

Big Law Celebrates 'Generations of Strength' at SF Pride Parade

On Sunday, June 24, Am Law 100 firms with roots in California have organized events for their staffs to march alongside those advocating for diversity and equality.

By Xiumei Dong

As San Francisco celebrates Pride Month this weekend with marches, concerts, workshops and more, lawyers and staffers from many large law firms are also showing their support, celebrating the achievements of the LGBTQ community.

On Sunday, June 24, Am Law 100 firms with roots in California have organized events for their staffs to march alongside those advocating for diversity and equality.

This is the second year Los Angeles-headquartered Sheppard, Mullin, Richter & Hampton is

participating in San Francisco's pride parade—the oldest and largest parade that celebrates the LGBTQIA community. The theme for this year's parade is "Generations of Strength," which is meant to commemorate nearly a half-century of activism in the city and beyond.



On Market Street participants gather to be a part of this year's theme "Generations of Strength."



Sheppard Mullin's Summer Connery makes sure the rainbow streamers adorn the parade cable car.



On left: Sheppard employee Sandi Cleveland helps hang a sign before the start of the parade.



Sandi Cleveland Sheppard Mullin



Left to right: Deb Kirk and Alisa Woodring at the parade pre-launch site.



Sheppard Co-managing partner Morgan Forsey (holding phone) takes a staff selfie at the parade, where over 100 Sheppard employees marched under the banner of "Generations of Strength."



Sheppard Mullin partner Rob Guite, co-chair of the firm's Out at Sheppard LGBTQ Group, marches on Market Street.



Sheppard Mullin's Summer Connery gets funky along the parade route.



This is Sheppard Mullin's second year marching in what is considered to be the largest parade that celebrates the gay rights.



Over 100 Sheppard Mullin employees participated in the march down Market Street.



The theme for this year's parade is "Generations of Strength."

“Our commitment to diversity is something we want to make more visible,” said Rob Guite, co-chair of the firm’s Out at Sheppard LGBTQ Group and a partner in the business trial practice group in the San Francisco office.

According to the firm, a contingent of over 150 lawyers, staff and their families and friends will be marching along the tens of thousands of participants that have gathered from all around the world. The group will also charter a motorized cable car festooned with the firm’s logo, and will be accompanied by the University of California cheerleading team.

“We really wanted to participate not only sort of behind the scene, but also be in the parade to be visible, as well as the pro bono work that we do for the organizations we represent,” said Guite.

Sheppard Mullin has long served as national outside general counsel to the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD) and a national sponsor of Lambda Legal. The firm’s lawyers also serve as pro bono general counsel to San Francisco Pride, and Los Angeles Pride. While the lawyers have been involved with a number of pro bono work to protect LGBTQ rights, Guite said, the pride parade also gives the firm the chance to invite other staff members, as well as their family members and clients to participate in the celebration.

In addition to joining the march in San Francisco, Sheppard Mullin’s lawyers also participated in the Los Angeles Pride parade

last weekend and will march again in San Diego next month, Guite added.

Also marching in the San Francisco Pride parade are Fenwick & West and Morrison & Foerster. Fenwick & West, which has been a staple at the event for four consecutive years, said the firm expects about 100 employees and their families and friends to march among its ranks.

Morrison & Foerster, whose former chairman Keith Wetmore was one of the first openly gay men to lead a large law firm, is hosting its second annual Pride breakfast with the Bay Area Lawyers for Individual Freedom (BALIF) in its San Francisco office during the day of the parade. The group will then march together along Market Street from Embarcadero to the Civic Center.

“We feel that attorneys and even our clients are best served when people can truly be themselves, and carry themselves the way they perceive themselves in the office and work place,” said Philip Besirof, managing partner of the firm’s San Francisco office.

Although Cooley has not yet announced a contingent to march in the parade, the Silicon Valley firm has organized a first-ever San Francisco Pride Parade Brunch this year, inviting its employees and their family members and friends to watch the parade from the firm’s conference rooms facing Market Street.

“We have recognized pride month for years now with firm-wide programs,” said Amie

Santos, director of diversity and inclusion at Cooley. “I have been very impressed with the firm not shy[ing] away from issues that may be uncomfortable, or not traditional to speak about by law firm standards.”

Pride Month stems from the historic riots at the Stonewall Inn in New York City. Since the initial Pride marches of the 1970s, the festivities have extended to fill the entire month of June. In addition to getting involved with the Pride marches, these law firms have also held a series of events throughout the month including fundraisers, internal education program, networking and speaker events to support and raise the awareness of the community.

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