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## Rising to the Occasion: Aid for AIDS

Oct. 26, 2006 - By David Norgard, West Hollywood

In the non-profit world, an agency is ultimately only as good as the involvement of its board of directors, a truth that is demonstrated most clearly whenever there is a vacancy in the Executive Director position. If a recent visit to Aid for AIDS (AFA) is telling, then this local AIDS service organization is doing very well indeed.

After beginning his career at AFA in 1991 in client services and leading the agency as Executive Director since June 2002, Mr. Terry Goddard II left a month ago to pursue new challenges at another organization. Yet the agency's work continues without interruption, with the board's president, Ms. Brenda Goodman, rising to the occasion to provide the necessary leadership for maintaining smooth operations.

To serve as a board's president is a substantial volunteer commitment under any circumstances but to do so in an interim period between executive directors typically requires an extra measure of dedication. Besides the usual governance matters that every board addresses, inevitably there are also management concerns which end up in the lap of board members. Typically, there is also the time-consuming task of conducting a search for a new executive.

These extra demands did not appear to diminish Ms. Goodman's enthusiasm for volunteering, however. Following a working session with staff on some routine financial business, she extended her time at the agency's administrative office to meet with me before returning to her own office in the middle of a recent afternoon.





AFA Board President Brenda Goodman. By David Norgard.

Coordinator who also functions as the agency's volunteer recruiter, said as many as 200 volunteers are needed on an annual basis.

A registered pharmacist, Ms. Goodman was originally attracted to AFA because it offered her the opportunity to use her professional skills to help people in need at a grassroots level. Ten years ago, she participated in creating a list of vitamins and other nutritional supplements which are offered to AFA clients, people struggling with both AIDS and poverty. Her involvement in the Pharmacy Program proved to be just an entry-point into the organization's life, however. Soon she was recruited to serve on the board, serving the last four years as president.

To serve the nearly 2,000 households it helps annually, AFA counts on there being others in the community like Ms. Goodman who want to make a difference and are willing to give of their time. Ms. Vikki Krekler, the Special Events

Volunteer service can range from the single occasion to the ongoing commitment and from simply lending a helping hand to offering expertise as a member of either the Medical Advisory Council or the Professional & Artisans Council. (To inquire about specific volunteer opportunities, readers can contact Ms. Krekler at [volunteer@aidforaids.net](mailto:volunteer@aidforaids.net).)

Although there is no sign on the door where the agency's office is located in deference to the privacy of its clientele, anyone who walks the main street of our community passes by all too many markers of its work. The AIDS memorial plaques which line Santa Monica Boulevard from Fairfax to Doheny represent a joint project between the municipality and the agency. The city installs and maintains the plaques.



A contingent of volunteers raising money for AFA at Long Beach Pride.

The agency receives the money collected from their purchase and uses 100% of it for client services, including direct financial assistance. The organization also benefits from several popular community events. Among them are the annual "Best in Drag Show" held just last Sunday and "Sister Bingo" held monthly at Micky's on second Sunday afternoons and hosted by the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence.

Another indicator by which non-profits are often judged is the percentage of income that is spent directly on program as compared to fund-raising and administration. At AFA, more than 90% of funds received for its 3.5 million dollar annual operating budget go directly to client care. The high percentage is likely one reason why governments have entrusted significant public funds to its stewardship over many years. AFA has held a contract with the City of West Hollywood since 1990 and is currently the administrator of Los Angeles County's largest HOPWA-STAP program - Housing Opportunities for People with AIDS - Short Term Assistance Program.

On her way out the door, Ms. Goodman checked on some accounting question with Leonard Vega, the Controller, and then mentioned to me that she hoped to announce the board's decision about the next Executive Director at the "Best and Brightest Party," the agency's volunteer recognition event to be held on 18 January 2007. Judging from the smooth dispatch of other business, my own guess is that the board will meet its self-imposed deadline. And in the meantime, people struggling with AIDS and poverty will continue to be cared for without disruption, as if there were no leadership gap at all.



AFA's Front Desk. By David Norgard.

[This is the second in an on-going series profiling our community's non-profit agencies. The series began on 12 October with an interview of the city's social services manager, Ms. Daphne Dennis.]

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