

Since 2001, new infections of syphilis and gonorrhea have grown exponentially among queer men in Portland, especially those who are older than 30, white and meet multiple anonymous partners online or in sex clubs. Many other U.S. cities experienced similar spikes four years ago and are now experiencing a rise in new HIV infections among MSM (men who have sex with men).

But queer men can take action to protect themselves from these epidemics and to help change the values that are making risky behavior the norm and not the exception in many erotic/social venues. Top HIV/STD prevention leaders in Portland, with assistance from advocates in Eugene, Seattle, San Francisco and Los Angeles, prepared this list of 10 recommendations for the new year:

1. If you see guys barebacking in a commercial public sex establishment, ask a staff member to stop the activity. If you see guys barebacking in noncommercial group sex venues (chat rooms, beaches, parks, tearooms, private parties), let them know that you are scared about the message they are sending to all the men who are watching and that you request they bareback in private, so as to not promote barebacking by people who don't know the status of their partners. Prevention experts say barebacking must not be tolerated in group erotic spaces where younger and more inexperienced men might observe it and then come to believe it is condoned.

2. Volunteer for an HIV/STD prevention program (to find a list of agencies outside Portland, call the Oregon AIDS Hotline at 800-777-2437):

- **Digi-Guys:** A program of Cascade AIDS Project designed to train online activists who want to encourage norms of fun and safety in queer men's erotic/social sites. Contact Philip Knowlton at 503-223-5907 or pknowlton@cascadeaids.org.

- **Backroom Boys:** CAP program to train and facilitate collective action by guys who want to encourage norms of fun and safety in Portland sex clubs. Contact Philip Knowlton at 503-223-5907 or pknowlton@cascadeaids.org.

- **Si Puedes:** CAP program offering HIV prevention outreach and social programs by and for Latino gay and bi men. Contact Rafael Arellano at 503-223-5907 or raralleno@cascadeaids.org.

- **Brother to Brother:** Offers HIV prevention outreach and social programs by and for African American gay and bi men. Contact Stephan Herrera at 503-417-7991 or sherrera@brotohopdx.org.

- **Multnomah County HIV/STD Prevention**

SEX CHANGE

Queer men can take action to stop alarming new epidemics of STDs

by Bart Church

Outreach: Contact Derrick Travers at 503-988-3030, ext. 237, or derrick.j.travers@co.multnomah.or.us.

- **Q-LAND (Queer Love Action Network and Directory):** Seeks to create new erotic/social spaces (massage exchanges, naked men dancing, safer-sex parties, classes on how to find true love) so queer men can get their needs for intimacy, fun and health met. Contact Phillip Moore at 503-281-2076 or www.qland.org.

- **HIV Stops with Me:** Recruits HIV-positive men to serve as spokesmodels in a major media and Web campaign designed to help them discuss and learn about prevention concerns from each other. Its award-winning Web site is full of the latest information on drug-resistant strains, disclosure, barebacking and other STD risks. To apply to become a spokesmodel or find out about the program, contact Ralph at 888-837-1102, ralph@socialmarketing.com or www.hivstopswithme.org.

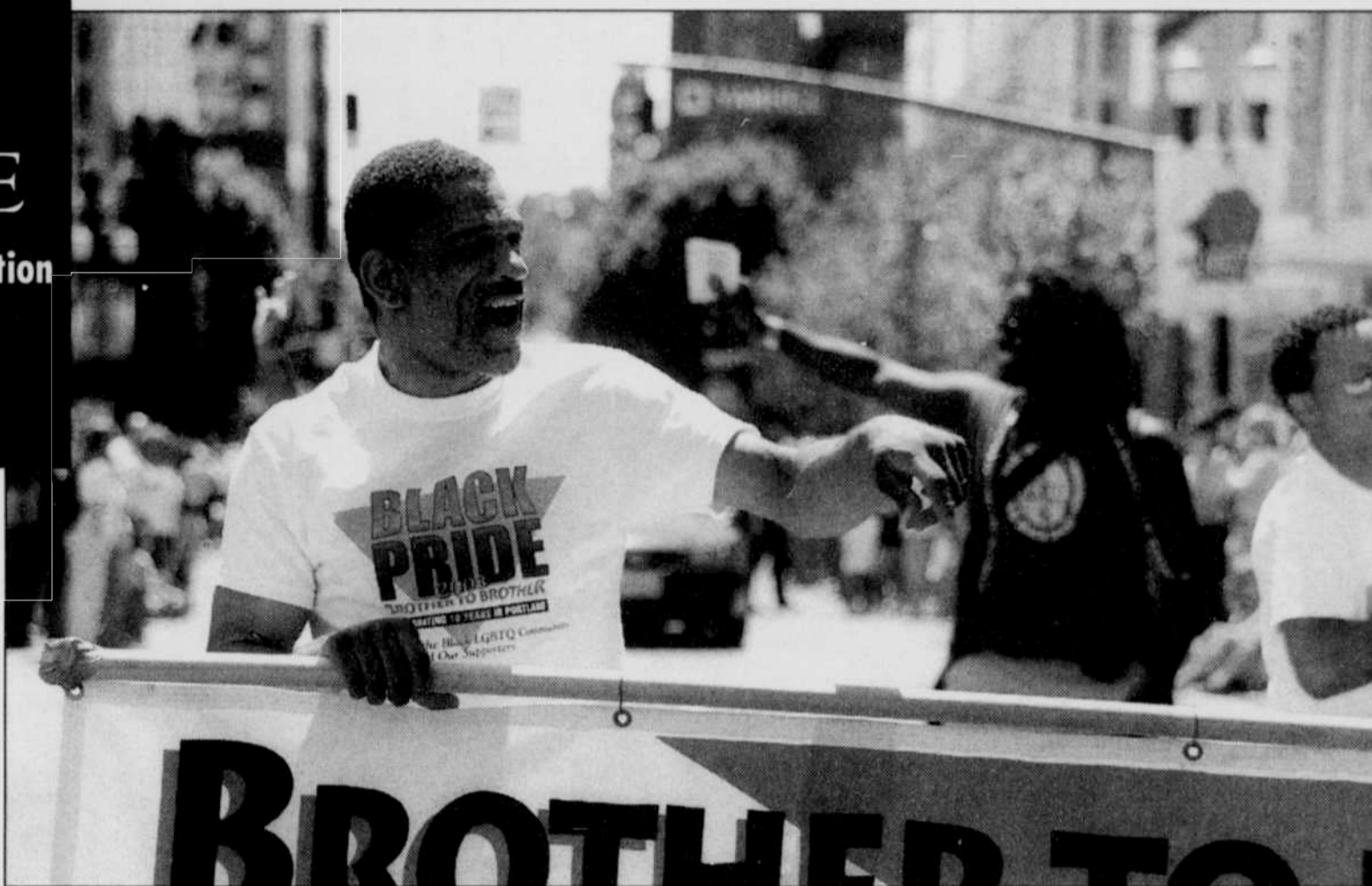
- **Volunteer for an HIV prevention study** (so researchers will know which strategies work):

- **Prevention Case Management:** Assists HIV-positive men who are engaging in risky behaviors (barebacking or needle sharing) to reduce their risks and address underlying needs. Call Kurt at 503-230-1202.

- **Sex Check:** Provides anonymous telephone counseling to sexually active MSM who have questions about their HIV/STD risk. People are paid for their participation. 877-604-6595 or www.thesexcheck.org.

- **Gay Men's Health Survey:** Confidential Oregon Department of Human Services study pays \$20 for a 20-minute interview on your health and sex life. 503-872-6794.

- **Shape:** Provides sexually active HIV-positive men with five phone sessions on



Brother to Brother offers HIV prevention outreach and social programs by and for African American gay and bi men

their questions and concerns. People are paid for their participation. 877-758-0042 or depts.washington.edu/shape.

- **4. If you're in a monogamous relationship, use condoms for all anal sex until you are confident you know the current HIV and STD status of your partner and yourself.** If either of you is sexually active with other people, only be confident if you have HIV and STD test results that are less than three months old for both of you.

- **5. Don't have anal sex when your judgment is impaired by drugs or alcohol.** Don't use drugs or alcohol in public sex arenas to avoid eroticizing drug use (including poppers).

- **6. Have more and better sex with fewer people in the new year.** Your risk of contracting any STD goes up exponentially based on the number of partners you have.

- **7. Get the name and phone number of every person you have sex with, and give them your name and phone number.** If you contract an STD or they contract an STD, you'll want to be able to inform one another; this is the primary way epidemics are stopped. Anonymous partners leave you at high risk for not knowing you might have been exposed and allow your partners to spread something you gave them unknowingly. Little black books need to become status symbols just as they were 20 years ago, prevention experts agree. Everyone should know how to reach their partners.

- **8. If you're sexually active with more than one person, get tested for STDs every three months.** Sexually active HIV-positive guys should get tested for STDs every three months, as STDs often can progress rapidly in people with compromised immune systems. You can arrange free, anonymous HIV testing by calling 503-988-3775 and free, confidential syphilis, gonorrhea and other STD testing by calling 503-988-3700. If you live outside Portland, call 800-777-2437 to find a testing site.

- **9. Disclose your HIV/STD status, and ask your partners to disclose theirs.** Practice with a friend first, and talk about any discomfort or concerns you might feel in having this discussion. Then, in your next sexual encounter, share your test results, and ask your partner about his HIV/STD history. If he doesn't know or won't disclose his status, play very safe.

- **10. Make a new year's risk assessment of your sexual behaviors in the past three months.** Get accurate information about contracting HIV and other STDs from www.sexuality.org/concise.html or by calling 800-777-2437. Then talk with a friend to come up with your 2004 sex plan, listing things you're going to do and not do to reduce your risk and still have fun. []

BART CHURCH is a Portland free-lance writer.

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