

VisitNorfolk is thrilled to be a Platinum Level sponsor of LGBT Meeting Professionals Association.

As I reflected on my comments this evening, it occurred to me that outside of Hampton Roads, Norfolk doesn't really have recognition as an LGBT-friendly city. Hampton Roads is an overarching name that includes (7) cities, including Virginia Beach and Norfolk. To date, none of us have joined to enhance awareness of our cities, but back in 2006, that's exactly what happened within the LGBT community.

The *About* portion of their website reads this way: "Hampton Roads Business OutReach (HRBOR) was founded in 2006 to promote LGBT influence through business ownership, workforce equality and active consumerism, creating prosperity to support equality, diversity and inclusion. We are the oldest LGBT Chamber of Commerce in the Commonwealth of Virginia, and the only one serving the Hampton Roads metropolitan area." And they achieved this with guidance from another community non-profit: NGLCC.

From the beginning HRBOR promoted the mission ideal of inclusion in the community, choosing the tagline "Developing diversity, creating community". The chamber's official title of Hampton Roads Business OutReach grew from the consistent thread of inclusion versus exclusion.

- HRBOR has continued to grow and diversify its membership which includes not only LGBT-owned businesses, but allied businesses as well.
- Our Safe Commerce program (which informs LGBT consumers that members are a welcoming place of business), LGBTE Business Certification offering, and social, education, and networking events are the keystones to the foundation of HRBOR.
- We have a strong presence in local higher education and we actively mentor upcoming business leaders from the area's colleges and universities.

For 30 years, Norfolk has hosted the Annual Hampton Roads Pride Fest, showing that this community has grown into such a vital part of the city's culture.

Norfolk has long been involved in diversity and inclusion; I'm proud to step up in support of both the LGBT Meeting Professionals Association and of the LGBT community. Our decision to become the newest Platinum Level sponsor (there are only 4!) affords VisitNorfolk the opportunity to demonstrate our commitment to enhance our visibility in and support of the LGBT+ community and to nurture our community-based organization, LGBT MPA.

I hope to see you all in Norfolk, the heart of the VA waterfront! Let's make plans and I'll show you a great time!

Ann Garvey  
Visit Norfolk