

# Shanti deals with issues surrounding AIDS

By Sarah Kitchen  
Of the Emerald

"If you want to know what it feels like to have ARC (AIDS-related complex), put an orange, a good-sized one, under each armpit, two in your groin and hang two off your ears and wear them for a week," a friend of the Rev. Ken Storer's told him.

Storer is the executive director of Shanti in Oregon, a volunteer-based organization that deals primarily with the psychological and social issues of AIDS — what he calls the "human issues." At Shanti, Storer works with both the victims and the families of the victims of AIDS, he said.

and that you not only have to change the sheets, but you have to change everything else under the sheets clear to the mattress because everything is wet," Storer said.

Storer became involved with Shanti while in San Francisco. A friend of his had recently died of AIDS, and it was a Shanti worker who helped Storer through the grieving process.

"It wasn't that he did anything, yet I do remember he was there — in a very active kind of way," he recalled. "He was the one person who understood I couldn't keep track of what my emotions were doing."

In 1985 Storer helped to

from the community.

"I found organizations responded, 'We don't deal with that kind of people,'" Storer said.

AIDS was, and often still is, considered a disease that affects "queer druggies," Storer said. And this is one of the many myths surrounding the disease, he said.

Another myth still around is "AIDS only exists in San Francisco, New York or Los Angeles," he added.

These myths, and similar ones, arose because in the past when AIDS was mentioned it was brought up in terms of high-risk groups, when it was high-risk behavior that should have been talked about, Storer said.

"The reality is that gay and bisexual men, right now, constitute the largest percentages of AIDS victims, but gay and bisexual men right now are probably at much lower risk than heterosexuals because gay and bisexual men are practicing safe sex, and my sense is, by and large, heterosexuals are not," he said.

This is especially dangerous with AIDS because it has a long incubation period during which no symptoms will appear, which also wipes out the myth that only promiscuous people contract AIDS. "It only takes one," he said.

Storer said he recently spent some time with a young man

who lives in Eugene diagnosed as having AIDS. The young man is not only trying to put his personal affairs in order but must also suffer the brunt of his parent's misunderstanding. His father came to Eugene to take care of a business matter but would not enter his son's house.

A month ago the same person made a trip home, and his parents met him at the airport. They would not let him sit directly on the car's seat, instead they placed sheets over the back seats.

"He literally did not stay overnight — he took care of his business and flew back, and that was real painful for him," Storer said.

Tora Schulman, co-director of the Gay and Lesbian Alliance, said she believes Storer's humanistic approach toward AIDS information is important.

"I think there has been, especially in Eugene with Ken Storer agitating the media, an

increase in the treatment of AIDS in a personal light," Schulman said.

She said the realistic approach toward AIDS, instead of the scare tactics often used by the media, has helped to bring home the danger of AIDS, and heterosexuals are beginning to realize that they too can be affected.

"It is important to portray AIDS as a disease that affects everyone," Schulman said.

There has been a forceful push on the part of the Student Health Center and the University administration to distribute more information about AIDS, she said. And as a result, Schulman believes students are becoming more responsible in their sexual relationships.

"The heterosexual population at the University is slowly coming round," she said. "We (GALA) get calls now and then, but it is only because of the sheer force on the part of the administration."

**'What amazes me is that I still find people who do not know what AIDS is all about.'**

— Ken Storer

The first few days of the symptoms of ARC are uncomfortable, Storer said. The time after that it gets beyond uncomfortable, he said.

"Imagine if you can, getting up, going to work and after about four hours being totally exhausted. Imagine, if you will, waking up in the middle of the night sweating enough that you feel you just got out of the shower and forgot to towel off

establish Shanti in Oregon. Around that time he tried to find out what services existed in the area for someone who had to deal with AIDS, and he generally got three kinds of reactions.

One reaction was "What is AIDS?"

"What amazes me is that I still find people who do not know what AIDS is all about." Fear and bigotry were the two other reactions Storer received

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Health Division, said public institutions must balance protection of the community with civil liberties rights.

"We have used unusual methods to ensure confidentiality, including offering anonymous testing for AIDS antibodies which indicates exposure to the disease," Gebbie said.

Gebbie supports a Oregon House bill which overhauls an old public health statute. The bill would restrict the power of public health officials to quarantine or restrict the movements of individuals with contagious diseases, she said.

She also backs another state House bill which ensures protection of civil liberties regardless of sexual orientation.

"Our (health officials') ability to do the ordinary things we do is restricted because groups of people in our society feel the threat of discrimination so greatly that they will not even come in to talk with us about an infection that is affecting them directly," she said.

Burton White, the chair of the Oregon ACLU Commission on Gay and Lesbian Rights, described legislators as "hotbeds of cold feet" on the issue, but predicted gay rights legislation would pass within the next two years.

This bill is due to hit the Senate floor on Friday or Monday, Gebbie said.

A third bill, this one in the state Senate, would reinstate mandatory blood testing, including AIDS testing, as a requirement for a marriage license. Pre-marital blood-testing was repealed in 1981 in Oregon.

In opposing the bill, Gebbie cited the expense and the risk of loose confidentiality in putting health records in the hands of county officials.



Photo by Andy Cripe

**Dave Fidanque and Gretchen Miller, at an annual meeting of the American Civil Liberties Union, participate in a panel discussion about the civil rights of people who have contracted the AIDS virus.**

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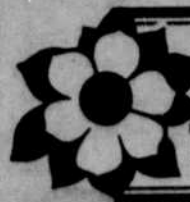
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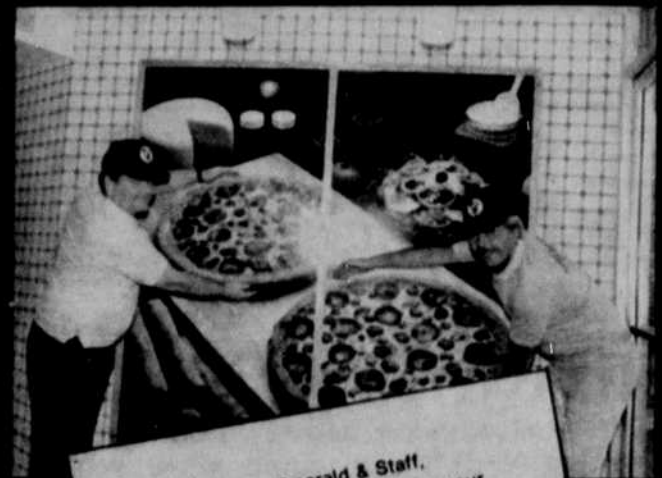
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