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# Voices

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The Voice of Delaware's HIV Community

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




*The 2005 Red Ribbon Advocates graduating class and supporters from left: Dorothy Harper, Yvonne McGee, Veronica Brown, Susan Tanner; back row from left- Beverly Catts, Teresa Wolhar, Alissa Garden and Rachel Nixon. Anthony Scott and Troy Williams are not pictured.*

### Definitions of Advocacy

 *Pleading or Arguing in Favor of Something*

 *Organizing Efforts to Effect Change*

 *Involving Citizens in Policy Making Processes*

 *Bringing an Improvement to People's Lives through Active Support*

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,

*story continued on page 5 ...*

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](http://www.delawarehiv.org)) you are in for quite a surprise!

The whole site has been overhauled 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](mailto:cpleiss@delawarehiv.org).

# Year-end conference focuses on 2005 HIV / AIDS statistics in DE

About 30 doctors and nurses affiliated with Christiana Care Health Services gathered at the Wilmington Hospital Annex on Jan. 4 to reflect on the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Delaware in 2005. Their focus was on the 3,045 men, women and children who are living with the disease.

Robert Vella, the Health Program Coordinator of HIV/AIDS surveillance at the Delaware Division of Public Health, reported statistics including race/ethnicity, age, geography and mode of exposure.

He explained that African Americans both in Delaware and nationwide are still disproportionately affected — despite being 19 percent of Delaware's population, they make up 66 percent of all HIV/AIDS infection rates in the state.

"In the late 80s, 44 percent of cases in Delaware were attributed to African Americans," Vella said. "This is an enormous increase in infection in one section of the population."

Vella said that 70 percent of reported HIV/AIDS cases in Delaware through 2005 were in the 30 to 49 age group. The age group with the least number of cases were children under the age of 12.

Compared to Kent and Sussex Counties, Vella said, the HIV/AIDS rate in New Castle county, and especially the city of Wilmington, is disproportionately high.

"Wilmington makes up 15 percent of New Castle county by land, yet 67 percent of the county's HIV/AIDS cases," he said. "More than 41 percent of all HIV/AIDS cases reported are within the city of Wilmington among minority populations."

Vella said that from 2000 to 2005, there was a shift in Delaware's risk group population. Heterosexual transmission was reported in 38 percent of the cases, followed by injection drug users at 27 percent and men who have sex with men at 24 percent. Through 1999, the highest risk group was injecting drug users at 43 percent, followed by men who have sex with men at 31 percent and heterosexual transmission at 16 percent.

"Although we still have people becoming infected at a high rate, the good news is that statistics show that Delaware residents with HIV are living longer and healthier lives as a result of the highly active anti-retroviral therapy and better management of the disease," Vella explained.

Consortium Board President Arlene Binscic attended the lecture.

"Bob did an absolute dynamite presentation," she said. "He really breaks down all of the categories and does a great job with his explanations."

To request an electronic copy of the Power Point presentation, contact Carissa Pleiss, Communications Coordinator, at 302-654-5471 or [cpleiss@delawarehiv.org](mailto:cpleiss@delawarehiv.org).

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*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-judgemental 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



*Medical technician Angie Marvel (left) performs a HIV test on Executive Director Renee Beaman in Beautiful Gate's office, located in the Bethel AME Church on Walnut Street in Wilmington.*

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](http://www.delawarehiv.org) or call BGOC at 472-3002.

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## Sussex County AIDS Council (SCAC)



*SCAC volunteers Errin Antisdal (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](http://www.scacinc.org).

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# Policy Committee to examine pressing issues in 2006

Needle exchange, Ryan White reauthorization, healthcare in the prison system and HIV/AIDS awareness and education were just some of the topics discussed at January's Policy Committee meeting.

The Committee, which is composed of about 30 individuals from organizations including AIDS Delaware, Christiana Care, Planned Parenthood, The Gateway Foundation, the University of Delaware, Department of Public Health, SCAC, Beautiful Gate Outreach and Connections, as well as other concerned members of the community, discuss possible solutions and remedies to problems that are plaguing HIV services.

The Committee will break up into smaller workgroups and explore topics such as the availability of HIV education, the conditions of healthcare in the Delaware prison system and counseling and testing.

"These are issues that definitely need to be looked at very closely," said Chandra Crawford.



*John Klein, Arlene Bincsik and Karen Swanson (from left) attend January's Policy Committee meeting, which was held in the Community Services Building.*

Policy Committee meetings are held 11 times per year (once a month, excluding December) in the Community Services Building, 100 W. 10th St., Wilmington.

To become involved with the Committee, contact Chandra Crawford at 302-654-5471 or [ccrawford@delawarehiv.org](mailto:ccrawford@delawarehiv.org).

The Committee's next meeting will be held on Feb. 8.



*Sister Jean Rupertus and Jim Welch discuss the conditions of Delaware's prison system.*

## 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.

## F.Y.I.

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.

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.



*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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