

Jim Kennedy: A grateful gait

When Jim Kennedy participated in his first AIDS walk in the late 1980s, awareness of the disease was still minimal and often skewed. President Ronald Reagan had recently made his first speech about AIDS (1987) and the U.S. Department of Justice had just ruled people with HIV could not be discriminated against (1988).

"It was at a time when a couple of my friends were actually battling AIDS and it was my way of trying to help," the 46-year-old hair stylist and actor recalls. "I remember it was a new thing to talk about AIDS/HIV and I felt a little conspicuous asking businesses to display posters in their windows to advertise and get people to join the walk. But I was proud to help."

But Kennedy wasn't just helping others through his awareness and fundraising efforts, he was building a framework for his own future. When his very first HIV test in 1996 came back positive, Kennedy immediately turned to Cascade AIDS Project for referrals and encouragement.

"I had insurance and found a good



doctor and I never ended up using any CAP services because, thankfully, I was and am blessed with a support system," Kennedy says. "But what if I hadn't? Just knowing that CAP was there took a huge burden of panic from me."

Kennedy credits CAP for reassuring him he is not alone. That awareness reminds him of both the services available

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to him and those living with HIV/AIDS who need assistance.

"I am in the minority of those out there living with this challenge," Kennedy says. "I know there are those who have no insurance, no support from families or loved ones, and perhaps even no homes or jobs. I can't imagine what my life could have been like without those things."

Fortunately, he isn't alone in his desire to help—a fact that inspires hope.

"[The] solidarity is very inspiring," Kennedy says. "It makes a wonderful diversion from some of the less pleasant aspects of our current culture, and affirms to me that people are compassionate and generous in our city." ☐

—ERIN ROOK



AIDS Walk 2011 Schedule of Events

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 2

9 a.m.: AIDS Walk Portland opens and registration, entertainment and activities—including music, a kids corner, team photos, complimentary breakfast and more—begin.

10:30 a.m.: Official welcome and guest speakers take the stage.

11 a.m.: The 2.5-mile AIDS Walk through downtown, Old Town and the Pearl District begins.

11:15 a.m.: Music and other entertainment continue at Pioneer Square.

12:30 p.m.: Closing ceremony.

1 p.m. AIDS Walk Portland closes.

2-7 p.m.: After party at Cuda Beach Club, NW Second and Couch.

Visit aidswalkportland.org
for more information.

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