

# VT Cares Reflects on Canceled AIDS Ride

## Pallotta Teamworks Draws Fire For Low Fundraising Returns

**P**allotta Teamworks, the for-profit fundraising event-production business behind various AIDS awareness and vaccine rides, has no fans at Vermont CARES.

Pallotta Teamworks (PT) has been the subject of increasing amounts of negative publicity, primarily in the gay and lesbian press and in full-page ads funded by a group of "concerned activists" who've dubbed themselves "AIDS Community Donor Action." The group criticizes PT for its high fees and low returns to the contracting charities, the most recently reported result a dismal 14 cents given to charity for each dollar raised in the June Washington, DC AIDS Ride. The guidelines of the Wise Giving Alliance, a charity watchdog group, require that beneficiaries should receive 60 percent or more of the proceeds from a fundraising event.

The organization has also been sued for allegedly misrepresenting expected returns since 1997.

ed, it's just as well.

"The thing is that none of that money benefits Vermont in any way," Farrell pointed out. "Pallotta brings in its own tents, food, vans, everything, so even though the AIDS vaccine funds of course benefit research laboratories, there's not even a benefit for Vermont economically."

Farrell said her main concern is that "people have the information and know where the money they donate is going. We have limited resources in Vermont. I would never want to discourage people from giving to whatever cause they choose, but they should know who benefits. The [PT] riders can't guarantee to their sponsors what percentage of the money is actually going to the charities. No local nonprofit organization could spend 86 percent on expenses and get away with it."

The ASO director has great respect for the riders themselves: "The people who ride [for PT] - their hearts are in the right place. And it's a hugely supported ride. Pallotta pro-

ing the ride around Vermont or perhaps around Lake Champlain, but "we don't have the money to expand that largely and quickly. Buying all those vans and tents [as PT has] is a huge expense. And that's the difference between a for-profit and a nonprofit."

Farrell characterized local businesses as "fantastic" at donating goods and services to help people with AIDS and to support services.

There hasn't been much - if any - spillover of bad publicity to other AIDS fundraising efforts, Farrell said. "We said, 'hey, look at this, we're local, and nonprofit, and we can show you our books.' I respect people's choices; I just want people to make them *informed* choices."

Asked to comment on the purging of the CDC website of links to condom and clean needle information, Farrell said, "Is some of the prevention information that people need popular? No. But the best way to do prevention is to recognize that there are risky behaviors that we have to talk about."

VT CARES recently began its needle-exchange program in St. Johnsbury, but already the agency has felt the backlash. "Mostly people want to know whether we can do this without 'informing' the communities we locate exchanges in. It's not only legal to exchange needles, but it's directly linked to our mission of preventing AIDS transmission."

The agency has for some time now had to "finagle sources" in order to ensure that federal grants specifying abstinence-only prevention policies are not spent on needle exchanges, distribution of condoms, or safer-sex information. The agency had been able to find private money to fund those efforts, Farrell reported.

"The gay and lesbian community is very good about keeping community organizations going," Farrell enthused. "Of course there some donor fatigue, that feeling of 'when's it going to be over?' But there is no more important torch to bear than caring for people with AIDS. Our biggest challenge is to keep AIDS on the radar."

One way Vermont CARES is doing that is with its upcoming AIDS Walk: "Step Up, Step Out, Stop AIDS" on September 26 in Burlington. Walkers raise money by getting sponsors who pledge a certain amount for completing the walk. Information on the AIDS Walk is available online (<http://www.vtcares.org/development.htm>) or by calling the Vermont CARES office (802-863-2437). ▼

**For more information, see the following websites:**  
[www.bethepeople.com](http://www.bethepeople.com) (Pallotta Teamworks)  
[www.aidscommunitydonoraction.org](http://www.aidscommunitydonoraction.org) (Critics of Pallotta Teamworks)  
[www.vtcares.org](http://www.vtcares.org) (Vermont CARES)  
[www.give.org](http://www.give.org) (Wise Giving Alliance, a charity watchdog group)

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PT canceled its scheduled 5-day ride from Montreal, Canada to Portland, Maine, by way of Vermont, due to below-expectations rider registrations. PT sent an e-mail to participants in the Canada ride explaining that it was "nearly 1,600 riders short of our goal of 2,800 registrants" for the Canada AIDS Vaccine Ride. Each rider was required to raise a minimum of \$3,500 to participate.

And, as VT CARES executive Director Kendall Farrell suggest-

vides training resources and glossy fundraising materials and maps, and vans, and tent cities and meals. But then the organization takes \$350,000 off the top as a fee, plus expenses."

There is a local alternative to the Pallotta Teamworks AIDS rides: The Vermont CARES Champ ride. "We have a great route up and down lake Champlain and around Addison County," Farrell said. That one-day ride took place in June. There is a long term goal of expand-

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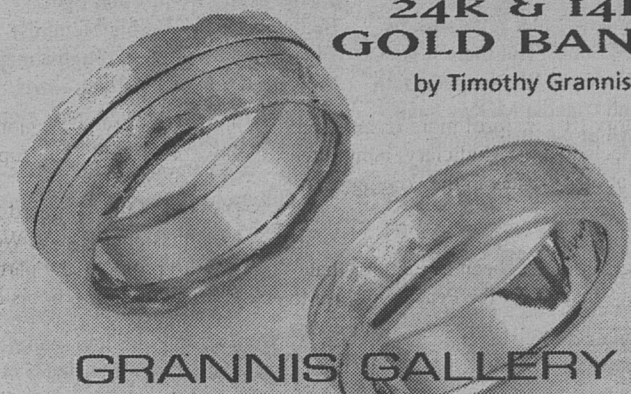
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