



Memo Demo

Letter pushes envelope

July 1, 1999 By Gabi Horn

Activists thought they might have to eat their words last April when the mail brought notice from the San Francisco AIDS Foundation (SFAF) announcing salary slashes and policy changes they had been soliciting for months, such as increased representation by PWAs on the board. “The reduction in my salary from \$200,000 to \$90,000 is a sacrifice I must bear,” stated the letter, which was printed on SFAF stationary and signed by executive director Pat Christen. “I am here to fight AIDS, not get rich. If it means more clients will live longer, I will tighten my belt.”

But upon rereading the two-page missive, many wondered if it wasn’t too good to be true. Two days later, they learned that the letter was a forgery—culprit unknown. SFAF quickly punched out a response, squelching such pipe-dreams as Christen’s cut in salary, which is actually \$175,000 annually.

“The letter was a brilliant satire,” said SFAF gadfly Michael Petrelis of San Francisco’s AIDS Accountability Project. “Many people have asked whether I authored it, and although I didn’t, I’m honored that they think of me in this context.”

Trying to find the forger would be foolery, said SFAF’s Gustavo Suarez. “What should we do—hire a detective? Offer a reward? Whoever wrote this letter is trying to force us to follow an agenda. We’re not getting caught up in what is at best peripheral and basically immoral.”

But the letter succeeded in pushing the envelope: The *San Francisco Examiner* and Associated Press subsequently published the prank.
