Red Ribbon Advocates learn to speak up for rights of HIV+ people

If you are passionate about speaking up and speaking out for the rights of all HIV positive people, then we want you!

2006 marks the second year of the Red Ribbon Advocates program, which is a nine-session training seminar that teaches individuals how to write letters to newspapers, speak to legislators, write and present personal testimony and speak about HIV/AIDS to church and community groups. The advocacy program is geared for people living with HIV/AIDS.

“It is a great opportunity for people living with HIV to become involved in their communities and really learn how to make a change in their own lives, as well as the lives of others,” said Chandra Crawford, the Consortium’s Policy and Training Coordinator, who organizes the program.

In its first year, eight advocates graduated from the program. Members from the class of 2005 have spoken at City of Wilmington Council meetings,

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Updated Consortium Web site features new stories, pictures and statewide event calendar

If you have not logged onto our home on the Web lately (www.delawarehiv.org) you are in for quite a surprise!

The whole site has been over-hauled and redesigned by the Degnan Company to feature more information, photos and graphics. We have also added a calendar for events, meetings, forums and goings-on both at the Consortium and around the state of Delaware.

“The new Web site has so much to offer,” said Executive Director Peter Houle. “We wanted it to be both visually appealing and easy to use, and we hope that those who log on find just that.”

The Consortium and statewide calendars, which are on the right side of the home page, are easy to both access and submit information. Providers can submit their information and see it listed on the calendar within 24 hours.

For questions, concerns or comments about the Web site, contact Carissa Pleiss, Communications Coordinator, at cpleiss@delawarehiv.org.
The Delaware HIV Consortium is a statewide, non-profit organization dedicated to eliminating the spread of HIV/AIDS and to creating a seamless continuum of care for all people infected and affected in Delaware.
Spotlight on
Sussex County AIDS Council, Beautiful Gate Outreach Center

There are so many services that some people living with HIV/AIDS need on a daily basis — access to food, shelter, clothing and medical care are just a few. And for those who are unaware of their status, going for an HIV test can be thought of as expensive or unavailable.

Thanks to two separate organizations in Delaware, going for an HIV test or receiving groceries and clothing are not as daunting as some might think. And even though the Sussex County AIDS Council and Beautiful Gate Outreach Center focus on two separate areas of HIV/AIDS service, they still share a common goal — to provide support and help for those living with HIV/AIDS.

Beautiful Gate Outreach Center

Beautiful Gate Outreach Center (BGOC) prides itself in being a faith-based, non-judgmental organization that provides free, confidential rapid HIV testing to anyone who walks through the door — but rings the doorbell first.

“When we hear that ring, we never know who will be walking through that door,” Executive Director and Registered Nurse Renee Beaman said. “It could be someone who wants to be tested, someone who wants information, or just someone who needs a person to talk to. We offer all of that.”

As a primary counseling and testing site, BGOC goes beyond performing blood tests and distributing information. The Delaware HIV Consortium has partnered with BGOC as a sponsor for their banquet dinner to be held on Feb. 7 in honor of National Black HIV/AIDS Awareness Day. The free event will feature guest speaker Dr. Rev. Willis Steele from Abbott Laboratories who will discuss education, testing and involvement of the African American community. The Office of Minority Health, The National Coalition of 110 Black Women and Love Heals Ministry will also be present.

For more information about the event, log onto www.delawarehiv.org or call BGOC at 472-3002.

Sussex County AIDS Council (SCAC)

SCAC volunteers Errin Antisdel (right) and Terry Wilkerson fill bags in their Rehoboth Beach office for clients. Food is either picked up by clients, or delivered directly to their homes.

SCAC’s motto is simple — “Helping people live.” As a provider of transportation, food, emergency financial assistance and education, that is exactly what they do.

Executive Director Steve Twilley explained that clients can receive free transportation to such destinations including doctors appointments (as far away as Philadelphia or Washington, D.C.), free food every month and emergency financial assistance for expenses such as rent, utilities, medical bills and nutrition supplements.

“I don’t think there’s not a whole lot we don’t do and I can’t imagine that there are a lot of people we are not serving in Sussex County,” Twilley said.

He explained that SCAC is funded through both Ryan White dollars and private donations, employs five staff members but relies heavily on volunteers. Twilley added that last year, volunteers clocked 70,000 driving miles.

“The community is very much involved and helps us in so many different ways, from volunteering time or contributing money,” he said. “It makes such a huge difference.” For more information, visit their Web site at www.scacinc.org.
AIDS Delaware to host fifth-annual ‘Do the Right Thing 4 Life’ banquet

The staff of AIDS Delaware and Channel 6 Action News anchor Lauren Wilson are proud to announce that they will host the fifth annual banquet for all the participants of the ‘Do The Right Thing 4LIFE’ program on Saturday, Feb. 4. It will be held at the Waterfall Banquet and Conference Center, located at 3416 Philadelphia Pike in Claymont.

‘Do The Right Thing 4LIFE’ is an educational prevention program for the African American community, according to Frank Hawkins, Director of Education and Outreach at AIDS Delaware.

“Our goal is to increase their knowledge and awareness concerning HIV, AIDS and STDs, to encourage safer behaviors and to provide HIV counseling and testing,” Hawkins said. “Barbershop and beauty salon outreach continues to be one of our non-traditional ways of reaching the African American community. This method of outreach has allowed us to reach many individuals that we would not ordinarily reach with other methods of outreach.”

The banquet will honor businesses and city officials that have supported ‘Do The Right Thing 4LIFE.’

“Without their generosity, our program would not have been as successful. Frank and his dedication has allowed AIDS Delaware work toward our mission of halting the spread of HIV/AIDS in Delaware,” said John Baker, Executive Director of AIDS Delaware.

Doors open at 6 p.m. and tickets are $20 in advance. Dinner will be served. Tickets can be purchased at AIDS Delaware, located in the Community Services Building, 100 W. 10th St., Suite 315, Wilmington. For more information about the ‘Do The Right Thing 4LIFE’ banquet, contact AIDS Delaware at 302-652-6776.
demonstrated outside of a board meeting where the Wilmington Hospital Annex was bought by a non-profit group, discussed needle exchange programs and Senate Bill 60 with members of the Delaware House of Representatives and participated in a march and rally in Washington D.C. as part of the Campaign To End AIDS (C2EA).

As Consortium Board President Arlene Bincsik wrote to the class of 2005, “It takes tremendous courage to stand up and express your views… I cannot thank [you] enough for [your] willingness to become involved…I am very proud of all of you for your courage. A group of HIV-positive individuals have finally put a face with the epidemic in Delaware!”

Beverly Catts is one such person. She became involved with the program to help herself and to help others. She said the Red Ribbon Advocates program gave her more insight about bills and how they are passed, and she now has a better understanding of HIV/AIDS and the impact it has on the lives of others.

“It was a great experience going to Dover and talking to the big shots,” she said. “I am truly hoping we can get even more members this year.”

Beverly will continue to be involved in the program this year, working as a mentor to the new class.

The Consortium is still looking for individuals who are interested in participating in the class of 2006. Even though it is a nine-session training program, it should not be intimidating. Most of the ‘meetings’ are actually field trips to put the skills learned to use. Whether you have done advocacy work in the past or are a beginner, the Red Ribbon Advocates program may be right for you. If you are interested in learning more about the Red Ribbon Advocates, please contact Chandra Crawford at the Consortium.

The ‘Keeping It Real’ 2006 Conference will be held at Clayton Hall at the University of Delaware from March 22-24.

The fifth annual conference will provide cutting-edge information on issues related to HIV/AIDS, hepatitis, and substance abuse. All outreach workers, substance abuse counselors, and other related health-care personnel who work with the drug-addicted and HIV/AIDS/HCV population are encouraged to attend. To register, fax or mail a completed registration form that can be found on our Web site.

C.H.A.T. will hold its next meeting in February, with a special focus on public speaking. Denise Barnes of Brandywine Toastmasters will discuss the ins and outs of public speaking.

The meeting will take place on Tuesday, Feb. 21 from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. in the Kent County Administrative Complex at 555 Bay Road in Dover.

For more information about C.H.A.T., contact Chandra Crawford.

C.H.A.T- There’s never been a better time to speak up!

Red Ribbon Advocates speak up... cont.

Red Ribbon Advocate Veronica Brown (left) celebrates her graduation with the Consortium’s Community Planning Coordinator Susan Tanner.

Beverly Catts attends the Red Ribbon Advocates graduation luncheon.
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