

WHAT FRIENDS ARE FOR

A kindhearted, low-profile AIDS organization celebrates its 10th anniversary by Katy Davidson

About 10 years ago, Corey Baker started an organization for people who fall through the cracks. He founded Friends of People with AIDS, a low-profile group that provides patients with services that are overlooked by larger organizations, services that directly improve patients' quality of life.

"[Corey] realized there were services for people with AIDS that no one covered," says Bill Space, the current board chairman.

Leaving the medical aspects of AIDS to the professionals, Friends of PWAs is merely a team of volunteers that, for example, foots the bill when a patient wants to see his father in Ethiopia before he dies, helps clean out a patient's apartment before mom comes into town, or pays the veterinary bill when a patient's pet is sick.

According to the organization's treasurer, Allen Brady, the group provides services on a case-by-case basis. In the past, Friends of PWAs has also helped patients' families with the cost of cremation services, helped people set up apartments, and bought Christmas gifts for clients with kids.

"Sometimes the clients are kids," Brady notes.

"We try to avoid being 'Make a Wish' for AIDS. We don't want to send people to Disneyland," Space says. "We want to help with things people take for granted."

The group runs Tod's Corner, a clothing and household goods "store" housed in the donated basement space of the Fantasy for Adults Only

video store on West Burnside Street in downtown Portland. Tod's Corner provides patients with tangible donated goods, free of charge. For example, the group gave away more than 80 winter coats last year.

Tod's Corner is a crowded but well-organized collection of clothes, pots, pans, blankets and teddy bears, among other household items. Jan Rosell, the Friends of PWAs full-time volunteer and client services person, operates the shop every Thursday and Friday between 11 a.m. and 1 p.m.

When Tod's Corner first opened, she says, patients needed items such as wheelchairs and disposable undergarments. Over the last 10 years, she has watched the face of AIDS change and those needs decrease.

"Before, people were striving to live," she says. "We are now providing services for the living."

Rosell says that every time a client leaves Tod's Corner, she gives him or her a hug coupon, "good for one hug, redeemable from any participating human being."

According to Space, Friends of PWAs is able to do so much with its funds because it has such low overhead. The group does not have an office and does not send out newsletters. People with AIDS find out about the group via referrals from larger organizations.

In fact, Baker points out that when he was board chairman, 100 percent of every dollar went to the patients. "I'm very proud of that," he says.

These days, Friends of PWAs helps about 250 clients, and the group has still never spent



Jan Rosell at Tod's Corner



more than \$45,000 a year. Space says it was a big step for the group to even get a phone line. "We have such a cheap aesthetic," he adds.

Friends of PWAs does not receive any government aid, but it used to get steady donations from Fabric of Life and Cascade AIDS Project. For various reasons, some of the organization's donation sources have begun to dry up.

"There's been some compassion fatigue over the last few years. People aren't as open with their wallets," Brady says.

Space adds: "People think the needs have gone away because people live longer."

Though the group still gets some money from individual patrons and other sources, it is currently planning a fund-raising event to celebrate its 10th anniversary. Friends of PWAs will host a garden party August 20. At the fund-raiser, the group will stage a silent and an oral auction, and also provide entertainment in the form of belly-dancing and live music. Brady and Space expect at least 250 people to attend.

"We're looking to raise the profile of the group so people can help out," Space says. "We're looking for patrons who want to help in specific ways."

■ For more information about the upcoming fund-raiser, FRIENDS OF PEOPLE WITH AIDS may be reached at (503) 283-8535.

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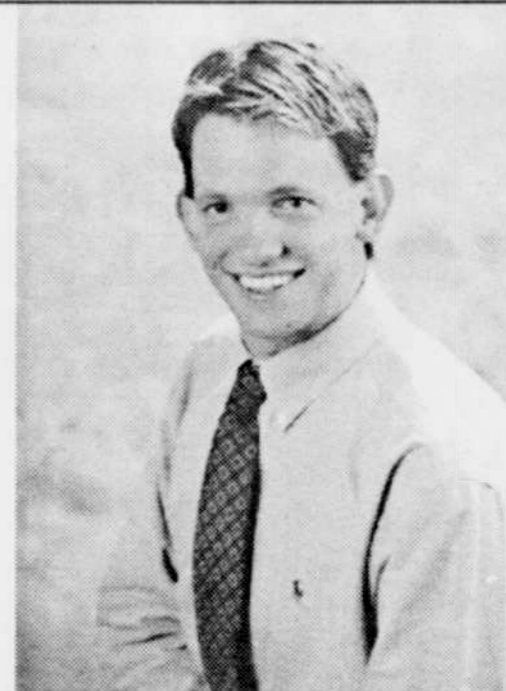
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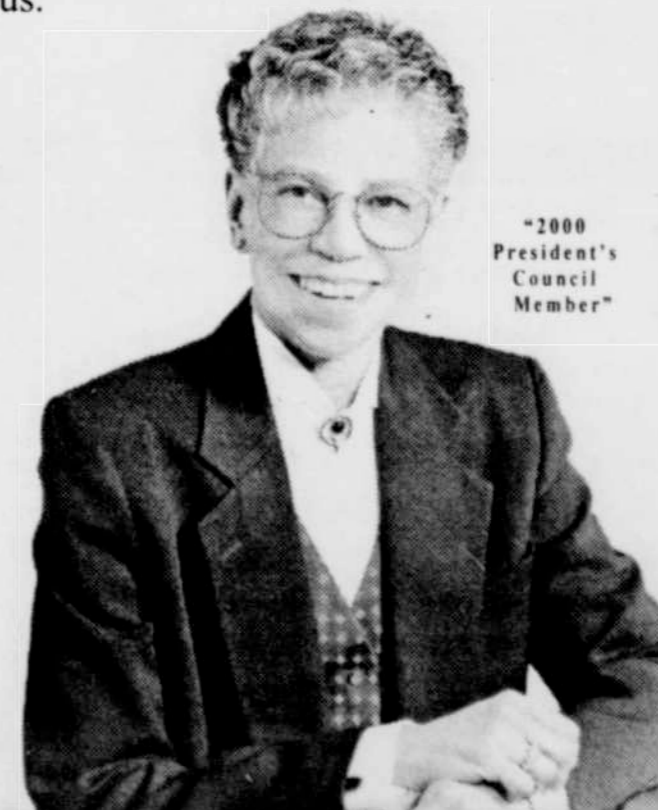
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