

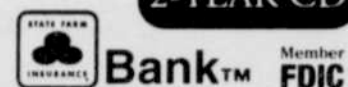
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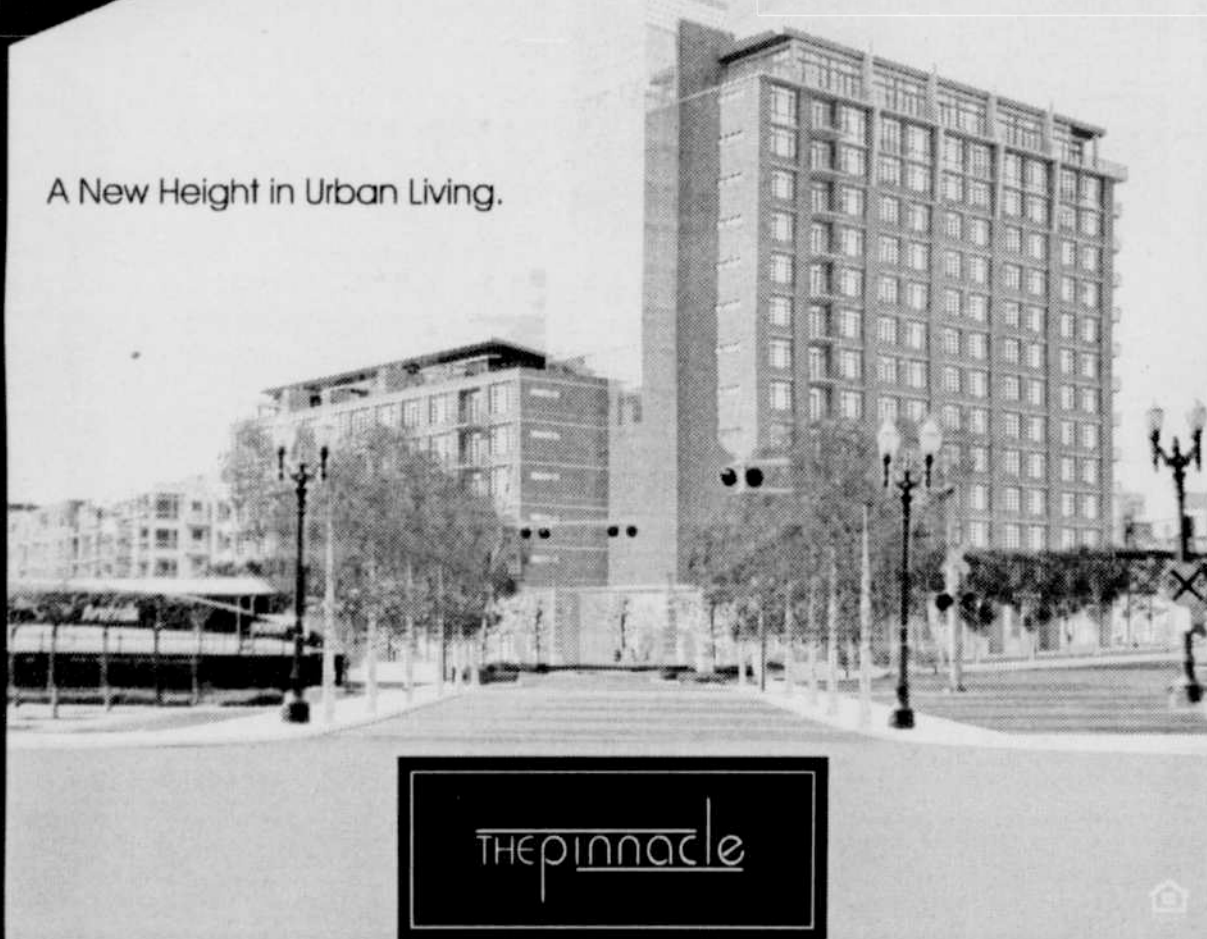
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## NORTHWEST news

# WORLD AIDS DAY

Women and girls the focus of annual commemorations

by Meg Daly

Overwhelming. That is how Becky Harmon describes her experience in southern Africa last year. Harmon, the associate executive director at Cascade AIDS Project, participated in an Oregon State University project to work with HIV/AIDS health organizations in Botswana and Lesotho.

"More than one in three people you see are living with HIV or AIDS," said Harmon. "Everywhere you go, you see it."

One woman told Harmon that 14 funerals had taken place in her small village in the course of one week.

Harmon says one of the main questions the OSU team had to address was why so many African women are becoming infected with HIV. One reason she cites is the patriarchal culture that prevents women from having much power over their own lives, from property rights to negotiating sex.

The issue of gender and AIDS is not confined to Africa. According to the Joint U.N. Program on HIV/AIDS, women and girls are becoming infected with HIV at a faster rate than men and boys. Globally, women now make up around half the people living with HIV. For these reasons, UNAIDS will commemorate World AIDS Day on Dec. 1 with the theme of "Women, Girls, HIV and AIDS."

According to Harmon, worldwide figures do not reflect cases of HIV in Oregon women, where the figure is only 15 percent. "The percentage of women [contracting HIV] in Oregon is not increasing dramatically compared to other parts of the community," she said.

Still, 30 percent of CAP's prevention education clients last year were women. Harmon says Portland lost an important resource when the Women's Intercommunity AIDS Resource closed at the end of April.

"It has left a hole," she said. "As a community, we're talking about how we can take care of women's needs."

CAP and other Oregon organizations take note of global trends, and several are planning World AIDS Day events focusing on this year's theme.

CAP will honor its volunteers and community partners at a private function Nov. 30. The annual Angel Awards recognize those who have made exceptional efforts in their

outreach and community-building.

Two of this year's Angels are Thomas Cherry and Guy Michelson. The two friends are active participants in CAP's Pink Link social group for HIV-positive men, which is how they met. Now they volunteer together to help out with various CAP events.

Michelson, who is on the Pink Link steering committee, says the group motivated him to come out of a self-imposed isolation after he tested positive.

"It was my way of getting out of the house," Michelson reflected. "I have met a lot of friends and wonderful people."

Now, he says, volunteering with CAP allows him to give back to the community that has supported him.

The following is a selected calendar of public events for Dec. 1:

### IN PORTLAND...

**AIDS Action Project Northwest** will hold a commemorative event at the World Trade Center Plaza, 121 S.W. Salmon St., at 5:30 p.m., doors at 4 p.m. The event is free and open to the public.

*The AIDS Timeline*, a year-by-year history of the epidemic from 1980 to the present in Oregon and the United States, will be on display. Several Portland HIV/AIDS service providers will have displays as well.

The evening program features former Oregon Gov. **Barbara Roberts** as host, Portland Mayor-elect **Tom Potter** and musical interludes by members of the Portland Gay Men's Chorus. The audience will participate in a reading of the names of Oregonians and others who have died as a result of AIDS. The program also includes an interactive sculpture, *Tree of Life* by Bao Nguyen, on which audience members can tie names of loved ones. Also on display will be T-shirts created by Reynolds High School's Gay Straight Alliance. For more information call 503-252-7980.

The Portland-Mutare Sister City Association will host *Hope Is Vital*, a benefit for Africa AIDS Response, at 7:30 p.m. at Crystal Ballroom, 1332 W. Burnside St.

The event benefits Portland's sister city of Mutare, Zimbabwe, and features the captivating energy and Afrobeat music of **Maya Soleil**, blending traditional African rhythm and vocals

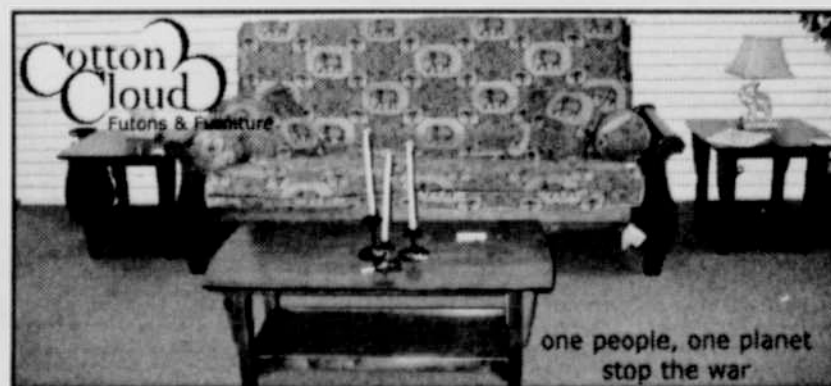
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