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AIDS Volunteers Speak of Unspeakable Rage, Sadness, Comfort and Indomitable Hope

By **Laura J. MacKay**
Bureau Chief

Volunteers are the backbone of the Provincetown AIDS Support Group (PASG).

About 80 of them tend to the daily needs of people with AIDS and HIV infection, doing laundry, driving to the hospital or just lending an understanding ear. They're in the thick of the epidemic, helping people live, helping them die with dignity.

So the PASG observed World AIDS Day Tuesday by honoring its volunteers at a gathering at Franco's restaurant in Provincetown. Here's what a few of those volunteers said when asked what it's like to be in the trenches of the battle against AIDS, and why they do what they do:

Gregg Russo, member of the PASG board of directors:

"I felt so powerless over what was happening in the community and I wanted to do something...You don't know where to put your grief. You don't know where to put your anger. I felt such rage over what was going on, and sadness.

"The PASG is a focus for my response to all these things happening in my life. Because there are so few people left that I know from my crowd of friends that were here when I came to town. There's only a handful of people. It's so stunning.

"One thing I keep in mind is I try not to get numb to it. And I try to remember this isn't normal. We're not living in normal times....I think the numbness is just a natural body reaction to try to have some control over the horror that's coming at us on a daily basis.

"Five people died within the last two weeks. Five. Most of them under 40. We just don't live in normal times. And I refuse to ever accept that this is normal. I just can't accept it.

"I feel like we've been in a war...The ranks are decimated and thinned. And it doesn't seem to end. Have you ever noticed that every time another wave of death comes through, it digs deeper? It definitely comes in waves. You keep wondering how deep is the next wave going to cut. And when you think that it can't cut any deeper, it's like a whole new wave of people is taken away. They're just swept away.

"The good side is all the people who are living productive lives with HIV. It's remarkable. That was something that was previously unheard of. The quality of life is pretty good for a lot of people. Thank God there's that. Because if there wasn't that, there would be no hope."

Gesture of Gratitude

Provincetown Benefit Is Men's Way of Thanking Women for Help in AIDS Battle

By Laura Collins-Hughes

Last August, when it first occurred to Douglas Brooks that the men of Provincetown should do something to thank the women for their support of local men with AIDS and HIV, he found he wasn't the only one thinking that way.

One man mulling over the same idea was Jimmy Rutland, a member of the internationally known a capella group, The Flirtations. Another was a client at the Provincetown AIDS Support Group, where Mr. Brooks works.

"He is a person with AIDS," Mr. Brooks explained. "He said, 'I don't have the energy to do it, to organize it, but I'd like to participate.' And I said, 'I promise you I will do it. I *do* have the energy to organize it.'"

The result is tonight's "Sisters and Brothers," a benefit for Helping Our Women, a Provincetown organization that aids women with chronic and

life-threatening illnesses. Described as "a night of community and entertainment," it will feature The Flirtations, singer-songwriter Peter Donnelly, songwriter and pianist John Thomas, the Provincetown Drummers, national women's rights activist Ann MacGuire and others and will be followed by a coffee and dessert reception.

Mr. Brooks, co-chairman of the event with Mr. Donnelly, said it is "not just a benefit for HOW. It's an opportunity to engage in some dialogue around, I guess, what's going on with each of the genders. [We want] for men to really find out what women need from us, what the women in our community need from us. Because the women in our community were the first, to my knowledge ... to step forward in the fight against AIDS."

The event is also, he said, not going to be a one-time thing but rather "the beginning of something, the beginning of our com-



Jon Arterton, Steve Langley, Suede and Jimmy Rutland are The Flirtations, who will perform tonight in "Sisters and Brothers," a benefit in Provincetown.

mitment to our sisters."

That's the consensus of the group of 10 male volunteers who have spent the past two months organizing the event for "women who have taken care of men during this battle."

"It's been really amazing watching 10 men sitting around trying to plan an event for women," Mr. Brooks said. "We've had to look at ourselves and try to determine what would be tasteful. We certainly would-

n't want to have anything that would be offensive to women."

As for what might be offensive, he said, "We don't know. Just anything that would appear to be chauvinistic. Just some humor. Some things that men find humorous are not necessarily humorous to women. Not only have we wanted to look at not having that kind of humor but at why men find it humorous.

"It's been an exciting process, really exciting," he said, "and I think we'll all be better men for it."

"Sisters and Brothers" is at 8 p.m. today at the Unitarian Universalist Meeting House, 236 Commercial St. Tickets, \$12, are available at the Provincetown AIDS Support Group, Outer Cape Health Services, Bayside Deli, Provincetown Reservations System and at the door. For more information, call Douglas Brooks or Peter Donnelly at 487-9445.

Provincetown Magazine is proud to support the Provincetown Aids Support Group



For information about programs
or the Support Group, contact PASG at

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