One To Watch: Frank Oldham

Frank Oldham

January 1, 2001 By Shana Naomi Krochmal

AGE: 52

TESTED POSITIVE: 1995

STRAIGHT FROM THE HEART: This AIDS-activist dinosaur -- and current assistant commish of AIDS policy for the Chicago Department of Public Health -- announced he's a member of the HIV club at the first "AIDS in the Heartland" conference last June. Oldham came out at the 11-state confab to personalize the predicament of Midwestern HIVers. "The idea that AIDS is in our heartland has shock value, but it's all too true," he says. "I hope that putting my face on that will help improve access to prevention and treatment. It was strategic decision."

RAINMAKER: So what took so long? "Usually I'm very shy and private," this viral vet says. "But it's important that an African-American gay man who is positive leads the fight for a major city's -- and region's -- AIDS services." After steady stints at East Coast AIDS agencies, Oldham says he's raring to rain some Madison Ave. savvy down on the cornbelt. "In Nebraska, there may be one town with qualified service providers, and it takes some people a whole day to get there," he says. "We have to create movement around issues like that."

CITY OF BIG SHOULDERS: The born-and-bred Brooklynite calls Chicago "the most beautiful city in America" and says the old myth about Midwesterners being friendly is tried-and-true. "There are old-fashioned values and a basic integrity. It's as good as it gets in America." When vacationing, look for him at his fave continental stop: Copenhagen, Denmark.

SWINGING SINGLE: Oldham cooled his heels as a jazz singer before signing on at GMHC in 1988. Now he's juiced about a new gig with a local HIV positive musician. Also onstage: "I'm the most eligible bachelor in the U.S.," this self-described hopeless romantic says. "To find one person you can call a soul mate or life partner is so important -- and so difficult. But I've always been upbeat about the possibility."

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