

HIV/AIDS SURVIVORS KICK ASS

Local group invites public to a brunch to learn more about AIDS Survivor Syndrome

Maralyn Gill has been living with HIV/AIDS since 2004. And as the executive director of Let's Kick ASS — Eugene, she wants to call attention to the experiences of long-term AIDS survivors and wants people to know more about what it means to live with HIV/AIDS.

The ASS in Let's Kick ASS stands for AIDS Survivor Syndrome, Gill says, and she tells *Eugene Weekly* that symptoms of the syndrome include isolation, depression, survivor guilt and more.

And she says it's not limited to those who were diagnosed with HIV. People who have lost partners and family members to the AIDS epidemic but don't have the disease can also develop the symptoms.

Gill is a 62-year-old mother of three and grandmother of 10 and was diagnosed with HIV in 2004 while living in Belize. She says got the disease from her husband, who is now deceased, and the stigma cost her the restaurant she ran there, Rasta Pasta.

By the time she moved to Portland in 2008, Gill had full-blown AIDS.

In Portland, she received more up-to-date medications than had been available to her in Central America and had access to primary care doctors who were also HIV/AIDS specialists. That's important, she says, given HIV patients' complex medical histories and is not available in Eugene.

According to Gill, long-term survivors are those diagnosed 10-plus years and their partners, lovers, family, friends and caregivers, including those who are HIV-negative.

"We also include folks 50-plus aging with HIV/AIDS," she says. The local Let's Kick ASS chapter has about 10 active members, she says.

June 5 is Long Term Survivors Awareness Day. The Eugene chapter of Let's Kick ASS Oregon is hosting a lunch at HIV Alliance 11 am to 1 pm June 9. Those living with HIV/AIDS, those who have lost loved ones due to the epidemic or people who just want to learn more are invited to come.

"Our goal is to help get folks out of isolation and combat depression and anxiety by hosting weekly social groups and other events and gatherings," Gill says.

HIV is not as talked about as it once was, she says, but it continues to infect people. Thanks to the opioid epidemic HIV is on the rise, especially in states with no needle exchanges. New medications mean that HIV and AIDS patients can live long lives, but they also mean that "HIV is getting quieter," she says. "They make it sound like its diabetes, and it's not." ■

Long Term Survivors Day Brunch is 11 am to 1 pm Saturday, June 9, at HIV Alliance, 1195A City View Street. More info at facebook.com/lkaeugene.

MARALYN GILL

PHOTO BY TODD COOPER



POLLUTION UPDATE

The Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) fined San Mateo, California-based J.H. Baxter & Co. Inc. \$19,200 on May 8 for repeated Clean Water Act permit violations at its Eugene facility. Baxter's discharges violated permit limits for pentachlorophenol in December 2015; January and December 2016; and January, February and November 2017. In addition, Baxter's copper discharges violated its permit in April 2016 and November 2017. DEQ noted that "pentachlorophenol and copper

are toxic to fish and other aquatic life" and that Baxter's violations "may impair water quality in the area of [the company's] stormwater discharge and downstream in Amazon Creek." In addition to the fine, DEQ has ordered Baxter to increase monitoring and develop an operations and maintenance plan for its treatment system. Baxter's pollution discharges are authorized by a DEQ-issued Clean Water Act permit that expired October 31, 2015.

— Indigo Sherck/Oregon Clean Water Action Project

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