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Doug Nelson: AIDS Warrior Spike in State HIV Infections Shows Fight Is Far from Over

By William Attewell, special to Q Life

More than 400 people in Wisconsin were reported last year as newly infected with the virus that causes AIDS. That is the largest increase since 1997. To many fighting the AIDS epidemic in Wisconsin, this sharp increase is seen as a "crisis."

The numbers are even more troubling to members of the LGBT community since the majority of the new infections were primarily among young gay men. This is seen as a major step back. Prior to last year, new HIV infections had been decreasing among gay men in Wisconsin.

Wisconsin's first case of HIV infection was reported in November 1982. Today, the AIDS Resource Center of Wisconsin (ARCW) is the state's largest AIDS service organization, providing services to approximately 2,500 persons living with HIV or AIDS. ARCW celebrates its 20th anniversary on April 9 at the annual "Make a Promise" event.

Doug Nelson, president and CEO of ARCW, is a high-profile veteran of the AIDS fight in Wisconsin. He is also notably the longest serving leader of any AIDS service organization in the nation. Recently, Q Life sat down with Nelson and discussed a wide range of topics including AIDS prevention, government funding for AIDS services, the HIV "superbug" and more.

HIV Spike, Methamphetamine and the "Superbug"

Nelson expressed great concern about the recent report from the state Department of Health and Family Services, which said the new cases of HIV infection increased from 364 in 2003 to 417 in 2004, a rise of 14.5 percent.

"That is a significant increase for Wisconsin and we are very concerned," said Nelson. "We are concerned because there is a clear increase of HIV infection among Caucasian gay men. This is a change from recent history. It means we must step up our outreach to young gay men."

According to Nelson, ARCW will reinvigorate its prevention message with a new focus on their Bag Boyz campaign. The new campaign will be launched shortly. Another challenge for ARCW is an apparent jump in methamphetamine usage — especially among gay men.

"It is spreading in the Midwest and here in Wisconsin," said Nelson. "It may be part of the reason we are seeing the increase of HIV infections in here."

To deal with the methamphetamine health threat, ARCW is focusing on generating a prevention campaign that will bring awareness and education to gay men around methamphetamine abuse and the abuse of other party drugs. That will be included in the new Bag Boyz campaign.

"It is so important to make sure everyone understands the threat to one's safety from HIV when party drugs are used. As gay men, we need to take control of these issues and take the steps to protect ourselves from HIV infection," Nelson said.

Nelson said it is difficult to explain why ARCW's previous prevention efforts did not avert the recent jump in infection rates.

"Over time this has always been cyclical," Nelson said. "There are times when the HIV infection rate spikes. We need to address why that is happening. We are looking hard at the issue of methamphetamine use. Historically, what has happened with this disease — over the past 25 years — is that what has been an issue on the east and west coasts becomes an issue in the Midwest two or three years later. But, I don't want to use that history as an explanation as to why we have had a 15 percent increase in Wisconsin. What we do know is that we are going into an intense mode focusing in on HIV prevention strategies with the new Bag Boyz campaign. That is a very successful program in reaching out to young gay men." *continued on page 3*

It is a sober reminder of the dangers of HIV. My worst fear is that we will have a strain of HIV that is completely drug-resistant and that will develop into full-blown AIDS in a matter of months.



Doug Nelson, president and CEO of ARCW

Will McGee Apologize? Efforts by Pennington Thus Far Have Been Rebuffed

By Sura Faraj

James Pennington, executive director of the Milwaukee LGBT Community Center, has made countless efforts to elicit a public apology and to have a meeting with Alderman Mike McGee, whose homophobic slurs on Feb. 10 at a "Justice for Jude" rally raised the LGBT community's ire.

Shortly after his slur, McGee left a message on the voicemail of Patrick Flaherty, director of community relations at the Center, stating that his comments "weren't meant to hurt or diminish you or your community." However, McGee has not publicly apologized.

Pennington listed for Q Life the multiple times he called (sometimes three times a day), left messages, and actually saw McGee. He hand-delivered a letter on Feb. 14 requesting both a face-to-face meeting and a public apology.

Pennington went to City Hall a second time to request a talk with McGee. An aide was sent out and Pennington reminded him that the LGBT Community Center is in McGee's district. The aide's response was that McGee was very busy and this was not high on his priority list. Pennington was promised that McGee would get back to him eventually.

On Feb. 18, Pennington sent out a media advisory and the following Monday, Feb. 21, Pennington, along with Charles Daniels and Carmen Murguia, held a press conference and made a statement. At the press conference, Pennington specified that the goal was to secure a public apology and a face-to-face meeting.

Pennington Speaks to McGee

In the weeks following the press conference, Pennington continued to attempt to secure a meeting. He also sent a letter to District Attorney

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Homophobe Watch

It's been two months since Alderman Michael McGee Jr. embarrassed himself and shamed the City of Milwaukee with his hurtful and bigoted comments directed at the LGBT Community. Queer Life continues to demand a public apology from McGee. Until then we'll continue our Homophobe Watch. We are not a community that will allow ourselves to be bullied and marginalized. We ask that our allies, both gay and straight, make their voices heard. McGee can be reached by calling his City Hall Office at 414-286-2221.



At the rally, McGee said, "At least with gays you don't know they are going to kill you until it happens."
— Alderman Michael McGee Jr.

Frank Jude Beating Case Spurs Organizing, Calls for Change

By Jamakaya

Charges have been filed against three Milwaukee police officers in the beating of Frank Jude Jr., but public outrage over the incident continues, fueling renewed calls for reforms in the Milwaukee Police Department (MPD) and the formation of a new group to speak up for the interests of LGBT people of color.

Jude, an African American, was severely beaten last October on Milwaukee's south side by a mob of off-duty cops, according to witnesses. The alleged assailants claim that Jude had stolen a wallet and police badge during a late-night party and that they confronted him and he resisted. No wallet or badge were found on Jude. Witnesses say Jude and Lovell Harris, another black man who fled from the white mob, were pulled from a vehicle and brutally assaulted in an unprovoked attack

that included racial slurs.

Little progress was made in the case until the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel ran a cover story Feb. 6 which featured a horrific photo of Jude after the beating. Public pressure grew on District Attorney E. Michael McCann to interview more witnesses and file charges. Three of the 10 off-duty officers on the scene were charged with felonies on Feb. 28.

The brutality leveled against Frank Jude Jr. resonated widely in Milwaukee's LGBT community, whose members — of all races and gender-identifications — have also been the victims of police harassment and brutality over the years. A hearing held in the wake of the Jeffrey Dahmer case in 1991 elicited compelling testimony about anti-gay slurs, harassment, beatings and bar raids by Milwaukee cops. *continued on page 5*

RuPaul and Taylor Dayne Headline Acts at Pridefest '05

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