

Hello, I'm Thomas Grote...

I am a Columbus native. I grew up on the city's south side working part time at the original Donatos Pizza. I graduated with a finance degree from Miami University and went to work full-time with Donatos. I rose to the post of Chief Operating Officer as the business grew from seven restaurants to over 150. I opened the groundbreaking Out on Main, a casual fine dining restaurant which celebrated the lives of gays and lesbians. In 2004, I received my MBA with honors from the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania. After Wharton, I served as chief financial officer for Green Biologics, a UK based bio-tech company.

I have been a tireless advocate for LGBTQ equality. I served as the State Business Chair for Ohioans Protecting the Constitution, the campaign to fight against the 2004 Ohio anti-gay marriage ballot initiative. Deeply disappointed by the outcome, I recognized the need for a strong, well-staffed, and consistently funded statewide gay advocacy and education organization. I helped found Equality Ohio to meet that need, and served as the founding chairman of the board. I married my husband, Rick Neal, in 2007, and together we advocated for marriage equality and adoption rights until we were able to legally marry and co-adopt both of our children, Amoret and Sophia, in 2015. I served as national chairman of the Liberty Education Fund, and as a director of the Columbus AIDS Task Force, the Columbus Short North Business Association, the Godman Guild, and the Legacy Fund of the Columbus Foundation. I received the President's Award from Stonewall Columbus in 1996 and the Equality Award from the Human Rights Campaign in 1998. I served as a trustee of the United Way of Central Ohio co-chairing the Diversity and Inclusion committee as well as helping to found the Pride Council, the first United Way LGBTQ donor and advocacy group in the nation. In 2010, my husband Rick, and our daughter Amoret, were Grand Marshals of the Stonewall Columbus Pride Parade. I was appointed by Governor Ted Strickland to serve as the first openly gay trustee for Miami University of Ohio from 2008-2011. Currently, I co-chair the steering committee for the Stonewall Capital Campaign to renovate Columbus' LGBTQ community center in the Short North. Recently, I became a member of the Southeast Lions and I am a founding steering committee member of the Matriots, a PAC founded after the women's march on Washington in 2017 to elect more women to public office in Ohio.

I live in German Village with my husband and two daughters.