

local news

Remembering

MCC is coordinating an event in honor of World AIDS Day, a time to share grief and strengthen our mutual resolve

by Inga Sorensen

The Rev. Roy Cole, pastor of the Metropolitan Community Church of Portland, wants people to remember this: "Despite what you hear, AIDS is not over. Huge numbers of people in this country and worldwide continue to contract HIV and die of AIDS. This is the reality."

And it's also why MCC is taking a lead role in organizing a local observance of World AIDS Day, an international event held each Dec. 1 to remember those who have lost their lives to AIDS complications and to mobilize people in the ongoing fight against the disease.

MCC is also planning for the International AIDS Candlelight Memorial slated for mid-May.

"AIDS continues to kill—MCC believes people must not forget this harsh reality. By sponsoring World AIDS Day and the International Candlelight Memorial on May 17, 1998, MCC can gift the community with events that will strengthen our collective resolve and honor our collective grief," he says.

According to Cole, the local World AIDS Day event will be held the night of Dec. 1 at the Portland Art Museum. The evening will include music, the lighting of a Wellness Candle, a dedication of Quilt panels, speakers, and theater and dance performances.

The Rev. Dr. Amos Brown, senior pastor of the Third Baptist Church in San Francisco, is the scheduled keynote speaker.

Third Baptist is one of the largest African American churches on the West Coast. Brown is also on the San Francisco Board of Supervisors and has been a vocal supporter of the gay and lesbian community.

Cole says Brown has even been to several fund-raisers at the Eagle, a popular gay leather bar in San Francisco, "not a venue for most pastors to be found."

He adds that Brown, who is a nationally recognized civil rights leader, was selected to keynote in order to "bring attention to the continuing rise in HIV infection among African American men and women."

"His presence in Portland will help support the work of the Urban League and Brother to Brother," says Cole.

Terry Durst, director of community outreach for the Urban League of Portland, a cosponsor of the event, echoes that view.

"We want to do more work with African American churches around HIV/AIDS," says Durst. "Churches have such a critical role in the community."

And HIV infection, he notes, is hitting the African American community extremely hard. Infection rates among African American men and women are among the fastest growing in this country.

"It was a wake-up call when Magic Johnson came forward, and then Arthur Ashe," says Durst. "But after a while, people kind of forget about it."

Participating in World AIDS Day, he adds, is

one way to remember the AIDS struggle is far from over.

"While I'm very happy protease inhibitors appear to be effective with some people, as well as more accessible, we also have to remember that we still don't know how long that will last. Certainly that's the hope, but at this point we just don't know," he says.

Judith Rizzio of the Coalition for AIDS Education agrees.

The coalition is a group of individuals, non-profit organizations and businesses that have joined together for the past 10 years to educate the public about HIV and AIDS.

"Some people are beginning to view AIDS as a chronic illness, but the truth is this disease is still fatal, and it's affecting a lot of people," says Rizzio, pointing in particular to vulnerable popu-

lations like women, youth, injection drug users and communities of color.

"It's a mixed bag. You want to express hope, particularly in light of new treatments, but you also have to remember many people don't have access to new treatments—especially worldwide—and there is currently no cure," says Rizzio, who also works for Our House of Portland, which throughout the AIDS pandemic has provided care to those in the final stages of life.

According to Cole, Portland's World AIDS Day commemoration will feature performances by the Northwest Afrikan American Ballet and the Portland Opera Com-

pany; the NAMES Project will dedicate new Quilt panels, as it does every year on World AIDS Day; the Coalition for AIDS Education will present its 1997 Red Ribbon Awards; and there will be a viewing of *Blood Lines*, a work in progress by filmmakers Jennifer Jako and Rebecca Guberman. The 8-minute presentation is the beginning of a full-length feature which shares the stories of HIV-positive and AIDS-affected young people.

According to Cole, the Portland Area Business Association, a 200-plus member organization of gay men and lesbians in business and their allies, has become a principal corporate sponsor of World AIDS Day.

PABA President Hala Gores says she's delighted the group can bolster the event both financially as well as with volunteer support.

"PABA wants to take a more active role in the gay and lesbian community and strive to give back to the community," says Gores, a Portland attorney.

Battling AIDS, she adds, is clearly a top priority.

"The AIDS pandemic is the No. 1 issue," she says. "It's taken its toll on so many.... We want to do what we can to see this stop."

World AIDS Day will be commemorated Monday, Dec. 1, from 7:30 to 9 pm in the Grand Ballroom of the Portland Art Museum's North Wing. The event is free, and the public is encouraged to attend. For more information, call MCC at 281-8868.



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