

SAN DIEGO BUSINESS JOURNAL

PRIDE MONTH

The San Diego Business Journal and the Community of Business™ proudly support LGBTQ+ Pride Month.



Gossip Grill: The Go-To Place for LGBTQ+ Community

Where 'Welcome Home Beautiful' is More Than a Motto

■ By KAREN PEARLMAN

Moe Girton is the owner and general manager of **Gossip Grill**, the successful women-forward bar, restaurant and night-club in Hillcrest.

The inclusive spot with a full patio bar and dance floor and a big, bold black and pink neon sign inside shouting "Welcome Home Beautiful" caters to the LGBTQ+ community but offers a safe space for all.

"Gossip Grill is for anyone," said Girton, 47, co-owner and general manager of the 6,000-square-foot site that opened in 2009. "Whether you're 10, 20 or 100 percent gay, straight, bi, pan or trans, or anything under that umbrella, you're welcome here. The cool thing about Gossip Grill is we are there for those who sometimes don't feel safe."



Moe Girton
Owner
Gossip Grill

Girton called the site "intersectional" and said that everyone is welcome, particularly "the marginalized of the marginalized."

With no lack of "cis white gay bars" in the region – cis meaning those whose gender identity and expression matches the biological sex they were assigned when they were born – Girton said, "sometimes those who are black and brown, trans and non-binary, and fluid gender don't feel they have a place where they belong. This is why it is so important to keep Gossip



Moe Girton of Gossip Grill has been running the spot since 2009. She is also part owner of Barrel & Board, across the street of Gossip Grill. Photo courtesy Moe Girton

Grill alive," she said.

Although Girton doesn't refer to Gossip Grill as a "lesbian bar," a nationwide campaign seeking to celebrate, support and preserve lesbian bars called "The Lesbian Bar Project" names Gossip Grill as one of the last 20 or so remaining lesbian bars in the U.S.

The **Lesbian Bar Project** said there were about 200 lesbian bars in the U.S. in the 1980s. The numbers have dwindled for a variety of reasons, including demographic changes through the years, and, since 2020, like many bars and restaurants, because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Gossip Grill had moments of darkness during the COVID-19 pandemic, literally having to shut down for two months in 2020. But Girton said the community

stepped up in a variety of ways and supported various efforts she and her staff pushed out to make it through.

Customers Help

Girton said she was able to secure Paycheck Protection Program funds from the SBA to pay her staff. When that money ran out, she and her staff turned to social media to ask for help, asking supporters to buy alcohol and groceries -- at prices that matched grocery stores -- from Gossip Grill.

"It was very humbling to have to ask the community for help," Girton said. "We did 'Drag Queen' delivery, unicorn delivery, we had a drive-thru."

At one point, Girton thought she might

have to close Gossip Grill. In the summer of 2021 she got together with business partners **Stefan Chilcote** and **Matt Ramon**, and looked into leasing a smaller site across the street – the former home of **BO-Beau's**.

The trio took over the spot, named it **Barrel & Board** and opened it up to Gossip Grill staff. The upscale woman-forward bar and restaurant is now completely employee-owned, Girton said.

"A week after we decided to purchase that spot, we got a second PPP and two weeks later, Gossip Grill reopened," she said.

Girton said "we did a lot of work during COVID to better ourselves and to make things better for our clientele."

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Jeremy Wilson
President
San Diego Equality
Business Association

Gossip Grill



FOUNDED: 2009

OWNER: Moe Girton

HEADQUARTERS: Hillcrest, San Diego

BUSINESS: Bar, Restaurant and Club

EMPLOYEES: 65

WEBSITE: gossipgrill.com

CONTACT: (619) 260-8023

NOTABLE: Proprietor Moe Girton was named Miss Gay San Diego in 2003.

AEC: Calculating Assistance for Businesses since 2005

A Company That Holds Itself Accountable

■ By KAREN PEARLMAN

During **Dale Peronteau**'s life as an entrepreneur and small business owner, he has been through a handful of major events that could have been career-enders:

A flood that wiped out his Reno-based S.C.U.B.A. manufacturing business in 1997, 9/11, the Great Recession and COVID-19.

But through it all, the Wisconsin-born owner of **American Eagle Consulting** has been steadfast and hard-nosed, always able to bounce back and forge ahead.

"I could have become a victim, but I was never going to do that," said Peronteau, who started AEC in San Francisco in 2005 and opened a San Diego location 10 years ago. "Bad things happen throughout your life and you've just got to put your pants on, get back to it and go to work."

Primarily supplying accounting and bookkeeping support to small businesses, Peronteau and his eight employees (six in San Diego) also offer business consultation to help with regulatory and strategic needs, tax preparation and personal and corporate payroll services.

AEC works with about 175 clients, 60 of them in San Diego. Before the pandemic, Peronteau said he would commute every other week to San Francisco but after becoming comfortable and savvy with Zoom, he now travels north once a month for a week at a time.

Peronteau minces no words when he talks about his clientele. He said when he first started the bookkeeping business in San Francisco, all of his clients were gay-owned businesses. "We're a gay-owned business catering to gay-owned businesses or gay-friendly businesses," he said. "If they're not either of those, we won't take them on."

"I just put a rule in place then that said that," Peronteau said. "I don't need your business if you're not gay or gay-friendly. I have had to fire clients for exactly that reason, for making a comment under their breath that was demeaning."

"I do seek out gay-friendly and gay-owned businesses. I know they've been challenged over history and I want to help. I knock on wood that I am in a place where I get to determine what kind of clients we take on."

Peronteau said AEC seeks out and tries to stay with small businesses. The company has two larger businesses it works with but focuses on those with 10 employees or less.

Spoiling Clients is What AEC Does Best

"We spoil the hell out of our clients," he said, and also noted that his company has continued to grow its client base every year.

"We are going to have a record year this year," he said. "We had one last year also."

Peronteau has reason to be happy that he is in a comfortable position with his career. It wasn't always that way.

The first company he owned in California was a S.C.U.B.A. manufacturing firm, which he ended up moving to Reno in the early 1990s.

In 1997, the area was hit by a major flood of the Truckee River.

"My building flooded for 18 hours and there was 36 inches of water," he recalled. "I was able to secure emergency disaster funds and got loans but then 9/11 hit. Two years later, I had to shut that company down and I moved to San Francisco."

He started working with a trucking company for a few years, but they shut down after the recession in the mid-2000's and was laid off for the first time in his life.

"Friends said I should start a bookkeeping firm, that they needed help," he said. "I was working as a contractor for them, so two years later I started the business in 2005."

He said he started thinking about what he wanted to do after he retired, and said he wanted to retire in San Diego, so he opened another AEC in San Diego in 2012.

He said that while COVID-19 was challenging at times, AEC was considered an essential business and was able to follow health



Dale Peronteau
Owner
American Eagle
Consulting

and safety protocols and mandates to continue keeping its doors open.

Peronteau, 64, said he has plans to retire when he is 70, and that one of his employees has expressed interest in taking over his business.

After he's done working, he hopes to continue to spend time with his rescue dog, indulge his "weakness" of buying cars (Teslas and currently an Aston Martin) and travel, particularly to his favorite spot – England.

"I don't know what it is about that country," Peronteau said of England. "They love us, although they don't like our politics. We are their closest ally because we came from England. Our laws are based on theirs. I always have a good time there. I used to travel there three or four times a year but I have been too busy now to go that often. When I retire I would like to travel there again." ■

American Eagle Consulting



FOUNDED: 2005

CEO: Dale Peronteau

HEADQUARTERS: San Diego (Talmadge), San Francisco

BUSINESS: Full-service accounting

EMPLOYEES: San Diego 6, San Francisco 2

WEBSITE: aecandb.com

CONTACT: San Diego: (619) 487-0143

NOTABLE: Peronteau has run 17 different

Cruising to Success

COVID-19 Pandemic Served to Build Adam Martindale's Business

■ By KAREN PEARLMAN

Perhaps no business sector was harder hit during the COVID-19 pandemic than the cruise and travel industry.

Local, state, national and global mandates have been ongoing since the pandemic started in 2020, bringing with it social distancing needs, testing protocols, proof of vaccinations, forced closures, cancelled bookings, decommissioned ships and more.



Adam Martindale
Owner
Cruise Planners –
Martindale Travel &
Tours

The impacts have been brutal for small business owners specializing in cruises and trips.

Adam Martindale, who owns **Cruise Planners – Martindale Travel & Tours**,

which since 2015 has specialized in luxury cruise travel with an emphasis on wine and food group cruises and tours.

His company is not just for seafarers, it also coordinates flights and land travel, specifically booking couple and group wine and food land excursions, escorted tours, transportation and hotel needs.

Besides wine and food travel and luxury travel for groups, the company also caters to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer



Adam Martindale takes time to pose in Vancouver at Canada Place Cruise Terminal during a recent trip north. Photo courtesy Adam Martindale

travelers looking for memorable cruise and land travel experiences.

Martindale isn't quite sure how he made it through the thick of the pandemic in 2020 and 2021, but his company has found a way to thrive in 2022.

The Nightmare of COVID-19 for Cruisers

"Those were rough years, really difficult," said Martindale, 56. "And 2019 was my best year ever. The first year in 2020, the first six months, people were cancelling, asking for

refunds, upset with how long it was taking to get their refunds. We'd reschedule their trip for later in 2020, then we had to move it to 2021. Then we had to reschedule those. It was a nightmare."

Martindale said he stayed positive, and he had also stayed in touch with the client base he had built up over the years. "I sent personal notes to them, I made phone calls, I never stopped marketing," Martindale said. "I was really focusing on the end of this pandemic, knowing it was going to happen."

Martindale said that the previous four

years he had built up his clientele. He already had a thriving network of friends and colleagues he had worked with or for during 30 years in the food and beverage sector.

"We managed to get unemployment and the PPP funds, which helped me a lot," he said.

"At one point, I almost looked for a job to survive," he said. "I didn't think it was a god idea to renew my lease where I lived in Banker's Hill. A lot of business travel companies closed down, a lot of agencies gave up. I think I was working more at that time than I was before, but working in a different way.

"I got a lot of new clients through the pandemic, a lot of referrals. I took on a lot of clients for the long-term and it's really

➔ *Cruising page 39*

Cruise Planners – Martindale Travel & Tours



FOUNDED: 2015

OWNER: Adam Martindale

HEADQUARTERS: San Diego

BUSINESS: Land and sea travel

EMPLOYEES: 4

WEBSITE: www.cruisewinetravel.com and www.martindaletravelandtours.com

CONTACT: (619) 879-3601

NOTABLE: One of Martindale's upcoming trips is a June 30 to July 7 cruise to the Greek Islands and Turkey with the San Francisco Wine School with Master Sommelier David Glancy.

B. Austin Consulting Educates, Protects LGBTQ+ Employers, Employees

Firm Still Keeps Veterans in Sight

■ By KAREN PEARLMAN

Black, lesbian and a disabled middle-aged American combat Veteran, local CEO **Bridgette Austin** doesn't mince words about just how things have gone for her on the unique path she's traveled. "My life has been phenomenal!" says the 53-year-old founder of **B. Austin Consulting**, a San Diego North County-based company she launched in 2017.

B. Austin Consulting facilitates workshops, provides business training and development programs, offering diversity training and anti-harassment coursework that is designed to eliminate bias and provide inclusivity.

The company provides workplace compliance-based training that is all inclusive "with an emphasis on eliminating bias through education, designed to break down what exactly is sexual harassment, and what it is not from a cisgender perspective," Austin said.

B. Austin Consulting also offers workplace investigation services and expert testimony and consultation.

Born in Indiana but a Southern Californian since she was 2, Austin had a long career in the U.S. Navy and later earned a master of business for veterans degree from USC's **Marshall School of Business**.

Once laser focused on helping veterans and service members transition from military duty to civilian life, B. Austin Consulting is now turning its sights to helping the LGBTQ+ community.

"My focus is to help my community with the workforce training that is

available and compliance training toward diversity and inclusion... but I want it to be more than that," Austin said.

Austin now helps those in marginalized, underrepresented and discriminated communities work toward having that same kind of phenomenal life she has.

"As a veteran of 25 years in the Navy, and LGBT nearly my whole life, I have learned where my passions are," Austin said. "After piloting a program at the LGBT Community Center and seeing what kind of fit is there in Human Resources for the community, I leaned how my community has struggled without parental support. Kids have been thrown out of their homes, they've been abused, they've had microaggressions at work. I thought, 'Here is where I belong. Here is where I can do something.'"

Austin said she considers herself fortunate that her parents, even while they separated, both supported her from the very start.

She said she grew up wanting to be a cowboy and asking for holsters to wear. She started riding a motorcycle at age 19 and bought a truck as well.

"Those are things that girls back then didn't do," Austin said. "The support from my parents propelled me to believe that whatever I want to do, I can do."

Austin joined the Navy at 25, not sure what she wanted to do.

Early on, she saw that as an older enlistee, she could advocate for her younger colleagues

in the military. Through her career in five combat zones while serving in the military, Austin acted as an advisor, was a nondestructive testing inspector, worked on quality control and safety, then had a job as a quality assurance officer and maintenance chief.

She later became a career counselor in her late 30's for the Navy, based out an aircraft carrier, in charge of 115 subordinates who were departmental and divisional counselors to about 3,000 men and women on the Harry S. Truman.

"But all I could think about when I saw a young sailor is, 'What is going on with their career?'" Austin said. "I watched young folks leave the military with nothing. They weren't told or weren't listening when they were told about life after the military. I remember the look on this young sailor's face and I could see he did not know what was going on besides what was needed to maintain this aircraft."

Landing in Coronado with the Navy SEALs

She ended her Naval career as a regional career counselor and was in charge of inspections of different career development programs. After a trip to Guam, Austin landed in Coronado with the Navy SEALs in 2014 -- and stayed.

After a short time helping in a **Department of Defense's SkillBridge** transition program, she earned a bachelor's degree in administrative management from **Excelsior College**.



Bridgette Austin
President and CEO
B. Austin Consulting

Austin said she felt like there was more ahead for her.

While she was busy "teaching sailors about education and their future," she was determined to "step it up and get my own practice... to practice what I preach."

So she hooked up with USC and earned her master's degree, making the drive to the Los Angeles campus every other weekend from San Diego.

"What I learned is not even close to what I thought I knew before," Austin said. "I learned about how transitioning is not just professional, it's psychological, it's physical, it's financial."

But even while B. Austin is helping with resources for veterans, the shift to championing those in the LGBTQ+ community is now Austin's biggest commitment.

"I will still be a resource for veterans," she said. "But I am building more to the LGBT community. Of course there is always the LGBT veteran component, too." ■

B. Austin Consulting



FOUNDED: 2017

CEO: Bridgette Austin

HEADQUARTERS: North County, San Diego

BUSINESS: Management consulting

EMPLOYEES: Two, plus several independent contractors

WEBSITE: baustinconsultingllc.com

CONTACT: (619) 786-5843

NOTABLE: Austin ran low hurdles, relays and was a shot putter at La Habra High School, also playing basketball, volleyball and soccer.