Everybody Reads

When Scott Harris opened Everybody Reads Books and Stuff in 2006, it was a dream come true that was born out of a tragedy. But now that the store has celebrated its third anniversary, tragedy is behind him and Harris is ready to help the community in any way he can - including LGBTs.

Harris and his wife met while studying at Michigan State University. For years leading up to and after their marriage, they talked about opening up a bookstore together that would serve the Lansing community. Harris worked in insurance, his wife worked in retail, and they had children together - always keeping their dream in their minds.

But before they could reach it, fate had other plans for the Harris family.

"We kind of kept (the idea of the bookstore) at arm's length and it festered there for a while but we didn't act on it," Harris explained. "Then about six and a half years ago, my wife passed away. At the time, my kids were very, very young. So the one thing that was clear to me was that I couldn't continue selling insurance. I had no idea what I would do at that point, but I knew I couldn't do that."

After a stint as a substitute teacher, Harris conceived Everybody Reads, and their dream finally became a reality.

The store began with books for children who had lost a parent to divorce or death. Then Harris added special needs to the list of necessary book topics. And multicultural families. And foster homes. And, of course, LGBT families.

Today, the bookstore is an eclectic mish-mash of books, bumper stickers and small knick-knacks, all with one goal in mind: to serve the underserved. From titles for parents of autistic children to books for children with parents who have substance abuse problems, Everybody Reads does just that.

Above and beyond that, however, the store has helped publicize important causes, such as anti-bullying legislation. Harris also features a non-profit each month that puts out their literature in the store and receives donations from sales proceeds. Featured LGBT-focused non-profits have included the Lansing Area AIDS Network, the Lansing Association for Human Rights and even the local high school Gay-Straight Alliance.

More than anything, though, Harris hopes that the books he sells will help children and parents who are having a tough time adjusting to their life in a "non-traditional" family. "Every child should be represented somehow," he commented. "No child should ever have to feel conspicuous on top of feeling..."
whatever else it is that they are feeling."

Including LGBT kids or kids in an LGBT-run household. For Harris, that demographic was an obvious choice to include.

"When we talk about people in various communities, we're talking about our family. We're talking about our friends. We're talking about our co-workers," he said of his choice to offer books for and about LGBT people. "I'll be damned if I'm going to allow anyone to limit or marginalize what my friends or family can do.

"No thought had to go into it. It's just the right thing to do."

So what books won't shoppers find in the Lansing store?

"Anything that marginalizes. Anything that preaches hate or intolerance. Anything that is dishonest," Harris said without hesitation. "...we're trying to preach inclusion and equality, not just because of this agenda, but because it's absolutely the right thing to do. The world belongs to all of us, not just the people who have the money and the power and the stump from which they can yell and scream.

"Anything that's homophobic, anything that's misogynistic, anything that advocates violence - we're not going to sell it here."

But as for anything that's inclusive, educational or progressive? You bet.

**Comerica Bank**

Comerica Bank, in Michigan for over 160 years in one form or another, has long stood for solid conservatism. Yet the LGBT group within the bank - plus one champion ally - have proven once again that it takes only a few dedicated people to affect great change when they work together towards a common goal.

Comerica has recently launched a new LGBT Business Initiative to develop business relationships within the LGBT community, both in the bank's retail centers and in their business banking relationships. Beth Correa, Senior Vice President and Regional Manager in Oakland County, chairs the initiative and said she came to realize that Comerica was missing a great opportunity by not focusing on the LGBT market.

"My eyes were opened when I attended an in-house diversity training seminar a couple of years ago," said Correa. LGBT speakers shared personal stories about their difficulties in dealing with financial institutions that did not honor or understand their family relationships. "I realized that there is a great market in the LGBT community and that we needed to reach out and provide services."

She sought out the internal LGBT Employee group (then chaired by Craig Mancuso and now, by Gary Lelito) and together they were successful in securing Comerica as a sponsor for several LGBT events including the Affirmations Big Bash, Motor City Pride, Triangle Foundation's Annual Dinner and others.

"I've been really pleased we have been so warmly welcomed," said Correa, who has attended many of the
LGBT events sponsored by Comerica.

Establishing the new, formal LGBT Business Initiative was their next achievement.

"Diversity is one of Comerica's core principles, meaning that it is one of our key business drivers. We believe that if we focus on the diversity of our staff and our customers we will be more successful," said Correa. She leads the monthly meetings of the 13-member group that includes managers from the banking center, the Wealth & Institutional management group, small business banking, marketing, communications and human resources. "What I have witnessed in chairing this group is I feel there are a lot more allies than we ever had before," she said.

Correa hopes to see tangible changes within the bank as well. "I also would really like to see an increased awareness internally at Comerica. Sometimes just basic things, like what LGBT stands for."

At a recent LGBT Business Initiative meeting, some members expressed concern that although the bank received an excellent rating on the 2008 Human Rights Campaign Corporate Index, they did not get the coveted 100 percent rating because the bank's non-discrimination policy does not extend to transgender people.

"We need to get that done," said Lelito. "Comerica needs to be at 100 percent with HRC." And just like that, a new goal was set and plans were discussed to begin moving the policy through the human relations department. Change is happening within Comerica, because people believe in each other and their collective ability to make it happen.