

## HIV &amp; AIDS

# Who Cares About HIV and AIDS?

## Vermont CARES!

BY DAWN M. CROWE

**H**ave you ever experienced losing someone you love? Have you ever experienced discrimination because of your sex, skin color, ethnicity or sexual orientation? Have you ever wished someone was there to support you during these times? If you have answered yes to any of these questions, then you know why hundreds of people gathered at the steps of Burlington City Hall on September 30 to participate in the Annual Vermont CARES (Committee for AIDS Resources, Education & Services) AIDS Walk.

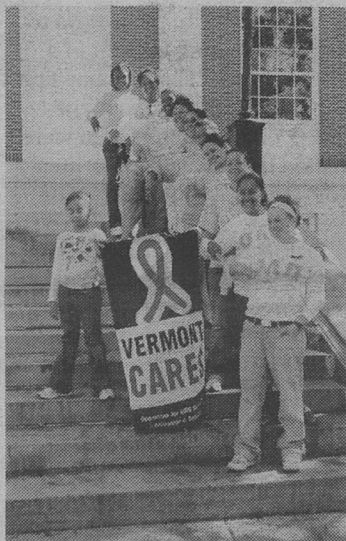
Vermont CARES is a local organization whose mission is to "improve the quality of life, create compassionate communities, and prevent the spread of HIV by working with people affected by HIV/AIDS as a catalyst for social and individual change," says the organization's Web site.

Many of those who came out to the AIDS Walk were there because HIV/AIDS has touched their lives in some way. Val and Cilla have taken part in the walk for the last five years. Cilla carried a sign that read, "I love someone who has AIDS," and Val shared how important Vermont CARES is in helping those who are infected with the virus. They both candidly talked about the continual need for funding and the support that Vermont CARES provides to a diverse community in Burlington and beyond. Despite their smiles as they walked and talked, one could sense the burden in their hearts that goes out to those affected in one way or another by HIV and AIDS.

The money raised during the annual AIDS Walk helps Vermont CARES offer a variety of services at no cost to those who participate in the program. Some of the accomplishments over the last year include helping 143 people living with HIV by providing over \$16,000 in direct financial assistance to get clients

to medical appointments, therapists, or help to access medication. Vermont CARES also provided more than \$48,000 in food vouchers, fuel assistance, rent offset, and utility bill aid.

Miss Lucy Belle LeMay, this year's top individual fund-



Omicron Lambda Pi  
PHOTO: DAWN M. CROWE

raiser, has been involved with the AIDS Walk for the last five years, she said. She is one of the many who has been greatly impacted by the AIDS virus, as she has lost many friends since the '80s because of the virus. With the help of LeMay and the many others participating in the walk, more than \$8,000 was raised during this event.

Peter Jacobson, executive director of Vermont CARES, said this money will help to provide several new services; including a new rapid testing program that provides results in twenty minutes, and a new anti-stigma campaign that will help educate people about AIDS, in the hopes of reducing the negative attitudes surrounding HIV and AIDS.

Many people still only associate HIV and AIDS with gay men and drug users. Fortunately, people are beginning to understand that this disease is not discriminatory. Particularly encouraging was the large turnout of students

from the University of Vermont, as dorms and other campus organizations joined in the cause. Several fraternities and sororities made significant contributions to the event and helped to create an extremely successful fundraiser. Students helped to bring attention to those walking by carrying signs, some of which read, "Think Positive. Stay Negative" and "Silence = Death. Action = Life." One student walking with the Pi Kappa Alpha fraternity from UVM made a powerful statement with his sign that said, "I am the face of HIV."

AIDS Walks are the national philanthropy of the Omicron Lambda Pi sorority, which was attended by several members of the UVM chapter. According to Harriet Williams, the National President of Omicron Lambda Pi, the group usually goes to New York City to walk, but because they had such a large group here in Burlington, they decided to pool their resources and support the local Vermont CARES agency. In doing so, they raised more than \$560 as an organization.

While the walk was a success, it is important to remember that Vermont CARES serves people across the entire state of Vermont on a budget of only about \$694,000 a year. As the agency provides free HIV testing, free education, free medical and job assistance, along with a variety other highly needed resources, this amount is not nearly enough. If you didn't have the opportunity to participate in the AIDS Walk, it's not too late to help. To make a donation of time or money, please call Vermont CARES at (802) 863-2437, toll-free at (800) 649-2437 or visit their Web site at [www.vtcars.org](http://www.vtcars.org).

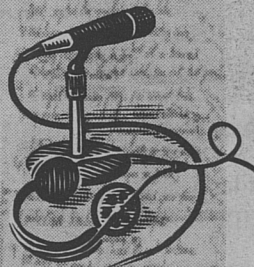
➔ Dawn M. Crowe is a student at UVM. She moved from New Hampshire several years ago to be closer to her partner and now considers Vermont to be her home.

# HIV+?

Feeling alone in the HIV System?  
Newly diagnosed?  
Need help getting the services you need?

CONTACT THE HIV CONSUMER ADVOCATE

VT People with AIDS Coalition, P.O. Box 11, Montpelier, VT 05602  
800-698-8792 & 802-229-5754 & [vtpwac@sover.net](mailto:vtpwac@sover.net) & [vtpwac.org](http://vtpwac.org)



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