

just out
since 1983

PUBLISHER AND EDITOR

Renée LaChance

COPY EDITORS

Kelly M. Bryan
Jeff Boswell

REPORTERS

Inga Sorensen
Bob Roehr
Rex Wockner

CALENDAR EDITOR

Kristine Chatwood

PHOTOGRAPHER

Linda Kliewer

OFFICE MANAGER

Teri Ventura

ADVERTISING DIRECTOR

Meg Grace

ADVERTISING REPS

E. Ann Hinds
C. Jay Wilson Jr.

CREATIVE DIRECTOR

E. Ann Hinds

GRAPHIC DESIGN

Rupert Kinnard

FORMATTER

Rachel Eborá

TYPESETTER

Jann Gilbert

DISTRIBUTION

Ambling Bear

CONTRIBUTORS

Chris Brady
Kristine Chatwood
Cathay Che
Stephen Chrysler
Rachel Eborá
Kevin Isom
Al Kielwasser
Lee Lynch
Richard Shumate
Floreid Walker
C. Jay Wilson Jr.

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steppin' out



"Bids, Banter and Basic Rights," a Nov. 18 benefit auction for Basic Rights Oregon, raised nearly \$60,000 in bids for items such as weekend getaways, dinners, unique gifts, art and professional services.

guest editorial

A bitter milestone

Dec. 1, 1995—World AIDS Day—finds a global village reeling from tragic losses and the grim realization that there are more to come

by Bob Roehr

A half million people in the United States have been diagnosed with AIDS—not HIV infection, but full-blown AIDS. The Centers for Disease Control announced that bitter milestone in a routine, and largely ignored, *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* issued the day after Thanksgiving.

More than 60 percent of people infected have already died. While the rate of increase among heterosexuals and injection drug users continues to rise most rapidly, the single largest group of those infected continues to be men who have sex with men.

Philip Rosenberg, a researcher with the National Institutes of Health's National Cancer Institute, noted that one in every 92 young people in this country (ages 27 to 39) may be infected with HIV. He worried that "the threat of AIDS may become a rite of passage" for young people. The report was published in the journal *Science*.

Cornelius Baker of the National Association of People with AIDS put the data in chilling perspective, "I don't think most young people really understand the potential for infection. We have to make it very clear to them: If you contract HIV in your 20s, you are likely to die before 40."

Thomas J. Coates, director of the Center for AIDS Prevention Studies at the University of California San Francisco, worries that "unless action is taken quickly, we will lose a new generation of gay men."

He cited a recent study in San Francisco of gay men aged 17 to 22 that found a 9.4 percent rate of infection. That number

soared to 21.2 percent among African American participants studied.

"It is now clear that the AIDS epidemic never went away in the gay male population," warns Gabriel Rotello, New York activist and columnist. "Transmission is continuing at levels that guarantee what is called a saturation point, that virtually all men who can be infected will be infected."

He says the gay community "put all of its eggs in the basket of the condom code" for safer sex, but he believes that approach is flawed because of less than 100 percent compliance. Rotello feels the refusal of the community to deal with issues of multiple partners, anal sex and unprotected oral sex is responsible for "continuation of this catastrophe."

Ralph Bolton, a researcher at Pomona College, cites data comparing men who go to bathhouses with those who do not. The patrons "engage in less risky sex, are more knowledgeable about AIDS, and have reduced their risky behavior to a greater extent than men who do not go to bathhouses."

Bolton places the blame for continued high rates of infection at the feet of "failed strategies that emphasized monogamy and bedroom sex over the simple message: Use a condom every time, everywhere, and with every partner."

While activists and scientists argue over where the blame for the continued high rates of infection should fall, the transmission of infection continues because people do not heed that message: Use a condom every time, everywhere, and with every partner. It's a matter of life-or-death importance.

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