

SKOLOFF & WOLFE CELEBRATES

# Pride Month

JUNE 2022 WEEK 1

## ABA's 21-Day LGBTQ+ Equity Habit Building Challenge

The American Bar Association has launched a syllabus in honor of Pride Month, modeled after the "21-Day Racial Equity Habit-Building Challenge," conceived to advance deeper understandings of the intersections of race, power, privilege, supremacy, and oppression.

SWDEI is challenging its own members, members of the firm, and our colleagues to engage in this program, which invites participants to complete a syllabus of daily, short assignments (typically taking 15-30 minutes), over 21 consecutive days, including readings, videos, or podcasts, seeking to expose participants to perspectives on elements of LGBTQ+ histories, identities, and cultures.

The Challenge is voluntary, with no commitment, grade, or requirement to finish. The Syllabus can be found [here](#).

## New Jersey Event Calendar

- June 5: [New Jersey Pride Fest](#) - Asbury Park
- Inaugural [Out Montclair Pride Fest](#):
  - June 2: [Kick-Off Night at the Montclair Art Museum](#) (free!)
  - June 3: [Rocky Horror Picture Show](#) screening at Lackawanna Plaza w/ Montclair Film (free!)
  - June 3-5: [Pride Workout Weekend](#) (various participating gyms)
  - June 3: [Drag Variety Show](#) at Vanguard Theater Company
  - June 7: ["Reading Scripture with Pride"](#) at Unitarian Universalist Congregation (free!)
  - June 8: [Drag Queens & Doughnuts](#) at the Montclair Bread Company
  - June 9: [Fleet Feet 5k](#) starting and ending at Montclair Brewery
  - June 11: Montclair Pride Fest and Concert at The Wellmont ft. Betty Who - [get tickets here!](#)
- June 12: [North Jersey Pride Fest](#) - Maplewood



## LGBT Lawyer Spotlight:



*Deb Guston*

- Pride month in the time of Roe
- Law firm's guide to making substantive change
- Exclusive: Deb's LGBTQ Icon

## S&W PRIDE SIGNATURE

Join in celebrating this month by including the graphic below in your email signature:

**Skoloff & Wolfe**

# Interview with Debra Guston

Partner at Guston & Guston, LLP  
she/her/Ms.

by Rachel L. Friedman, Esq.

I met with Deb, who I had watched captivate the room at FLEC meetings both in person and over Zoom. Deb is a champion for the LGBTQ community, victims of Domestic Violence, and all parties in the family law realm whose voices are prone to suppression or silencing.

There was a clear theme to our conversation: on the brink of the potential overturn of Roe v. Wade, Deb forewarns, "**This pride month will be a lot of celebration and also trepidation.**"

Deb regards this transitional period as a time where everyone – especially young people and those with skills (hint, hint, lawyers) – have a duty to become more active than they have been. Whether in their place of work, faith organization, or local political office, "**everyone is going to have to find a place to be active.**"

I asked Deb what she thought a law firm can do to nurture an atmosphere where LGBTQ employees and clients feel respected and understood. Deb didn't miss a beat: "Cultural competency training."

Deb explained that organizations with good intentions will show their support of diverse communities, but do so in only superficial ways (Deb named hanging Pride flags as an example.) However, substantive commitment to supporting those communities comes when every person in an organization is trained in cultural competency.

Deb shared her experience with well-meaning attorneys who want to serve LGBTQ clients and hold themselves out as comfortable and familiar, but subsequently rely on LGBTQ attorneys for help, or fail to deliver the safe and environment promised. Deb cautions, "**Don't outpace your competence.**"

Deb has observed that older LGBTQ clients shy away from larger and mainstream firms because they assume a lack of competency, while younger LGBTQ clients assume competency. And both can lead to this disconnect.

In pursuit of competence, Deb prescribes getting comfortable with the language and with addressing people who make them uncomfortable or with whom they are unfamiliar. Deb advised this is especially important for working with trans people.

I asked Deb her view on gender neutralizing a firm's forms, pleadings, and templates. Deb commended the practice and gave me some food for thought.

*That alone says a lot about people's comfortability because gender neutrality tends to make people uncomfortable. From a young age we are taught to gender things...but these are not really essential words. As lawyers we are supposed to be able to write and be creative, so we should be able to draft pleadings without relying on pronouns or honorifics. And the more I write in a gender-neutral style, the more I verbalize it.*

We agreed that even using the client's name repeatedly is not as obnoxious as the rest of the boilerplate contents of our legal submissions.

Regarding the ever-dreaded slip ups, Deb always says, "We all make mistakes. It's really a matter of our grace and humility we exhibit when we make a mistake that builds upon those relationships.

**We can change our language to erase barriers."**

# Interview with Debra Guston, cont.

Sitting as Chair of the Bergen County LGBTQ advisory committee, Deb will spend Pride at the county-wide event taking place at New Bridge Hospital, which launched an LGBT clinic during Covid and is praised for its service to the community.

In addition, Deb will be speaking at a local synagogue and church service. Deb started writing about the intersection of the Free Exercise Clause and LGBT issues when Burwell v. Hobby Lobby was issued by SCOTUS eight years ago and has done so for the LGBT bar ever since. She was asked to discuss Roe and what will happen to other rights based upon privacy if it is overturned. She explains that there seems to be a big disagreement about how panicked to be.

But Deb advises against waiting to find out. **"If people want to be really good allies, they have to start thinking about all the bad crap that's starting to happen.** They have to start looking at bills all around the countries that are targeting trans kids, including in sports and healthcare."

"This should be a topic of discussion. **Everybody in New Jersey feels very insulated by our laws and activism. We can't look at this stuff as being localized anymore.** We have to look outside our own borders. Anything people can do – learn, write, volunteer – they need to do."

I asked Deb where ally attorneys can get active, and she named the LGBTQ section of the state bar as the place to be. She explained of the 200 to 300 members, many are allies, but many also identify as LGBTQ. Deb explained that outside of family law, sexuality or identity does not necessarily come into play, and the bar provides that intersection. Connection and exposure are of utmost importance. **"The more LGBT people that people know, the more protected LGBT people are."**

In fact, contrary to what she envisioned, most of Deb's career and activism has been in mainstream organizations like the state bar. "When I started practicing, the last thing I thought was that I was going to hang out with a bunch of lawyers."

So, to end on a law-free note, I asked Deb,

**RLF:** "You have the opportunity to ride a Pride float with one icon – who are you picking?"

**Deb:** Dead or alive?

**RLF:** Dead or alive.

**Deb:** It has to be Edie Windsor.

**RLF:** Why?

**Deb:** Here's this person who was just a totally average person who thought something was wrong. It took her forever to find an attorney, and when she did, she went from being a private little old lady to an icon – all because the government wasn't treating her right. I think there are tons of people like that in the LGBT community. And I believe that in twenty to thirty years from now, she will be regarded as a Rosa Parks: just a normal person who said, "This wasn't right."★

**Upcoming interviewees include  
Celeste Fiore, Esq. of Argentino Fiore Law & Advocacy and  
Past President of the NJ Bar, Thomas Prol, Esq.**