



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
November 20, 2017

**Contact:** Jeremy M. Helfgot  
J.M. Helfgot Communications  
Mobile: (310) 413-3360  
E-mail: [jm@helfgot.com](mailto:jm@helfgot.com)

**PHOENIX PRIDE BIDS FOND FAREWELL TO**  
**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR JUSTIN OWEN,**  
**WELCOMES INTERIM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**  
**MICHAEL FORNELLI**

**FIVE-YEAR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OWEN ACCEPTS NEW POSITION**

**PHOENIX** — The board of directors of **Phoenix Pride** has announced that the organization's executive director of nearly five years, **Justin Owen**, will be departing his professional role at the agency on December 31<sup>st</sup>. Mr. Owen has accepted the position of executive director of the McDowell Sonoran Conservancy in Scottsdale, beginning on January 1, 2018.

Concurrently, the board is pleased to reveal that Phoenix Pride has hired veteran business owner, Pride board member and community leader **Michael Fornelli** to serve as interim executive director upon Mr. Owen's departure.

Under Mr. Owen's nearly five years of leadership at Phoenix Pride, the organization has undergone tremendous growth, and 2017 will stand as one of the most successful years in the agency's history, with record attendance and revenue at the Phoenix Pride Festival and Parade, as well as phenomenal turnout at last month's Rainbows Festival and an incredibly successful local Unity Rally for Equality and Pride

- more -

**PHOENIX PRIDE ANNOUNCES CHANGES IN PROFESSIONAL LEADERSHIP  
NOVEMBER 20, 2017  
PAGE 2**

held in June. In addition, the agency awarded more than \$80,000 in community grants and scholarships during the 9<sup>th</sup> Annual Community Spirit Awards held over the summer.

“While we are certainly sad to see Justin depart the organization which he has so successfully led for us on the professional level over the past four-and-a-half years, we are extremely excited to see him pursuing this new and exciting opportunity in his career,” Phoenix Pride President of the Board **Mark Leeper** said. “Under Justin’s leadership, we have experienced tremendous growth in multiple areas, and he is leaving us in a position of strength and stability, with significant leaps in our presence, reach and credibility in the community. We are also very happy to announce that Justin will remain involved in Phoenix Pride on a volunteer basis, and we are thrilled that he will continue to share his skills, contacts and experience with our organization and our community.

“At the same time, we are excited to announce the appointment of Michael Fornelli as our interim executive director, effective upon Justin’s departure,” Leeper added. “Mike’s long presence in our community as a business owner, community leader and local icon for LGBTQ rights, provides a phenomenal platform from which to continue the momentum Phoenix Pride has built as an agency, and we look forward to writing the next chapter in our history with Mike at the organization’s professional helm.”

“For more than 20 years, the Pride Movement has been a home and an extended family for me, and serving as the executive director of Phoenix Pride over the past four-and-a-half years has been the greatest honor and privilege of my career to date,” Justin Owen added. “I fully intend to remain connected to Pride in a volunteer capacity, and to stay active in pursuing equity and parity for Arizona’s entire LGBTQ community, even as I move into my new role beginning in January.”

“I am truly honored and humbled to be entrusted with the professional leadership of Phoenix Pride, an organization that I have loved, admired and supported for many, many years, and I am especially excited to continue working with Mark and the entire

- more -

**PHOENIX PRIDE ANNOUNCES CHANGES IN PROFESSIONAL LEADERSHIP  
NOVEMBER 20, 2017  
PAGE 3**

Phoenix Pride Board through this critical next phase of the organization's existence," Michael Fornelli stated. "We are facing an era of challenge and change for the LGBTQ community, with uncertainty surrounding policy at the federal and state level, and increased incidents of anti-LGBTQ bias and violence. However, our community is at its strongest when we come together and stand boldly, and Phoenix Pride will continue to be the touchstone for that unity, by providing the two largest public LGBTQ community events in the State of Arizona and continuing to lend our voice to advocating for equity for our community, including the push for anti-discrimination protections at the Arizona Legislature."

Mr. Fornelli, has been the Owner and President of popular Scottsdale LGBTQ bar/nightclub BS West, since 1992. His experience includes extensive background in financial management, staff leadership, community engagement and event production. He has served as a festival entertainment manager and pageant director for Phoenix Pride since 2013, and joined the Phoenix Pride Board of Directors earlier this year. In addition, he serves as board director and chief of staff for USofA Pageantry, and he previously held a three-year term on the board of directors of local LGBTQ youth support organization one•n•ten.

**ABOUT PHOENIX PRIDE**

Phoenix Pride is the producer of the two largest annual public LGBTQ community events in Arizona: the Phoenix Pride Festival and Parade held each spring in April, and the Rainbows Festival, held every fall in October. Founded in 1981, the organization engages year-round in its mission to unite, educate and engage people and partners to support and empower the LGBTQ community and its current and future allies.

Additional information regarding Phoenix Pride is available online at the agency's web site, <http://www.PhoenixPride.org>.

# # #