

OneAmerica: Leading the Way in DEI

By Anthony Schoettle

For many companies, the journey to implementing diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) initiatives is very new. OneAmerica has been focusing on DEI for nearly a decade and shows no sign of taking its foot off that gas pedal.

“DEI isn’t just about under-represented groups. That’s the narrow view. Lost sometimes in the conversations about DEI is that diversity is represented in all of us,” emphasizes Kim Thomas, OneAmerica chief DEI officer and head of community affairs.

“This (DEI) work is a commitment to everyone in our company and everyone in our community. To stop the work takes away from who we are. We recognize this includes everyone, including white men. DEI is represented in the intersectionality in all of us. The commitment goes to the heart of caring about people and helping them feel they matter.”

For its bold stance and the DEI initiatives undertaken by the company, the Indiana Chamber of Commerce celebrated OneAmerica as the 2023 Jackson Lewis Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Champion at its annual DEI Summit October 3 at the Hyatt Regency Indianapolis.

The statewide honor recognizes an organization making ardent strides to become a more equitable workplace. OneAmerica, an Indianapolis-based insurance and retirement-services provider, embodies that ideal in its culture, says Indiana Chamber President Kevin Brinegar.

“OneAmerica was one of the first companies to focus on diversity, equity and inclusion, and it has continued full speed ahead with programs for Black, Hispanic, Women, LGBTQ+ and other underrepresented groups,” he offers. “It’s not just about forming a mission statement around diversity; it’s about truly bringing everyone to the table, giving them a voice and taking action to ensure equity and inclusion at their workplace.”

OneAmerica has many initiatives to ensure that DEI is woven throughout its culture. As one example, the company in 2022 launched conscious inclusion interactive sessions to all associates and leaders. These two-hour virtual sessions were facilitated by The Kaleidoscope Group and included group exercises and



Team members came together for the OneAmerica Week of Caring in August, here volunteering at Wheeler Mission.

breakout discussions. This training is part of OneAmerica’s overall focus on associate development to achieve its enterprise outcomes, which includes advancing DEI.

Additionally, OneAmerica has launched voluntary business resource groups, driven by and made up of leaders and associates who work in partnership with the company’s DEI team to help advance DEI at OneAmerica. The two initial groups include one with a focus on the experiences of OneAmerica’s Black associates and another on that of women. This year the company is launching four more such groups. One will represent Hispanic/Latino associates and another the LGBTQ+ community. The focus of the other two will be announced later in 2023.

OneAmerica also has DEI efforts that have significant community outreach components. Notably, says Thomas, are the Know Yourself, Grow Your Wealth and Pathways programs.

In 2022, OneAmerica announced a \$1 million commitment to the Know Yourself, Grow Your Wealth program, a uniquely tailored financial literacy program in central Indiana, in collaboration with The American College of Financial Services. The program teaches participants personal finance concepts that will help drive economic empowerment and narrow the racial wealth gap.

“The work we’re doing is helping people take control of their financial journey and helping drive economic empowerment in people’s own households,” Thomas imparts.

One component of the Pathways program, The Pathways Program for Junior Fellows, was launched in 2019 with the commitment

to increase access to career opportunities in the financial services field for more individuals in central Indiana. Pathways focuses on developing new talent from underrepresented communities by creating career awareness, providing hands-on experiences and ensuring equitable compensation.

“We bring participants in to OneAmerica for five weeks for a mini paid internship,” Thomas explains. “The main objective is to show them what is possible in terms of a career in this sector. They have real work assignments; they’re learning something new and they’re getting exposure to a work environment and profession that they might not otherwise.”

Nationwide law firm Jackson Lewis P.C., the sponsor of the award, believes an inclusive organization is a stronger and more effective one. OneAmerica is a shining example of that, says Brian McDermott, managing principal of Jackson Lewis’ Indianapolis office.

“We had some very impressive submissions once again this year. But I will say that One America’s submission rose to the top,” McDermott notes. “It is evident through its work that OneAmerica is committed to advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion in all aspects of its business.”

Thomas says OneAmerica is investing in DEI initiatives because it’s the right thing to do, and it’s good for the company.

“OneAmerica is more than the name of our company,” she stresses. “It’s what we’re working to build through our commitment to strong relationships and our vision of being there for those who need us.”

RESOURCES: Kevin Brinegar, Indiana Chamber of Commerce, at www.indianachamber.com | Brian McDermott, Jackson Lewis, at www.jacksonlewis.com | Kim Thomas, OneAmerica, at www.oneamerica.com