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**For Immediate Release**



## **Screw Stigma! is Positively Positioned to Take Off**

Openly HIV-positive individuals visibly lead *AIDS Walk Portland*

PORTLAND, OR (September 17, 2009) – On Sunday, October 11<sup>th</sup>, approximately 100 openly HIV-positive people will do something that's never been done before in Portland. Sporting red t-shirts emblazoned with the words "Screw Stigma!" these community members will gather for the **23<sup>rd</sup> Annual AIDS Walk Portland presented by The Standard**. Together they will be the first team to step off from Pioneer Courthouse Square and lead this 5k walk and rally. Also, new this year will be a special tent, centrally located at Pioneer Courthouse Square and available for those who are HIV-positive to gather and meet and greet others in the community who are also HIV-positive.

According to Michael Kaplan, Executive Director for Cascade AIDS Project and an openly HIV-positive individual, "Our goal this year is to have 100 openly HIV-positive people lead off AIDS Walk Portland. We not only want to remind people that we are part of the community, but also that by coming together publically we can help fight the isolation and stigma associated with HIV and AIDS. At a time when there is a new HIV infection every 9 ½ minutes, we still have to work to prevent the spread of this disease while we support people living with HIV."

The Screw Stigma! Team was born out of the *Project 150* groups for Oregon's Sesquicentennial. Seventy HIV-positive men, women and youth came together for **Project 150+** to clean up the Park Blocks, hoping that their visibility would help others (see *Positively determined*, Oregonian, May 17, 2009). The momentum has continued and the group has committed to working together with on-going efforts to educate, eradicate the stigma attached to HIV and AIDS, and confront the many challenges of HIV/AIDS, one of the most devastating and misunderstood health crises of our time.

**AIDS Walk Portland** opens at 9:00 am with festivities, breakfast, registration and entertainment. After a brief program, walkers will step off at 11:00 am to begin the 5k. 10,000 people committed to making a difference will come together for this event. Funds raised benefit the vital programs and services of Cascade AIDS Project (CAP). As the largest and oldest AIDS Service Organization (ASO) in Oregon, CAP continues to provide support for those infected and affected by HIV and AIDS.

Sponsorship is provided this year by organizations such as Presenting Sponsor, The Standard and Gold Level Sponsor, Nike. **Multnomah County Commission Chair Ted Wheeler and his wife Katrina are Honorary co-chairs.**

### **About Team Screw Stigma/Positive Force**

The *Screw Stigma* was born out of a goal of engaging HIV-positive people in policy, advocacy and community education related to HIV and AIDS. The individuals who made up the *Screw Stigma* effort later rebranded to become *Positive Force Portland*.

The vision for *Positive Force Portland* is to ensure a vibrant and empowered HIV-positive community that can be engaged in both combating isolation through social networking opportunities and serving as a force to combat the HIV pandemic by bolstering awareness, education and advocacy.

One great way to accomplish this is through AIDS Walk Portland. Last year when Michael Kaplan invited people, who were living with HIV to join him onstage, the response was an inspiration that led to our involvement in Project 150+, Oregon's sesquicentennial birthday celebration where openly HIV+ people came out and cleaned up the South Park Blocks.

This year AIDS Walk Portland has set a goal of having 100 openly positive people wearing the red Screw Stigma shirts and leading off the walk.

The decision to come out publically as HIV+ is a very personal one and not everyone will feel comfortable making it. For those who are ready or who have already publically disclosed, CAP invites them to join us as part of Team Screw Stigma at AIDS Walk Portland.

For more information and to sign up: <http://tiny.cc/ScrewStigma>, or contact BJ Cavnor at [503 278 3873](tel:5032783873).

### **About Cascade AIDS Project (CAP):**

Cascade AIDS Project is the oldest and largest community-based provider of HIV services, including housing, education, and advocacy in Oregon and Southwest Washington.

CAP's mission is to lead efforts to **prevent** new HIV infections, **care** for people affected and infected by HIV/AIDS, **educate** communities to eliminate stigma and shame, and **advocate** for immediate action in combating the pandemic.

Overall, last year CAP provided HIV/AIDS education and prevention services to 16,040 people and coordinated wrap-around support services for 2,502 men, women, and children affected and infected with HIV/AIDS. In addition, 735 people 19,960 hours of their time to help CAP achieve its mission. More information about Cascade AIDS Project is at [www.cascadeaids.org](http://www.cascadeaids.org).

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