



2022
BEST
PLACES
TO WORK
FOR **DEI**

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR



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The Rochester Business Journal has held annual Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Summits since 2019 to help educate Rochester-area businesses on the importance of DEI and to bring leaders together to help others grow their DEI efforts.

This year, we decided to honor companies that have taken steps to improve their DEI programs by launching the Best Places to Work For DEI awards.

This regional survey and awards program was designed to identify, recognize and honor the best places of employment for diversity, equity and inclusion, in Western NY, Central NY and the Finger Lakes, benefiting the region's economy,

workforce and businesses.

We are happy to recognize five companies for the work they are doing in Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. You can read more about these honorees in the following pages.

To be considered for participation, companies had to fulfill the following eligibility requirements:

- Have at least 15 employees working in Western NY, Central NY and/or the Finger Lakes;
- Be a for-profit or not-for-profit business or government entity;
- Be a publicly or privately held business;
- Have a facility in Western NY, Central NY and/or the Finger Lakes; and
- Be in business a minimum of one year.

Companies from across the region entered the two-part process to determine the Best Places to Work For DEI. The first part consisted of evaluating each nominated company's workplace policies, practices and demographics. This part of the process

was worth approximately 25% of the total evaluation. The second part consisted of an employee survey to measure the employee experience in diversity, equity and inclusion. This part of the process was worth approximately 75% of the total evaluation. The combined scores determined the top companies and the final ranking. Best Companies Group managed the overall registration and survey process in the region and also analyzed the data and used their expertise to determine the final honorees.

Thank you to all the companies who applied to go through the survey process and congratulations to the honorees. Working to improve DEI efforts is vital to the success of our business community, and we applaud every company that is taking steps to do so.

If you have suggestions for next year's Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Summit or tips for DEI coverage in general, please feel free to email me at bjacobs@bridgetowermedia.com.

Coordinated Care Services, Inc.

Coordinated Care Services, Inc. (CCSI) takes diversity, equity and inclusion seriously, and they employ a full-time diversity officer to oversee its initiative and efforts.

"It's important to understand that there isn't one framework or model to follow when incorporating DEI into your overall strategy," says Chief Diversity Officer Kesha Carter.

The 438-employee nonprofit, health and human services company provides a broad array of management services and technical assistance specifically tailored to meet the needs of local behavioral health, social and human services departments, state agencies and community-based organizations in Monroe County, across New York state and beyond.

CCSI leaders say engaging in this type of work must be a commitment that is made to all of its employees, the agencies it works with, the communities that it serves and the people that it engages with every day.

As Carter explains, the DEI effort isn't all hers or anyone else's alone. It's a shared commitment. The effort requires the participation of all departments, management, senior leadership and board members to be successful.

Anti-racist Practices, Trauma Informed Response, Health and Wellness and a Code of Busi-



ness Ethics form the foundation of CCSI's talent and culture strategy.

CCSI regularly engages employees to provide feedback through various methods including surveys, town hall meetings, staff meetings and other social/community platforms to keep a pulse on how the company is doing and to ensure that the employee experience is aligned with "best" place to work benchmarks and criteria.

CCSI leaders say their vision is to be an exceptional place for individuals to grow and build a career, while expanding its

capacity to invest in communities. Flexible work hours and an attempt to have little or no overtime helps employees manage a healthy work/life balance.

"Focusing on DEI has helped CCSI evaluate the impact we historically have had on the community and all the individuals who work here," says Carter, although she notes there is always room for improvement. "Incorporating DEI within all of our business functions allows us to identify these areas of growth and collaboratively work together to create innovative solutions for closing these gaps

to sustain a culture of inclusion, anti-racism and equitable opportunity."

Among the benefits of successful DEI implementation is that current and former employees say that they would recommend CCSI as a good place to work to their friends and family.

Employees say they appreciate that CCSI empathizes with its employees' lives and recognizes diverse backgrounds, life experience and hires employees from a mix of cultures.

Excellus BlueCross BlueShield

Excellus BlueCross BlueShield leaders have put Sady Alvarado-Fischer in charge of diversity, but promoting equity and inclusion throughout the company is more than one person's job or an initiative that's dictated by a checklist.

"It takes ongoing, intentional action to disrupt interpersonal and systemic inequities," said Alvarado-Fischer, director of diversity for the insurer.

Excellus adopted an I.D.E.A. (Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Access) Mindset in 2019, which Alvarado-Fischer described as "the lens through which we approach our work and take action ... (It) has enabled all our employees to see themselves in this work and understand how they can better serve others.

"I.D.E.A. has allowed us to have important conversations around privilege, biases, racism and other forms of oppression that are at the root of health inequities."

Among the changes fostered by the I.D.E.A. Mindset, Excellus has raised the minimum hourly wage to \$18; started DEI book clubs as part of employee conversations about racism; performed an annual inclusion survey to measure DEI experiences of employees; and launched Health Equity

Award grants to improve community health.

"The I.D.E.A. Mindset means digging deeper, asking the tough questions and taking action to ensure our communities have access to the health care they deserve," Alvarado-Fischer said. "Becoming a more socially conscious and just organization is a humbling journey."

Excellus also started a diversity mentorship program, added a DEI policy to its employee handbook and increased employee communications around DEI issues. The company has been recognized by the Human Rights Campaign Foundation's Corporate Equality Index Best Places to Work for LGBTQ+ Inclusion since 2014, earning a 90% score in 2022; and received a 100% score on the "Best Place to Work for Disability Inclusion" 2022 Disability Equality Index.

Beyond racial and ethnic aspects of DEI, education is provided on micro-aggressions related to ageism and biased language. Excellus offers training on generations in the workplace, and the company encourages employees, particularly those nearing retirement, to have their own development plan to stay engaged and feel valued.

As part of its benefits, some pack-



ages include full coverage for hearing aids. Employees have reported that prior to working at Excellus, they had to take out personal loans to buy hearing aids.

Excellus hosts 10 employee resource groups, including an Indigenous and Native American group. All the groups offer cultural education, and experts from outside the company are invited to provide cultural competency training on a variety of populations.

Alvarado-Fischer said DEI efforts take time and resources. While DEI

is a team effort, she said successful strategies can start with investing in a team to lead the work and for executives to trust in that team's professional expertise and lived experience. Frequent communication, measuring results and making adjustments are crucial to staying on track.

"Be clear about your company's commitment to DEI both internally and externally," she said. "Hold your organization accountable for action. Remember: It's about progress, not perfection."

Home Leasing LLC

Home Leasing LLC is committed to providing affordable housing options to those in need at a time when the need for housing solutions has never been greater, and its employees are guided by a set of core values: servant leadership, a commitment to community, transparency, generosity and sustainability.

In order to preserve those values now and in the future, the company maintains a Certified Benefit Corporation status, which is given to for-profit companies that meet verified social and environmental performance, transparency and accountability standards. A CBC corporation strives to work toward fulfilling the promise to transform the global economy to benefit the earth and all of its people.

Furthermore, commitment to DEI workforce principles creates a workforce benefit of employee retention, reduced turnover, longevity, engagement and a variety of perspectives for Home Leasing.

"Among our 200 positions is a very wide range of jobs that require us to successfully recruit people from diverse perspectives in urban, suburban and rural areas," CEO Bret Garwood explains. "Prioritizing DEI

has created a work environment that values individual differences and a culture that minimizes bias and recognizes and addresses systematic inequities."

Garwood says his team cares passionately about carrying out its mission to "improve the lives of our residents and the communities in which we work while aspiring to do no harm."

The family-owned real estate development and construction company is as committed to its employees as it is to the communities it serves. The management and employees of Home Leasing believe housing is a fundamental human right and a necessity to live a quality life.

To ensure DEI initiatives are implemented and successful, the company has two DEI co-chair employees.

Like its fellow Best Places to Work for DEI honorees, Home Leasing offers flexible hours for family necessities such as school events or to accommodate the medical needs of family members. In addition, employees are allowed to utilize more time off than they actually have on a temporary basis, if needed.



Choosing how and where they want to work is a valuable option for most Home Leasing employees. Most choose the work from home option while others prefer the office and others have a hybrid schedule.

"We empower our employees to work where they can do their best work," Garwood says.

The company recognizes the holidays of its multi-cultural workforce. Multi-cultural employee

groups plan cultural and inclusive events for all employees.

Home Leasing employees note they appreciate that the company donates \$100 annually to the charity of every employee's choice. Employees are also asked to take a day off annually to assist the charity or organization of their choosing, representing the company's dedication to giving back to the community.

Huther Doyle

Huther Doyle's presence in the community is much larger than the nonprofit agency itself.

The reason for that is due to factors such as the area's great need for their addiction recovery services and the fact that the agency, founded in 1977, partners with other community organizations to accomplish its mission to provide addiction treatment services and health-related services to their clients.

"We partner with our clients to transform their lives through our substance use disorder outpatient clinic and our Health Home," says Human Resources Director Colleen Jank. "In all our work we practice patient-centered, trauma-informed care."

The nonprofit agency not only operates its own health home program to ensure that Medicaid recipients get connected to the medical care and community support they need, but the organization leads 40 other health home programs as well.

It's rewarding work just by itself for the 45 local Huther Doyle employees that do it, but the agency makes sure it's a rewarding experience for its employees, as well. The agency is committed to person-centered care not only to the people it serves but for

the people that work there, too.

Employees say the company cares about their well-being and provides resources and programming to support the whole person.

Health care cost is a universal concern for all employers and their employees. Huther Doyle offers its employees a no premium high deductible health care and dental plan for free.

"We strive to have a staff that is representative of the community we serve and feel that helps us to serve our clients better," Hank explains. "Through the lifecycle of the employee we seek to have a diverse staff that are respected and cared for as individuals."

That strategy and reputation in the community helps make recruiting in a difficult recruiting era easier and keep employee turnover down.

Much like the other Best Places to Work for DEI honorees, Huther Doyle leadership acknowledges achieving a sense of belonging for every employee is a continuous journey that doesn't end with an award ceremony.

Effective and ongoing communication is a key to successful DEI. The agency established a Cultural Competence Committee specifically



to plan training and events and guide important DEI measures.

An example of DEI awareness for employees is educating staff about the importance of pronouns in society today. CEO Kelly Reed provides weekly motivational quotes. Huthers Happenings newsletter keeps employees informed. Employee accomplishments and recognition is the subject of "Goosebump Reports."

The agency also utilizes local re-

sources to assist in DEI advancement such as participating in the United Way's 21-Day Racial Equity Challenge and the Rochester-Monroe Anti-Poverty Initiative.

Jank advises businesses that are creating DEI programs and initiatives to "move with commitment and intent and take purposeful steps forward that are visible and evident to staff."

Mengel, Metzger, Barr & Co. LLP

Mengel, Metzger, Barr and Co., a public accounting firm headquartered on Chestnut Street in Rochester, serves businesses and individuals in Rochester, Canandaigua, Elmira and Hornell. Knowing it serves clients in a mix of urban, suburban and rural areas, the firm is working to recruit talent and create a culture that reflects the communities it calls home.

In 2020, Mengel, Metzger, Barr established its diversity, equity and inclusion committee with the goal to foster a diverse and inclusive work environment.

"This group is highly committed to creating a corporate culture that reflects the communities we come from, the clients we serve and the growth needed in our industry," said Lauren M. Ciaccia, the firm's chief talent officer.

To that end, the firm established a DEI Scholarship Program that identifies minority students who want to pursue accounting as a career. Scholarship winners receive a \$2,000 award that is renewable for up to four years, and the students gain an internship with the firm.

"Our hope is to encourage peo-

ple of all different backgrounds to pursue the accounting profession and to feel like they have a meaningful career with MMB," Ciaccia said.

Those already with MMB are exposed to monthly heritage newsletters that feature different cultures, historical minorities and their achievements. Company-wide heritage celebration lunches are ways to educate about and celebrate cultural differences. In addition to informal monthly events, MMB provides more structured DEI training to its 125 team members.

"Putting structure around our DEI initiative has further fostered our culture of inclusivity throughout our firm," Ciaccia said. "Allowing employees to feel seen, heard and valued has driven employee engagement across the board and has resulted in more diverse thinking and innovation."

"Individuals are encouraged to contribute new ideas openly and without judgement. MMB is committed to ensuring every employee sees a future for themselves within our firm."

The focus on DEI has led to a different approach to the actual



tasks — incorporating remote work, reduced schedules and flexibility that give employees choice to fit their personal circumstances.

The DEI approach to running a business is not just offering an annual training or a one-off event.

"DEI is not a policy nor the charge of a committee," Ciaccia said. "DEI is the way a company operates and makes decisions. It is engrained in who you are and how you engage with your em-

ployees. It is your culture."

Companies already have the resources to start a DEI strategy, she said. It's a matter of creating a framework, identifying leaders and opening the process to all who want to contribute.

"Most importantly, have fun with the DEI strategy development," Ciaccia said. "Be open minded and engaged in the initiative for the most impactful long-term benefits."