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Women at Risk for HIV

Local healer works to empower those 50-and-older

BY MINDY COOPER
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

While in massage school in the late-1980s in Boulder, Colo., Jacki Gethner, a Portland massage therapist and practitioner of the healing arts, remembers when she received the phone call that her girlfriend had contracted HIV after a relapse in substance abuse.

At the time, she said, HIV was a fairly new deal.

"We only knew it surrounding gay men," she said. "And there weren't many women at that time who had been diagnosed."

She said there was such a stigma surrounding the disease that society feared being around those who had been diagnosed, and more than often, they were greeted with masks and gloves. "People weren't considered touchable," she said.

The same year she began school, however, Boulder hosted the AIDS Medicine and Miracle conference, which was the first holistic and western medicine AIDS conference within the United States.

At the event, Gethner and a friend, without knowing what the response would be, decided to set up a massage area in the building. "We provided massage chairs, and massaged over 300 people in four days," she said.

"It was very powerful. Some of them hadn't been touched in months."

After realizing, first-hand, the healing impact mere touch can have in the healing process, Gethner returned as an integral component of the conference each year, and became determined to share her skills through community outreach and healing and support workshops.

She began working with the support communities of those living with the disease. "Many



PHOTO BY MINDY COOPER/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER
Portland resident Jacki Gethner, the founder of the Women of a Certain Age program, which is aimed to help reduce the growing number of older women contracting HIV and AIDS, has worked with over 15,000 individuals from all walks of life through education, activism and her healing arts practice Regenerative Therapies.

people who had contracted HIV were abandoned by their biological families," she said. "So these people, their 'families of choice,' all wanted to know what they could do to help their loved ones."

"Skin is the largest organ of your body," she said. "It only makes sense to teach them how to touch."

Today, Gethner has worked with over 15,000 individuals from all walks of life, both locally and world-wide, through education, her knowledge of reflexology, and at her practice Regenerative Therapies located in northeast Portland.

Her current mission, however, has been to educate the community on HIV prevention, especially for women 50-years and older, who currently represent the fastest growing demographic of people diagnosed with HIV and AIDS throughout the country.

In an effort to support women who are infected or impacted by HIV/AIDS, Gethner created the Women of a Certain Age Program in 2006, to support older women, who she said are severely underserved within the community.

The non-profit program was made possible after she received the Keiser Permanent National Diversity Award for her work in HIV and AIDS. Although there was a number of ways she could have used the funds she received, Gethner said she decided to focus on the age group in which she lives.

"I've never met anybody who does what I do," she said. "I used to work with youth, but as I got older, I kept hearing of older people becoming infected because of a lack of information about their risks."

Women, she said, often have a difficult time

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Margaret Carter Building Dedicated at PCC

Tireless advocate embraced by family, friends and colleagues

BY CARI HACHMANN
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

It's not every day that a college gets to name a building after a local hero.

As Portland Community College celebrated its 50th anniversary, hundreds of supporters arrived at the PCC Cascade Campus on Friday afternoon to



honor the 75-year-old former Sen. Margaret Carter for a dedication ceremony in her name.

Stand up applause echoed throughout the auditorium as Dr. Algie Gatewood, president of north Port-

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PHOTO BY CARI HACHMANN/
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER
Portland Community College President Preston Pulliams joins Margaret Carter during ceremonies to rename the Technical Education Building on the PCC Cascade Campus in north Portland to the Margaret Carter Technology Education Building.