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# HIV Alliance director resigns after four years

*Citing personal reasons, Sharlene Simon left the organization she's led since it's grassroots start*

By David Ryan  
Oregon Daily Emerald

For people affected by AIDS in Eugene, Sept. 22 marked the passing of an era colored by construction and change.

Sharlene Simon resigned as executive director of the HIV Alliance, the local educational, nutritional and re-socialization center for people who are HIV positive. Simon cited personal reasons for leaving the position she held for four years.

Part of Simon's time as the organization's leader was spent working with University programs and student groups, such as the Student Health Center, the Substance Abuse and Prevention Program and the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual

and Transgender Alliance.

At a farewell reception on Sept. 22, Simon reflected on her experiences.

"It's been an incredible experience for me to know people with HIV, to watch them struggle, to share losses with their family and staff, and to share the new medical advances that came," Simon said.

Her colleagues and friends recalled how Simon's accomplishments led the organization from a grass-roots outfit to its current and more visible position in the community.

"We were a merger of the hospice organization [Shanti] and the HIV education organization," said David M. Bernstein, director of the Acorn Center, the nutritional wing of the HIV Alliance. "She really built [HIV Alliance] up."

"We were just struggling to keep our heads above water, and she helped our visibility greatly.

We became much more current. She helped us catch up to the disease."

Simon, 51, began AIDS social work in Eugene as a volunteer for Shanti in 1985. After receiving her bachelor of arts in psychology from the University, she moved to San Francisco in 1987 to complete a master's degree in social work at San Francisco State University.

Soon after, she worked with inner-city seniors and became a psychotherapist.

Simon stayed in San Francisco until the Eugene HIV Alliance placed an advertisement for an executive director in 1994. Simon responded and got the position.

At first, the HIV Alliance occupied two back rooms in an office building on Amazon Parkway.

"It was a glorified storage shed," Simon said. "It had a couple inches of standing water underneath it that gave it an odor. We were all crammed into two rooms, so we

had no privacy to meet with our clients."

HIV Alliance moved into another office building off Franklin Boulevard in 1995 and built a restaurant-size kitchen, refurbished the floors, painted the walls and landscaped the outside.

"She oversaw the merger," Bernstein said. "She helped the 'Building for Hope' campaign that took us from a moldy couple of back rooms on Amazon to a professional building. We grew from being able to serve two meals a week to seven meals a week to about 30 meals per week."

To Bernstein, Simon's accomplishments gave order to the organization.

"We used to work in crisis and chaos; now we just work in crisis," Bernstein said. "We'll always be changing, but we're in a much better position because of Sharlene to keep up with the changes in the community."

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