest GLBT civil rights organization providing a voice on gay and lesbian issues.

"I enjoy being active in our community and an advocate for our community," she says. "It really energizes me. I've known a lot of people whose energy is all bound up because they're afraid to be honest. That can produce all kinds of ill effects." ●

CHAMBER CHAMPION

Group's leader sings city's praises locally, nationally

It's been eight months since the North Texas GLBT Chamber of Commerce announced its kickoff event, and business is booming.

"We already have more than 300 members and four corporate sponsors," says chamber president Leo Cusimano. "That's a solid start by almost any standard."

Cusimano, advertising director for *Dallas Voice* and *TXN Newsmagazine*, says establishing a gay chamber was long overdue.

"Many years ago, Realtors George Harris and Jack Evans established the Stonewall Professional Business Association, a kind of forerunner to the chamber," he explains. "But the time was right to build on that and create something bigger,

more diverse."

Essential to that diversity is the group's willingness to welcome anyone who wants to join in its mission of empowering, promoting and supporting the economic and cultural development of the GLBT business community.

"The chamber's greatest strength is its diversity," Cusimano says. "If you want to promote North Texas to GLBT people nationally and tell them that Dallas is a great city to do business in, then this organization is for you."

A recent chamber-sponsored event involved a national press tour bringing several travel writers to the city so they could see for themselves what Dallas has to offer.

"It worked," Cusimano says. "We've already had four major articles written in national publications touting Dallas as a gay destination."

The chamber also is committed to helping its members improve their businesses and the way they do business.

"We provide business resources and education as well as networking and advertising opportunities," Cusimano says. "Our corporate sponsors - American Airlines, Deloitte, Global Merchant Group and SRJ Marketing - make it possible for us to provide an educational component. Plus, our monthly meetings, weekly e-mail blasts, mixers and special events all are aimed at fostering business relationships and growing commerce within the gay community and its allies. The bottom line is that we want to help our members grow stronger, smarter and more efficient in their business."

He says the GLBT community has real spending power, and is the best reason to support and promote gay-owned businesses.

"The latest market research shows that the total buying power of the U.S. gay population is more than \$610 billion," he says. "And more than \$2.5 billion of that goes into our North Texas economy. By bringing more GLBT business and people to our cities, we'll have an even more powerful impact on our economy, and we'll help build a stronger North Texas."

For more details, visit the Web site at www.northtexasglbtchamber.org. ●



Leo Cusimano

Photo by Aeneas Ford

GONE TO THE DOGS

Entrepreneur opens Dallas' latest hangout for pets and their people

By **Bob Pittman**

April Prohaska is way ahead of the pack when it comes to haute dog hangouts.

The Pooch Patio, located at 3811 Fairmount St., in Dallas, is a pleasing blend of neighborhood watering hole/coffee house, dog park, pet service provider and boutique. She calls it "The ultimate place to congregate and socialize with your pets."

Prohaska has two dogs of her own, a border collie named Bear and an Australian shepherd named Blue. They are proudly listed as "managers on duty" and pictured on the company's Web site. Prohaska says the business has become a popular meeting place for the GLBT community since opening earlier this summer.

The Pooch Patio offers iKandi coffee, including its own "Big Dog Brew," as well as playful wines from the Mutt Lynch Winery, including "Merlot Over and Play Dead," "Unleashed Chardonnay" and "Canis Major Zinfandel." An espresso machine cranks out "Bark-A-Lattes" and "Prissy Poodle Coffee." Pets can try the "Bone Appétit" line of gourmet dog food, including a "mutt loaf" with ground turkey. Down the way, the Bark Boutique offers specialty dog beds as well as toys, leashes, apparel, nutritional supplements, bones and treats. There's a large outdoor deck with televisions and a patio, and the business has wireless Internet access.

It's obvious that Prohaska had a blast developing the business concept. But don't be fooled by The Pooch Patio's puns and lighthearted approach - this sector of the economy is big business. U.S. residents spend more than \$3 billion a year on their pets, Prohaska points out.

The Pooch Patio is also strong on providing services - including a "doggie day care" offered Mondays through Saturdays and a spotless self-serve area where owners can trim, shampoo and groom their dogs.

The idea for the business was several years in development.

"I had always loved animals and knew that I wanted to work with them in some form or fashion," she says. "I knew I was great at working with people and customers."

However, she initially worked in Internet programming at AudioNet, the



April Prohaska and Bear

Photo by Steve Reed

company that later became Broadcast.com.

"As an animal lover and someone who traveled a lot, I saw a real need - not just in Dallas but also in other cities - for a coffee shop or a bar that was extremely pet friendly," Prohaska says. "You'd find one here and there, but it didn't seem as though anyone had really focused and built a business around the concept."

She decided to build a business where people and pets could congregate in a relaxed environment. So she spent several years researching and developing the idea, and she made a resolution

on New Year's Day 2005 to have The Pooch Patio up and running by 2006. But things started moving rapidly after that. She found a building (a former funeral home) in February, signed a lease in March and spent four months renovating the building before opening the doors in July.

"My business is growing astronomically," she says. "I get more clients on a daily basis. Some days are busier than others. I have had as many as 22 dogs in doggie day care. Most of my clients use the service two to four days a week, although some come in five days a week."

She would like to open two additional Texas locations - perhaps in Austin and in Plano, Frisco or Las Colinas - before extending her reach out of state. She's already been contacted by individuals interested in opening franchises of The Pooch Patio in other U.S. cities.

"People are getting out there and socializing more with animals because it brings people together," she says. "Every Friday, night, for example, we have a pooch mixer. It's a non-invasive way to meet other people, single or not."

For more details, visit the Web site at www.thepoochpatio.com. ●

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