

Walk The Walk

AIDS Walk Portland 2011 puts the "act" in activism

BY AARON SPENCER

What would it take for you to donate \$10 to AIDS Walk Portland? How about a sext? Michael Sorensen is betting on it.

Well, not Sorensen personally—he's offering a seat at a cocktail party for every \$69—but he knows someone who is advertising sexts on Facebook for donations, and he's all for it.

"Facebook just gives you an opportunity to be creative," says Sorensen, director of development at Cascade AIDS Project, "and maybe creative in a not-as-professional way."

"People are going to think, 'Oh yeah, that's [him]—he's kind of kooky that way,'" he adds. "He's not trying to get me to sleep with him, but he's going to send me a sext."

In the fundraising game, you have to be aggressively friendly, organizers at CAP say, and you have to use every tool in your belt.

CAP, which works to prevent HIV infections and help individuals with HIV/AIDS,

aims to raise \$400,000 this year for its 25th annual AIDS Walk Portland, which makes up 10 percent of the nonprofit's budget. CAP fell short of the same goal last year. The organization expects turnout for the event to exceed 2010's tally of 11,000 people, but it hopes those people will reach deeper in their pockets.

"The truth is it takes 11,000 people to make a statement in Portland and we've been doing that for 25 years," Sorensen says. "Yet \$400,000 is still such a small amount of money from this community."

For comparison, Sorensen points to the AIDS walk in Seattle, which exceeded its 2010 goal of \$500,000 and is shooting for \$600,000 this year. San Francisco's recent AIDS walk raised more than \$3 million. Before the recession, CAP had been able to raise

\$600,000 in Portland.

"Stepping up to walk is certainly laudable," Sorensen says, "but stepping up to walk and throwing five bucks in is definitely better, and stepping up to walk and throwing five bucks in and asking 100 of your friends to throw five bucks in is fantastic."

Though the number of deaths from AIDS is nowhere near its peak during the 1980s and '90s—mostly due to the advent of antiretroviral therapy—new HIV infections in Oregon have not declined in the past 10 years, according to the Oregon Office of Disease Prevention and Epidemiology. An estimated 5,791 people in Oregon are infected with HIV, and 70 percent of those are men who have sex with men.

But a breakthrough study released this year indicates that early treatment of an HIV-infected person with antiretroviral drugs can

cut the risk of HIV transmission to an uninfected partner by 96 percent. The study was funded by the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases.

"For the first time," says Michael Kaplan, executive director of CAP, "if we could get everyone to know their HIV status and get treatment, we'd have a clear path to basically ending this epidemic."

AIDS Walk organizers hope the community will mobilize for the cause this year and attend the event, held at Pioneer Courthouse Square.

"There are moments that will bring a tear to the eye and moments that will have you smiling and beaming with pride at what the community is doing," Kaplan says.

AIDS Walk Portland 2011 takes place Sun., Oct. 2, beginning and ending at Pioneer Courthouse Square (SW Broadway and Yamhill).



"I mean, when you read about AIDS in the news it seems kind of distant, but here it was affecting me personally. It really opened my eyes and exposed me to the reality of things."

—MARLA DEVYNE

Walking, Doing, Winning

AIDS Walk Portland participants share what moves them

Marla DeVyne:
You've come a long way, baby

Marla DeVyne, 38, was living in Virginia when she got a call that her friend had died of AIDS. It was the first time a friend of hers had died of the disease, and she didn't even know that he had it.

"At that time my friends and I were really angry and upset about it," she says, "but now it makes more sense because there's the whole stigma of people with HIV, and at the time there wasn't a lot of education."

DeVyne remembers telling her mother that her friend died of AIDS. Her mom panicked, she says,

and told her to wipe down all of the hard surfaces in the house.

"She told me I could get it from the toilet," DeVyne says. "It all seems kind of funny or ignorant now, looking back."

Still, the death prompted DeVyne and many of her friends to get tested.

"When I lost a friend it really made me think about my life and some of the risks that I had taken sexually," she says. "I mean, when you read about AIDS in the news it seems kind of distant, but here it was affecting me personally. It really opened my eyes and exposed me to the reality of things."

DeVyne eventually left Virginia; she is transgender and bisexual, and she says where she lived wasn't

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