

**LEGAL**  
**PANNONE LOPES DEVEREAUX**  
**& O'GARA LLC**



**TALENTED GROUP:** Pannone Lopes Devereaux & O'Gara LLC managing principal Gary Pannone says incorporating diversity and inclusion in the law firm's philosophy has resulted in hiring the most talented individuals from day one. Pictured at the firm's Johnston office are, from left, William Trezvant, senior counsel; Regina Costa, senior counsel; and Cristina Irizarry. PBN PHOTO/TRACY JENKINS

## Firm organically builds up accepting environment

BY JOHN A. LAHTINEN | Contributing Writer

AT PANNONE LOPES DEVEREAUX & O'GARA LLC, diversity and inclusion aren't just lofty goals. At the Johnston-based, full-service law firm, diversity and inclusion are a way of life.

"Diversity and inclusion are very important," said Gary Pannone, managing principal who co-founded the firm with Matthew Lopes Jr., William Devereaux and William O'Gara. "They are philosophically fundamental to our organization, and we are stronger due to this core belief. In my opinion, an organization does not necessarily need a written policy to be true to a philosophy and belief. Having a diverse culture and being inclusive can and should happen organically. Without both, we would all live a very shallow life, personally and professionally. I am proud that PLDO is one of the most diverse business organizations in the region."

It is this inherent philosophy, Pannone says, that he has found most rewarding, as it has resulted in the firm hiring the most talented individuals from day one.

"Without diversity and inclusion, the organization would not be as successful as it has been," Pannone said. "We would not have the opportunity to learn from others who come from different walks of life, which is what we are all about."

Pannone learned about leadership and taking responsibility for others at an early

age from his father, who, after serving three tours of duty during World War II and the Korean War, became an executive with a company managing more than 300 employees.

As a young boy, Pannone would go to work with his father and watch how he managed others and how he made important decisions that would impact the business and its employees. The lessons he learned from those experiences have influenced him throughout his entire career.

"Leadership is being accountable to those with whom you work and taking responsibility for the decisions you make on their behalf," Pannone said. "A leader's main concern is the well-being of others. Leadership is also encouraging others to lead and providing a trusted environment and the support they need in their decision-making process. I believe that if you empower others to do their job and give them the resources and the support they need, an organization becomes grounded with strong pillars, which is what has developed at PLDO and led to its growth and success."

David Sweet, the firm's chief operating

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**DAVID SWEET**  
**Pannone Lopes**  
**Devereaux & O'Gara LLC chief**  
**operating officer**

officer since its founding in 2006, says management has always made diversity and inclusion a fundamental ideology and that the team has become diverse organically.

"We didn't have an agenda or policy driving us; we have just done what came naturally," Sweet said. "It is who we are. It has only been in the past few years that we included such policies and practices, and we did this as more of our own reminder of who we are and who we will always continue to be."

Sweet feels that the firm's policies and practices that celebrate diversity and inclusion prove that the environment – for staff and clients alike – is one that is open and comfortable for everyone. As the firm continues to grow – now with nearly 40 lawyers and additional offices in Massachusetts and Florida – Sweet hopes that the entire team will continue to lead by example and assist in the development of an even more diverse and inclusive culture.

In addition to creating a diversity committee that includes management and staff from all levels, the firm also looks for outreach opportunities for community involvement where diversity and inclusiveness exist.

"I am passionate about doing good work and creating safe environments in which people feel at ease," Sweet said. "As an openly gay man, I know all too well what it is like to be in uncomfortable situations. We are in the work environment more than we are outside the work environment and it should be a place where everyone feels safe and welcomed, regardless of whatever diverse background or lifestyle one may have." ■

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