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PHILADELPHIA GAY NEWS

Philly LGBTQ+-owned businesses receive grant package from Comcast

By **Michele Zipkin** - August 30, 2023 10:59 am



From left, Justin Mendoza — owner of Intrins Inq. — and Nima Etemadi and Lily Fischer, co-owners of Cake Life Bake Shop.

This story has been updated to include information on other LGBTQ+ business owners who received Comcast RISE grant packages.

Several local LGBTQ+ small business owners received a Comcast RISE grant package this year. The grant offers multifaceted resource packages to support the growth of small businesses, with a goal to push for diversity, equity and inclusion and community investment, and to help businesses and their communities flourish.

PGN spoke to two of the grant recipients. Justin Mendoza, owner of the boutique wellness lifestyle studio Intrins Inq, and Nima Etemadi, who co-owns Cake Life Bake Shop with Lily Fischer, are among more than 100 local businesses to receive this Comcast package.

“While this round of grants was open to small business owners of all demographics, we continue to focus on diversity, inclusion and community investment and recognize the importance of helping underrepresented communities who historically face more challenges when it comes to accessing grants and resources,” a Comcast spokesperson said via email.

Comcast RISE, which stands for representation, investment, strength and empowerment, began in late 2020 to help small businesses who were most impacted by COVID-19.

In Philadelphia, 716 businesses have received grants and service packages from Comcast RISE since the program’s inception. The program is a component of Project UP, Comcast’s initiative “to advance digital equity and help build a future of unlimited possibilities,” according to a press release.

Not only do selected business owners receive \$5,000, they get access to consultation services including an assessment of business and tactical planning and business to business coaching; educational content and resources for entrepreneurs; production of a 30-second TV spot, media strategy consultation and a temporary media placement schedule; and a technology revamp.



"From a representation and visibility standpoint, for a company as large as Comcast to say 'yes, the work that you're doing is valid and this community really needs quality services [and] we're going to support that,' I think that level of validation [helps] others to feel like we're deserving of taking up space," said Mendoza, who identifies as queer and nonbinary, and is Latinx with mixed racial heritage.

Mendoza also identifies as a sober person, which has become a part of their professional background, they said. As a health coach, licensed clinical social worker and advanced drug and alcohol counselor, Mendoza offers psychotherapy to address issues such as depression, anxiety, substance use, and sexuality; coaching that includes lifestyle design, behavior change, nutrition, entrepreneurship and career transition; and consulting and speaking. They started Intrinsic Inq right before the pandemic hit in 2020.

"It was challenging to navigate that for myself," Mendoza said. "But three plus years in, [it's] definitely gaining some momentum. It's great to be able to get out into the community more and create visibility."

Mendoza is especially excited to use the business consultation, educational resources and media aspects of the grant package, they said.

"I think that [the grant] acknowledges some structural components of what can make someone successful as an entrepreneur," Mendoza added. "I think the queer component for myself, having experienced discrimination and someone that has complex trauma from those experiences — it can affect your level of confidence."

When Mendoza was initially promoting Intrinsic Inq, they grappled with processing their own complex trauma while seeing clients.

"It was really important and helpful for me to then put that into practice for myself and process some of those barriers," they said. "I think that for other queer folks in our community, being recognized [by Comcast] in that way is really important to see that doing this kind of work and speaking directly to the needs of our community is something that should be recognized and invested in."

For Etemadi, who co-owns Cake Life, the production and media aspects of the grant, like the 30-second commercial and the technology makeover, stand to benefit the business the most. The Cake Life team is in the middle of having a new website designed and Etemadi thinks "there's a lot of

potential ways for Comcast to really help us get it out there.” Cake Life is described as “woman and trans-owned” on its website.

“There’s a lot of good stuff in this grant in general that I think can have an impact in different ways. I’m really looking forward to starting to talk to their team about the implementation part. That’s where my mind gets racing in all the positive aspects.”

According to the [Special Report on Small Business and LGBTQ+ Inclusion](#) published by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce in 2022, 73% of small business owners said they believe that LGBTQ+ business owners face more challenges than their cisnet counterparts.

“Like a lot of other communities out there, I think LGBTQ+ entrepreneurs face a set of challenges that others might not,” Etemadi said. “I think having programs like Comcast RISE that are really specifically looking to offer a helping hand to disadvantaged communities is a really important part of helping to level that playing field a little bit and really giving people an opportunity that might not otherwise exist.”

On the whole, business at Cake Life is going well, Etemadi said. He and Fischer are planning seasonal menu rotations in preparation for Halloween, Thanksgiving and the winter holidays.

“We have new programs that are coming,” Etemadi added. “We’re going to start offering sandwiches this fall, and we’re expanding our hours. Just a lot of good stuff to come.”

Other Philly Comcast RISE grant package recipients in the LGBTQ+ community include FRIEDA for Generations owned by David Wong and others, Beau Monde Originals (Flat World Productions) owned by Cathie Berrey, RPM Consulting owned by Perry Monastero and LASER Philly owned by Sharif Pendleton.

For a full list of Comcast RISE grant recipients, visit comcastrise.com/recipients/.

Michele Zipkin

Michele Zipkin is a staff writer for Philadelphia Gay News, where she reports on issues including LGBTQ youth issues, housing insecurity, healthcare, city government and advocacy organizations, and events. Her work has been recognized by the Keystone Media Awards, Society of Professional Journalists, National Newspaper Association, and more. She received her BA from Goucher College and her MA in journalism from Temple University. She has been on staff with PGN since January 2020 and previously worked as a freelancer.

