

Christine Skrak Creates Trend with "It's About Life"

Text by Lisa Walls

She attributes her entrepreneurial success to "being in the right place at the right time" and "being lucky." Christine Skrak is modest, yet anything but lucky. In reality, she's a hard worker whose clear vision and determined nature led her to form her first company—an ad agency—at the tender young age of twenty. Her second venture, a custom furniture rental business for trade shows, just celebrated its 20th anniversary. (She sold the business to her sister before starting Triumph Expo and Events.) Her youngest baby, Trend Productions, is an offshoot of Triumph, formed for the specific purpose of organizing gay expos.

Christine is partnering with the Greater Seattle Business Association to produce "It's About Life," Seattle's first broad-themed gay expo. LGBT and LGBT-friendly businesses will have booths at the Washington State Convention and Trade Center during Pride weekend, June 20–22. Four different market segments will be represented at the event: health and fashion, community and professional services, home and family, entertainment and travel.

Entertainers are also lined up for the weekend, the most well-known act being Sandra Bernhard. Music enthusiasts and writers will be pleased with the others: recording artists Liz Clark and Ari Gold, and actor and playwright Odalys Nanin. Christine is most excited about meeting Odalys, because "she's an entrepre-

neur. She started a theatre company. When I read about her I said, 'We have to get her.'"

Entrepreneurs are upstarts who don't always fit into corporate America. They're not afraid to take risks. "I've always been a bit of a rebel," said Christine. "I didn't like the feel of corporate culture. I think I can offer more and make a bigger difference on my own, when I can control my own destiny."

And offer more she does. Wade Schwartz, Christine's employee and a person who (according to his boss) has been "paramount in concept" for the expo and in setting up the entertainment, said, "she gives a lot more away than people know. She donates stuff to nonprofits and gives without being recognized. If people only knew how much she gives. ... She's phenomenal."

As a businessperson, Wade said Christine "has it in her mind where she wants people to go" and that "she's incredible at directing people to her vision." This vision includes creating a corporate culture with an open-door policy, and encouraging her employees to follow their passion. "She's let me pursue my life dream of supporting the LGBT community," said Wade.

Christine's penchant for giving will continue with her first gay expo. Gay Bingo opens the weekend, and all proceeds go to Lifelong AIDS Alliance and the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence, including their nonprofit. A percentage of every ticket will go to the GSBA. In addition, a cash donation from Trend Productions goes to the Sisters. "We're doing lots for the community in a short period of time," said Wade.

Speaking about the upcoming event, Wade said, "This event highlights where we're at ...



Christine Skrak of Trend Productions.

it pushes us past just having a parade." Trend Productions is planning for two gay expos this year, their Seattle debut, followed by Dallas in October. Planned for 2009 are expos for Phoenix, Chicago, Los Angeles, and Denver.

Expos targeting the gay community have been happening for many years on the East Coast. The vision of a dynamic woman with a quiet, commanding presence starts the "trend" of our community enjoying the same event in our own territory.

Christine said the expo "presents an avenue for people to support companies that are forward thinking and open to diversity. For Seattle, we're working with the GSBA and the Chamber of Commerce to bring more gay tourism to the city. Seattle is a key turning point for the first event. I think if we have a successful event in Seattle, the rest will follow."

The "It's About Life" Expo is at the Washington State Convention and Trade Center June 20–22. Buy your tickets online at www.seattlegayexpo.com.

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