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"Equality Begins at Work" Press Conference Remarks

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Thank you, organizers, employee group representatives, and members of the press. My name is Cindy Clardy. I serve as the External Communications Coordinator for Ford Gay, Lesbian or Bisexual Employees, otherwise known as Ford GLOBE.

It is encouraging to see such an active interest in the work lives of so many Americans often rendered invisible in corporate America today. For we **are** in corporate America today -- in the board rooms, in our little Dilbert cubicles, and on the factory floor. You will find us on mahogany row, in the labs, down at the union hall, on the test track, at the dealerships, and in the supply base. We are your supervisors, coworkers, secretaries, and team members. Ford GLOBE is proud to represent gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender employees and contractors worldwide at Ford Motor Company.

Ford GLOBE and Ford Motor Company have worked in partnership over the past five years to achieve some common goals. We are proud of those achievements, particularly Ford's inclusive nondiscrimination and EEO policies. We look forward to future accomplishments. I want to share some of those achievements with you today. A brief history of our organization and milestones at Ford are listed on the Ford GLOBE brochure and on our public website.



Internal Resource

As an internal resource, Ford GLOBE helps support diversity education through presentations to numerous Ford diversity councils. We sponsor such events as last year's "Gay Issues in the Workplace" workshop at Ford World Headquarters. We provide GLOBE materials and members for Ford diversity fairs, training and recruiting videos. Some members are certified trainers for Ford's mandatory four-hour Diversity Awareness course while others serve on divisional and plant diversity councils.

GLOBE provides members for various focus groups gauging Ford's corporate climate.

External Resource

Ford GLOBE also serves as an external resource promoting Ford to the gay community and giving feedback on events of interest to Ford management.

For the past two years GLOBE has presented a workshop on gay work life at Ford at the Midwest Bisexual Lesbian Gay Transgender College Conference. Nearly 1,500 college students from universities throughout the Midwest attend the yearly conference. Ford Recruiting had a booth at the conference last month, providing thousands of gay-friendly Ford keychains for the event and sponsoring a full-page Ford Recruiting ad in the conference brochure. (*See link on GLOBE website.*)

Changing the Corporate Climate

Despite the numerous contributions that gay and lesbian employees make to Ford Motor Company, many do **not** feel valued and included as part of the Ford team. An analysis of the corporate climate will help explain why half of GLOBE's members fear to be "out" at work.

When I hired in to Ford Motor Company five years ago, I did so with much trepidation. I didn't know a soul in Michigan. Ford did **not** have a gay employee group nor any diversity training. Despite 20 years of industrial engineering experience, I knew I could be fired simply for being who I am. Ford did **not** include sexual orientation in its written non-discrimination statement. Another company that had already extended me a job offer clearly included sexual orientation protection on its employment application form, something Ford **still** does not do. During my first year here, I attended a candlelight vigil for a Ford engineer killed in a gay bashing, murdered in his own home. Fear can paralyze a person or it can act as a catalyst for change. I took a big risk coming to Ford and an even bigger risk coming out at work with no protection. To "out" myself to my supervisors was a **terrifying** experience. But I **refused** to live my life in fear. So did other Ford employees.



Ford GLOBE works with the corporate Diversity Office to bring to management attention any homophobic or gay-insensitive postings on the company's electronic bulletin boards, internal or external Ford website, manuals or other materials. Inappropriate phrases most often encountered at Ford include "sexual preference" and "gay lifestyle."

One of GLOBE's most challenging objectives is to help strengthen and maintain a safe work environment, free of harassment and homophobic behavior. While only 10% of Ford GLOBE's membership is comprised of hourly employees, over 90% of the anti-gay harassment complaints and **all** reports of anti-gay violence reported to GLOBE in the past four years have come from the plants. Harassment continues to be **the** top priority on the factory floor, with one of the most recent cases culminating in a failed suicide attempt.

Internally, GLOBE has posted procedures for salaried and union workers as well as contractors to report harassment. If, after following established procedures, a complaint is not resolved to a member's satisfaction, a GLOBE member can ask us to bring an unresolved case to higher management attention. We have done so on several occasions with some success.

Future Challenges

Ford GLOBE will continue to support Ford's diversity efforts through both formal and informal education, including a presentation this afternoon to the Marketing and Sales Diversity Council. GLOBE will be featured in an October Gay History Month display in Dearborn.

Lack of domestic partner benefits is one of two policy issues that separates Ford from Top 10 companies on diversity issues. Lack of benefits hampers Ford's recruiting and marketing efforts, and negatively impacts employee retention, morale and productivity. Partner benefits were recognized as a barometer of corporate culture at two recent University of Michigan panel discussions for lesbigay job hunters. (*Available on GLOBE website.*) Lack of benefits was mentioned in a 1998 letter of resignation by a Marketing & Sales manager. It has also been cited as a substantial added relocation expense for employees on rotational assignments. Other cases have cited lack of "family leave" for partner's surgery; disqualification from Ford child care programs for partner's children; and disqualification from the use of a company plane for partner visits during extended launch assignments when spouses are routinely flown for visits.

While much has been accomplished, much remains to be achieved. GLOBE applauds the cooperation between management and union in response to the recent Rouge tragedy. Family members were flown in to be with injured loved ones. It brought a pang of sadness to realize that if any of those injured had been gay, lesbian or bisexual employees, their same-sex partners and partner's children would **not** be counted as "family" members. Ford GLOBE urges Ford to implement domestic partner benefits. We encourage both the Canadian Auto Workers and United Auto Workers to bargain for it in their contract talks this year.



Since both Ford Motor Company and the United Auto Workers include sexual orientation in their respective EEO policies, it is only logical that sexual orientation protection be included in **all** union contracts negotiated this year. I **never** again want to hear of a union worker reporting ongoing harassment to her union representative and reportedly being told that "Being gay is a choice and there is nothing the union can do to help." Given such misinformation and offered **no** legal protection in the state of Michigan, this closeted young employee was too frightened to pursue a harassment complaint through established channels, but instead spent her breaks crying in the restroom, switching cars in hopes of avoiding her harasser, progressively missing more work, until eventually trying to end her torment through suicide. The fact that "being gay is not covered in the union agreement book" should not justify inaction.

Gay and lesbian workers do **not** live in a vacuum. We are part of the greater society. Ford GLOBE challenges the State of Michigan to include sexual orientation in the state's Equal Employment Opportunity law. We likewise challenge Congress to pass the Employment Nondiscrimination Act (ENDA). We ask Ford Motor Company to proactively support such legislation. Ford's thousands of gay, lesbian and bisexual employees in Michigan and throughout the United States deserve equal employment protection before the law regardless of sexual orientation. To be treated with dignity and respect is **not** a "special right." On the corporate level it is recognized as a good business practice. On a larger societal scale, it is simple equality and justice. For gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender employees, truly Equality Begins at Work.

Ford GLOBE thanks you for being here today and asks for your support in making equality a reality in **all** our lives.

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"Where, after all, do human rights begin? In small places, close to home - so small that they cannot be seen on any map of the world. Yet they are the world of the individual person: the neighborhood ... the school or college ... the factory, farm, or office. Such are the places where every man, woman, and child seeks equal justice, equal opportunity, equal dignity without discrimination. Unless these rights have meaning there, they have little meaning anywhere."

Eleanor Roosevelt