Milestones

December 1, 2000 By Denny Lee

Controversy: Name Games
Even bend-over-backward-with-tolerance San Fransciscans snap sometimes. An alliance of 200-odd Bay Area agitators formed AIDS Activists Against Violence & Lies, which promptly slammed ACT UP/San Francisco and its "dangerous lies about HIV." The coalition advertised in local gay papers, calling on all HIVers to boycott denialist-run cannabis clubs—where rabble-rousers who claim that HIV does not cause AIDS make $15 an hour selling pot to those made sick by the "harmless" virus—and push local government to crack down on violence by ACT UP/SFers. The renegade group responded with ads of their own, asking "Why should we trust those who make careers cashing in on a crisis?"

But wait—there's more. In September, seven months after AIDS denialists formed ACT UP/Hollywood to "separate ourselves from the now-retired ACT UP/Los Angeles," the ragtag splinter group exchanged that name for "AIDSRealityCheck.org." Founder Rod Knoll explained: "We got a lot of press because of our name, but we didn't feel that ACT UP was worth redeeming." Former ACT UP/LAers, who had cringed at the titular hijacking, expressed anything but remorse. "It's hard to believe we can rejoice at the demise of a so-called ACT UP chapter," said Peter Cashman.

And, in the grand La-La Land tradition of taking a screen name, the Glendale-based Alive and Well Community Health Center recently remonickered itself as WellnessWorks after funders threatened to pull support. Benefactors and national media outlets alike had repeatedly confused the nonprofit holistic healing center with the Christine Maggiore–headed Alive and Well AIDS Alternatives. "Who knows how many people have dismissed us, thinking that we were promoting the same ideas?" WellnessWorks' Marolyn Krasner asked.

So ring out the year 2000—it all started with the now-famous Survive AIDS switcheroo by ACT UP/Golden Gate. A lot of water has flowed under that particular bridge.

Trials
A federal judge in New York City dealt a harsh blow to **Mayor Rudolph Giuliani** in September, ruling that the city had "chronically and systematically" mistreated poor people with HIV who sought public assistance. The five-year-old case, brought by **Housing Works** on behalf of the city's estimated 25,000 HIVers, successfully argued that the mayor's budget cuts crippled the **Division of AIDS Services & Income Support** in violation of federal disability laws. While the city signaled a swift appeal, **Judge Sterling Johnson Jr.** took the extraordinary step of ordering

the government agency placed under federal oversight for three years. **Armen H. Merjian**, a Housing Works lawyer who presented hair-raising testimony at trial, said the decision speaks for itself, and added only that “a judge has found what we knew all along.”

Careers

Tim Rosta, who founded **LIFEBEAT** in 1991 and has served as its head since, left in September to join **MTV** as vice president of trade marketing. Under his direction, the New York City–based group lifted HIV awareness among young music-lovers through a constellation of pop acts ranging from Gloria Estefan and **Notorious B.I.G**. to **Puff Daddy** and **NSYNC**. Rosta’s first MTV project takes him back to familiar ground: lining up sponsors for a World AIDS Day concert broadcast he helped pilot. “This change is good for me and brings new energy into the organization,” said Rosta, who remains a LIFEbeat board member.

Awards

Health and Human Services Secretary **Donna Shalala** announced in August that 670 HIVers will each receive a $100,000 payment this year under the **Ricky Ray Hemophilia Relief Fund**. Honoring a Florida teenager who died in 1992, the fund was established in 1998 to compensate those infected in the ’80s through tainted blood-clotting products. Although hailed as a “momentous first step” by the National Hemophilia Foundation, fewer than 10 percent of the 7,500 eligible people will actually be receiving payments at this point.

Stung by criticisms that it has done too little, too late, the **World Bank** announced in September that it would extend bargain-rate, expedited loans to help sub-Saharan governments fight AIDS, starting with a $500 million credit line for the worst-hit countries. Bank officials painted the program glowingly: “The ultimate impact,” said president **James D. Wolfensohn**, “will be to avert millions of HIV infections.” But advocacy groups said many governments are unlikely to accept the offer of additional debt. “It’s not anything earth-shattering,” said Ron MacInnis, AIDS program director at the Global Health Council. “The loans will have little or no significance.”

Deaths

Vincent Sterlacci, 51, died while participating in the **Pallotta TeamWorks Boston–New York AIDS Ride** on September 15. Sterlacci, a lawyer from Haworth, New Jersey, apparently had a heart attack just 30 miles from the starting line, then swerved into traffic and was hit by a Ride marshal on a motorcycle. Sterlacci’s wife told The Bergen Record that it was his first AIDS Ride. Lisa Tabor of TeamWorks said only that the company was “deeply saddened” by the “unfortunate incident.”

Falcon Studios founder and philanthropist **Chuck Holme**s, who turned a tiny San Francisco mail-order outfit into one of the world’s largest gay porn production houses, died September 9 of AIDS. Holmes, 55, leaves behind a well-greased operation with impressive stats: three film lines (Jock Studios, Mustang Studios and Falcon International), a growing “accessories” catalog, a robust website and a stable of leading men he groomed and fluffed. Holmes was also a major contributor to gay, environmental and AIDS-related causes, and he served on the boards of the Gay and Lesbian Victory Fund and the Human Rights Campaign.

Neal Hitchens, an actor and writer, died July 17 of AIDS in Los Angeles. Hitchens, 43, wrote two books on HIV: Fifty Things You Can Do About AIDS and Voices That Care, a highly-praised collection of inspirational essays. He also cowrote unauthorized biographies about Marilyn Monroe, James Dean and Bette Midler. Before appearing on the small screen as a reporter for Hard Copy and The Joan Rivers Show, Hitchens acted in such television series as Hawaii Five-O, Eight Is Enough and Charlie's Angels.

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