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local news

Reignite the passion

Organizers of a May 19 vigil seek to counter AIDS apathy by outing grief—and celebration

by Inga Sorensen

Can She Make AIDS Hot Again?" screamed a recent *New York* magazine cover. Perched next to the headline was a photo of glamour actress Sharon Stone, who has taken on the role of spokeswoman for one of the nation's leading AIDS organizations, the American Foundation for AIDS Research, a New York-based foundation that has fallen on difficult times.

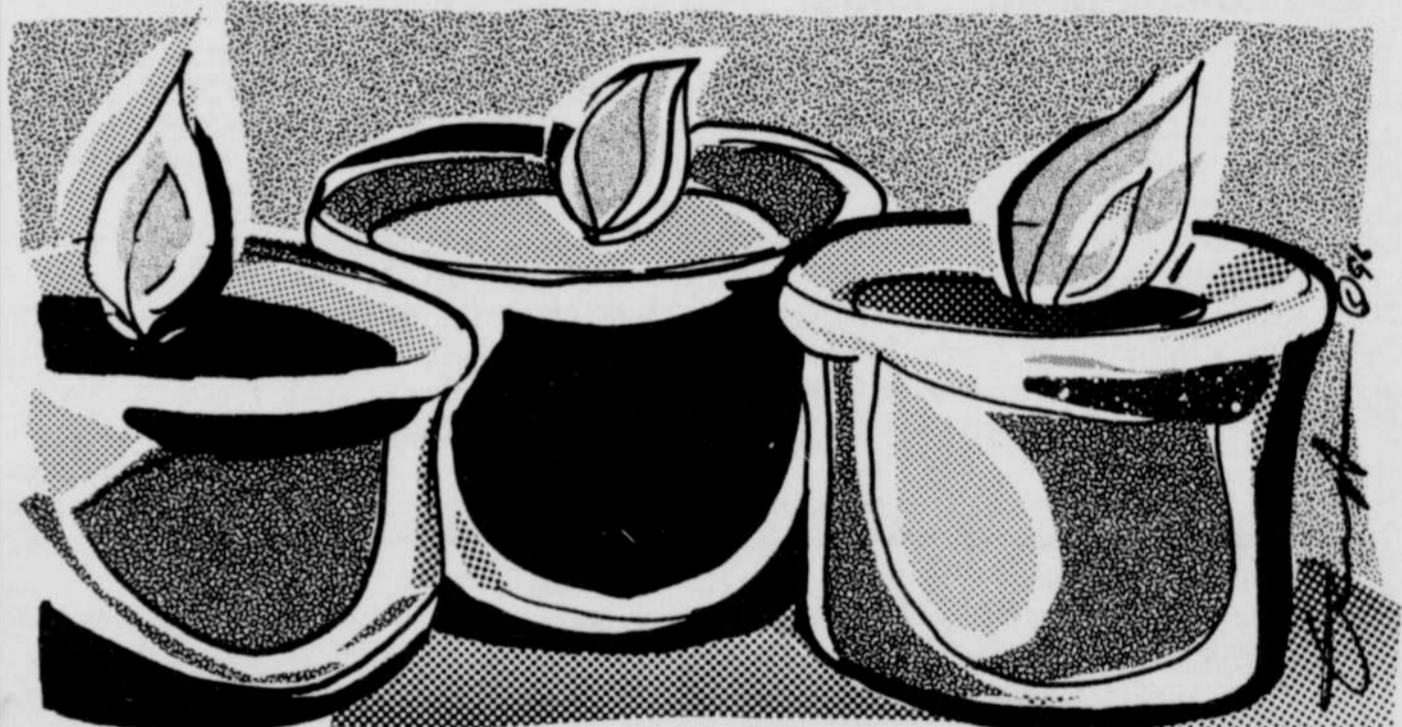
The gist of the article is that AMFAR and other AIDS organizations throughout the United States are "literally begging for cash," due in large part to an overall decline in interest in the disease.

"Bored, burned-out, or convinced that the disease is no longer their problem, most Americans have come to view the epidemic as a relent-

According to Leverenz, a vigil and ceremony will be held May 19 at Pioneer Courthouse Square in downtown Portland. It begins at 6 pm. The Ainsworth Singers will perform, and proclamations from Portland Mayor Vera Katz and Oregon Gov. John Kitzhaber will be read. There will be speakers, dancers and music, as well as a presentation of a quilt panel and the lighting of the candles. The gathering runs roughly three hours.

Leverenz says in years past, the local ceremony has been held in a more private setting, such as Portland's First Congregational Church.

"We're very pleased that this year we're holding this in a very public and visible place," he says. "I wanted to see us step out from the very cloistered confines of a church, for instance, where we have grieved and consoled each other in rela-



less scourge," writes journalist Andrew Jacobs. "Like famine in Africa and violence in the inner city, AIDS has been added to the list of problems that society ritually wails about—but has largely given up solving. In 1991, AIDS appeared in more than 2,000 headlines in the *New York Times*; last year it showed up 500 times."

"I, too, feel like we're just not hearing much about [AIDS] in the media anymore. AIDS isn't in the public eye the way it used to be, and that disturbs me a great deal," says Bob Leverenz, executive director of Our House of Portland, a hospice serving people with AIDS. "We need to reignite the passion. How exactly to do that is a tough question, but we must try."

Leverenz is helping organize a local vigil as part of the 13th International AIDS Candlelight Memorial and Mobilization. Activities honoring those who have died of AIDS complications will take place across the country and the world.

tive privacy. I think we need to be more public—and to celebrate as well as grieve."

The Rev. Roy Cole, pastor of Portland's Metropolitan Community Church, agrees.

"We do need to try and re-energize the community as well as the public at large," says Cole, who has seen two MCC members die from AIDS complications in the past three weeks. "I think there has been sort of a national turning away from AIDS. People are very tired.... In our community we used to be able to say to people: 'Be here for the cure.' Well, now people are realizing that a cure may be a long way off. That's a difficult reality to deal with emotionally, intellectually and spiritually."

He adds: "While that's hard to process because of its enormity, it is important for us to continue remembering those who have passed away, and to try and stay involved in any way we can."

Contract promotes women's equity

Oregon Reps. Gail Shibley (D-Portland), Cynthia Wooten (D-Eugene) and Kate Brown (D-Portland) are among a group of state dignitaries who recently signed the "Contract with the Women of the USA," a dozen principles for policies and programs to improve women's lives and advance their equality in Oregon and nationwide.

The contract is modeled after the Platform for Action adopted last September in Beijing during the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women.

It is part of a national effort to help implement

the United States' commitment to carry out the international Platform for Action, which calls for the removal of obstacles that block women's full participation in society.

Contract endorsers "pledge to work together to overcome discrimination based on sex, race, class, age, immigration status, sexual orientation, religion and disability. We seek to end social, economic and political inequities, violence and the human rights abuses that still confront millions of American women and girls."

Other contract endorsers include state Reps. Kitty Piercy, Avel Gordly, Anitra Rasmussen and Margaret Carter, as well as retiring state Sen. Shirley Gold and Oregon Superintendent of Public Instruction Norma Paulus.

Inga Sorensen

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