Standing Together for 30 Years
Join Us for Our Walk for Life on May 20

Each spring we take a symbolic walk to remember our friends who have died from HIV-related illnesses, to call attention to the effects of the AIDS epidemic on our community, and to honor those who make a difference in this challenging work.

In 2017, the AIDS Project of Southern Vermont is marking 30 years of effort by community members to support those living with HIV/AIDS and to reduce the risk of HIV transmission in Windham, Bennington and southern Windsor counties.

We hope you’ll join us as we gather at the River Garden on Main Street in Brattleboro on May 20th at 10 a.m. There, we’ll take time to reflect on the memory of those we have lost before setting out on our walk. On our return, we will share stories, listen to music provided by the talented Samirah Evans, receive prizes for fundraising and enjoy a light lunch.

Individuals and team members may use the Internet-based FirstGiving website, as well as traditional means, to reach out to family and friends and raise funds for HIV/AIDS direct services and prevention efforts.

For more information, please call Karen at (802) 254-4444.
Marchers take stand on AIDS

MONDAY, JUNE 13, 1988 / by THERESA M. MAGGIO

About 70 men, women and children lined up at the P&C supermarket lot on upper Canal Street at noon Saturday for the start of a community AIDS Walk for Life to the Brattleboro Common. Before setting out, they heard a warning.

Michael Fernandes, a Williamsville psychotherapist who helped organize the walk, asked for the marchers’ attention. “We’ve made an agreement with the police” who were escorting the band through town. “If people hurl epithets at us, we won’t hurl any back.”

But no one who watched the long, thin line of concerned citizens file through town had anything negative to say to the marchers. A few blank stares, some puzzled looks and a handful of applauders outside the Planned Parenthood headquarters on Canal Street were the most obvious reactions to the walkers who carried banners and posters in support of AIDS education.

Some marched to make a public statement about how they feel about AIDS, its victims and its effects on society. Others marched in memory of George Lindsey, a local man who recently died as a result of AIDS.

Patti Whalen, a Brattleboro resident, pushed her child in a stroller down Canal Street. “I’m participating in support of the gay population, for my brothers and sisters in Brattleboro, for myself, my family and our future,” she said. “It’s an issue for all of us.”

One man, Fletcher Proctor, came from Westminster West to be a part of the walk.

“I think AIDS is the twentieth-century version of the plague and sooner or later, we’re all at risk from it,” he said. “Anyone who thinks the disease is confined to one sector of the population is just hiding his head in the sand.”

Karen Kamnetzky said she felt strongly the community has to mobilize to be ready to be supportive of people who come down with AIDS. “We can’t pretend it’s not here.”

Geoff Burgess, of Brattleboro, said he was walking not because his life had been personally affected by AIDS, but because friends of friends of his had been. “It seems to be getting closer. The disease is growing to be epidemic proportions, and there is still not enough consciousness raising going on,” Burgess said.

He called Washington, D.C., syndicated columnist James J. Kilpatrick’s Friday column on AIDS “ridiculous and insulting.”

“What’s the big deal?” Kilpatrick wanted to know in his column which appeared on the editorial page of the Reformer Friday. He said the disease was “emphatically” not an epidemic, citing statistics that said cancer, heart disease and automobile accidents killed more U.S. citizens annually than AIDS does.

“Statistics can go back and forth,” Burgess said. “But I have more problems with his attitude. Kilpatrick categorized people who are suffering and tried to decide who deserves more sympathy,” Burgess said. “It’s a real shame the Reagan administration has downplayed the seriousness and dimensions of the problem.”

Lisa Cox said she joined the march because the disease has touched her personally. “I had a good friend who died of AIDS three years this month. Then George Lindsey’s death really brought it home to me,” she said.

Lindsey, 45, died of AIDS-related pneumonia May 23. He had been the fiscal officer at the Brooks Memorial Library and a Brattleboro historian. In a statement he had drawn up before his death, Lindsey described the cause of his death and his active participation in the gay liberation movement.

Fernandes, a close friend of
Lindsey and a member of the Brattleboro AIDS Project, brought that message to the public.

When the walkers arrived at the Brattleboro common under a burning June sky, they were greeted with free ice pops from Jeannie Dewey, owner of a local ice cream truck.

Fernandes waited until the crowd settled down on the grass in front of the gazebo before he read several statements from area people who could not attend the march, but who wanted to be heard.

Fernandes first read a letter from a local man who said he was suffering from the early stages of AIDS. In the message, he wrote that he still finds it necessary to maintain his anonymity because he needs to protect himself, his wife and his children from “the ignorance, misinformation and fear that still lingers among many of our neighbors and friends.”

He also commended Brattleboro residents, saying it was “most reassuring and comforting to see how this community supported a fellow person with AIDS, George Lindsey, throughout his illness and death.”

David and Janet Wells of Putney, who say their son was diagnosed with AIDS six months ago, also sent a message to the community through Fernandes.

“It has been a time of great grief and despair for us. We’re focusing on trying to remain hopeful right now, because hopes seems to help our son’s immune system.

“Our son is angry about the difficulty of getting needed drugs,” wrote the Wellses. “AZT is highly toxic and is obtainable at scandalously high cost.” Other medications are not being approved, tested or marketed because of the Food and Drug Administration’s unwillingness to respond to the AIDS crisis, they added.

Elizabeth Lolatte, an AIDS educator and district director of the Brattleboro office of the state Health Department, told the crowd gathered on the grass in a circle near the gazebo, “We have to value humanity and not be afraid of intimacy. We’re really fighting a disease and not people.”

“We’ve seen a lot of change in the last 30 years regarding the AIDS epidemic in this country and worldwide,” says Geoff Burgess who attended the first Walk and now sits on the AIDS Project Board of Directors. “But the disease still exists, and any one of us could be susceptible, we all continue to be impacted. I’m happy to support the AIDS Project of Southern Vermont to steadfastly fight the good fight and be there for my neighbors and community. Please join us on May 20 as we honor those we’ve lost and thank the community for 30 years of support.”
UPCOMING EVENT

May 20 | 30th Annual AIDS Walk for Life

Join us as we remember friends and family we’ve lost to HIV-related illnesses, call attention to the effects of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in our community, honor those who make a difference in this challenging work and thank the community for 30 years of support.

More information on page 1.

This year, popular jazz and blues vocalist Samirah Evans will embrace us with her powerful music. Please join us!