

HISTORY LESSON

The face of AIDS has changed since 1988

by Pat Young

When Our House of Portland opened its doors 15 years ago, Bud "Whoop Whoop" Clark was the city's mayor, the Oregon Citizens Alliance had successfully passed its anti-gay Ballot Measure 8, and George Bush (the first) was elected president with the promise of creating a kinder, gentler America. However, in 1988, AIDS was anything but kinder and gentler.

Insurance companies wanted to test applicants for HIV and feared they would lose money covering the cost of AIDS care. Education was a controversial subject. Tri-Met removed Cascade AIDS Project posters from buses after riders complained they promoted homosexuality. People were being shunned. Family relationships were torn. Fear, misunderstanding and discrimination engulfed people with AIDS. They were in desperate need of a care facility.

"Our House was an offshoot of Juniper House," remembers Pat Schwiebert, the first board chairwoman. "A group of us got together and planned and dreamed and worked on it. It was something that needed to happen in Portland."

Juniper House was an AIDS foster care facility, but when it closed, Schwiebert and others thought they should start over and do it differently. They thought they could do it better from the perspective of care and compassion.

"Five people got together and came forward. They started with nothing but commitment, and in less than six months Our House was open," recalls Kimberly Brown, who volunteered at Juniper House.

The first location was at Southeast 26th Avenue and Powell Boulevard. It had two bedrooms upstairs and two downstairs, accommodating five residents. It was a wonderful house, but the stairs presented a problem. Within a year, Our House moved to its current location at Southeast 28th Avenue and Alder Street, which has 12 beds all on one floor.

The first year was a wild ride. Everyone was still learning about AIDS and knew little about dementia. From the beginning, the residents had a role in how things were done, within limits. Thus the name "Our House." It was going to be a community, a family.

"It was pretty intense at times," Schwiebert says. "It wasn't just nice, sweet stuff. We were

always on the edge, and yet there would be these absolutely pure, perfect moments of coming together and caring for each other."

One reason for the success of Our House is the philosophy surrounding the volunteers.

"To have a successful volunteer program, you have to have a strong volunteer ethic about it being just as valuable as the paid staff," says Judith Rizzio, who's been with Our House for 14 years—the first eight as volunteer director.

Rizzio made sure the staff and residents respected the volunteers. She implanted an ethic of giving back and thanking the volunteers. She makes sure that the volunteers feel they are an important aspect of Our House and that their time is well spent. It's a philosophy that has withstood the test of time.

When Our House opened, most of the residents were white gay men. Some were middle class before AIDS took away their livelihood. They came to Our House to spend their last days.

"Our hardest year was 1993, in which we had 63 deaths. It was so constant. It was like being in a war zone," Rizzio recalls. It's still difficult for some volunteers and staff to talk about.

"We just thought, 'When is this going to stop?' And then all of a sudden, the unbelievable magic of protease inhibitors came along and literally gave back people life," Rizzio says.

With AZT came a huge change in the mindset. Now people could live with the disease instead of waiting to die from it.

"The whole psyche about working here changed as well as the way we went about doing our work," Rizzio notes. "And it was profound."



Judith Rizzio has been with Our House for 14 years

The House That Volunteers Built

Continued from Page 25

their final days—especially at the moment when they pass on. Estes, Barham and St. Martin serve on the personal care team that deals with those moments. They not only bathe and feed those too ill to do that themselves, but they often are called in during the middle of the night when it becomes clear someone may soon die.

"You do sometimes get emotionally attached, and it is hard," Estes says. "I deal with it...I know that am I there to help them, and to be with them in their final days of their life

is an incredible experience. I always feel like I get back more than I give."

All of the volunteers echo that sentiment.

St. Martin notes that some residents of Our House have absolutely no family support and that having volunteers there in the end helps them deal with the process. "Just having someone there to hold your hand makes a difference," she says.

Barham adds: "I don't think until you've actually experienced Our House you can describe what it's like to volunteer there. People say: 'I don't know how you can do that. It would be so said. It would be so hard.' It's about the gifts of life and giving and nurturing and sharing and caring for each other. It is a true gift when they allow you to be a part of their life's journey at Our House. I leave there feeling I've gotten more than I've given."

Bryant shares a story about a resident who was "very difficult to me and to others" when she first volunteered. That man eventually got well enough to move out, and she left the area for a short time to take a new job. However, she eventually returned to Our House, and soon that resident became ill and moved back into the facility.

"When Kathryn told me he was back, I rolled my eyes to the sky and said, 'Here we go again,'" Bryant says. "What happened next floored me. He told me he was sorry for the way he treated me, and he asked me to forgive him. I told him there was nothing to be forgiven for."



Lisa Benson

PHOTO COURTESY OUR HOUSE OF PORTLAND

PHOTO COURTESY OUR HOUSE OF PORTLAND

'IT'S ALL IN YOUR HEAD'
TRAIN YOUR BRAIN.
CHANGE YOUR LIFE.

"I have to date lost 22 lbs and am off Zoloft. All thanks to you. You are a goddess."

-Don Clarkson, Mayor (Mosier, OR) and Personal Coach

If you are struggling with depression, anxiety, panic attacks, attention issues, stress, sleep problems, mental clarity, or are seeking a peak performance edge contact:

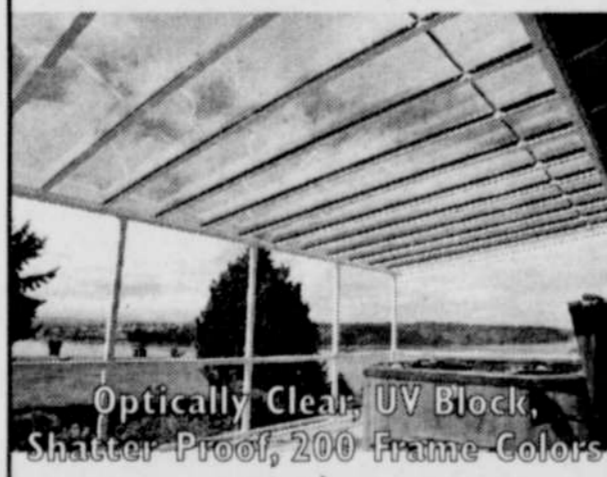


Nora Gedgaudas
Neurotherapist
Nutritional Specialist

Northwest Neurofeedback
Johnson Street Professional Building
1920 NW Johnson Street, Suite 100
Portland, OR 97209
Office: 503-274-7733
Fax: 503-274-7770

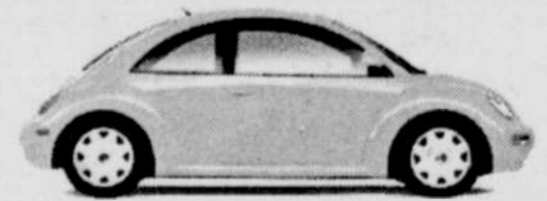
call for a free consultation <http://www.northwest-neurofeedback.com>

Clearly Not Just a Patio Cover



Optically Clear, UV Block,
Shatter-Proof, 200 Frame Colors
CLEARVUE Free Estimates
patio covers (360) 695-9856

Drive with Pride



Visit us online at:
www.reyreece.com
or schedule your appointment
503-256-3700

REY REECE DEALERSHIPS
ISUZU-VOLKSWAGEN-USED
122nd & East Burnside
www.reyreece.com

Westside Florist



Our professionals
will arrange
your delivery

Don Duncan
owner



(503) 642-9992
1-800-356-1884

Aloha Market Centre
20455 SW TV Highway
www.westsideflorist.net