In Memoriam

Dennis deLeon, president of the Latino Commission on AIDS (LCOA), died of heart failure in New York City on December 14, 2009. He was 61. POZ mourns his passing.

March 1, 2010 By POZ Staff

In 1994, deLeon became LCOA president. At the time, it had a staff of two. Today, the organization employs a staff of 45, has a $5 million budget and works in cooperation with 380 AIDS groups around the country to provide support to Latinos living with and affected by HIV/AIDS.

He received his law degree from Stanford in 1974. He later became a trial lawyer for the Department of Justice. In 1982, New York City Mayor Ed Koch named deLeon senior assistant corporation counsel.

In 1986, Manhattan borough president David Dinkins named deLeon deputy borough president. After Dinkins was elected mayor, he named deLeon the city's human rights commissioner.

From 1990 to 1996, deLeon was cochair and then chair of the board of directors of Housing Works, which advocates on behalf of HIV-positive and homeless people.

He first publicly disclosed he was HIV positive in a 1993 op-ed in The New York Times. He also wrote three first-person essays for POZ in 1998 and 1999.

The following is an excerpt from his 1999 POZ essay:

"Before AIDS, I was one of the world's many lawyer-careerists extraordinaire, always building that résumé for the future and never burning a bridge. I relished making money and playing a lawyer's behind-the-scenes role as much as I did giving advice to clients.

"All of this changed when I tested positive in 1986. While I had many reactions, one main concern shifted to leaving a legacy…. As I eventually came to understand, it's not how many clippings you accumulate, but how many lives you touch."

The following reactions demonstrate some of deLeon's influence:

"It will be a challenge to pick up the mantle Dennis has left for us at the commission. Dennis was a friend, a mentor and an example of what a national leader should be…. His work and his

dedication to our community will not be forgotten."
Guillermo Chacon
President, Latino Commission on AIDS

"Housing Works will always be in his debt for the leadership he provided in our early years, when we never had enough money but always believed we could do anything we dreamed."
Charles King
President and CEO, Housing Works

"His passing is a huge loss for the AIDS and civil liberties movements. It also is a milestone, as he was one of the dwindling few activists from the early years of the epidemic still fighting it full-time."
Sean Strub
Founder, POZ

Click here to read the complete tribute by *POZ* founder Sean Strub.

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