

local news

Slow train coming

A local AIDS service organization makes diligent progress in its efforts to get surplus supplies to Mexico

by Inga Sorensen

It took two-and-a-half months, but a shipment of medical supplies earmarked for patients in the AIDS ward of the Guadalajara Civic Hospital finally arrived near Valentine's Day. The supplies were mailed in early December.

Jerry McBride, a board member of the Portland-based Friends of People with AIDS Foundation, a nonprofit organization that assists people with AIDS with their everyday and emergency needs, says additional boxes of supplies, including medications such as AZT, Crixivan and aspirin, were also hand-delivered in mid-February via members of Portland's sister city group. (The Rose City and Guadalajara are sister cities.)

"It's a good feeling to know that some supplies have finally gotten there," says McBride, who along with his partner, foundation founder Corey Baker, pledged assistance to the ward following a vacation in Guadalajara.

During the trip, they visited the hospital's AIDS ward and were unnerved by the lack of basic supplies such as hospital beds, wheelchairs and walkers.

Instead of simply lamenting that tough reality, they decided to try and do something about it.

The Friends of PWA Foundation relies on grants and its two annual fund raisers—a benefit

dog walk held each July and an October luncheon auction.

The money raised supports a variety of foundation funds, including a travel fund, which is designed to cover the expenses involved in bringing family and loved ones to visit those living out their final days; a cremation fund, to help pay for cremation services for people who have died of AIDS complications; an emergency food fund, which provides emergency food baskets to those in need; a fund geared toward the care of pets owned by people with HIV/AIDS (who may be living on a limited budget); and an entertainment fund, which allows the organization to sponsor a Thanksgiving dinner, as well as purchase Easter baskets and Christmas toys for children.

Over the years the foundation has managed to collect a stock of medical supplies that has gone unused—boxes of diapers, rubber gloves, hospital beds and walkers, and thermometers, to name a few.

Baker says the supplies have piled up because state law prohibits the unused portion of medical supplies, as well as drugs, purchased for a patient who dies from being passed on to another.

Thus the excess has gone unused—until now. However, while McBride says he's pleased



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that some boxes of supplies are getting through—albeit at a less-than-efficient pace—many others may not, due to bureaucratic red tape.

He says an estimated 300 boxes of clothing are ready to be sent.

"But the clothes are not new, and the [Mexican] government says they have to be new. They want the store tags and everything," says McBride. "I don't know if we'll be able to send all of this."

He adds that plans to ship copious medical supplies to the hospital via a freight car have also hit a snag.

In December, Baker told *Just Out* that the Guadalajara hospital was going to send a car for him to fill. Now McBride and Baker are scram-

bling to get Union Pacific to donate a car to take the supplies to the border, where a train exchange will then occur.

"But then they need to get armed guards to travel with the car because of the robbery problem," says McBride.

The two had originally hoped to have the freight car filled and returned by March. McBride now concedes that meeting that timetable is a long shot at best.

"No doubt it can be frustrating and exhausting, but we have to do what we can," he says.

To donate money or medical supplies to the Friends of PWA Foundation, call 245-7428.

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