



Hyacinth Celebrates a 40-Year Milestone

New Jersey's first HIV service provider held a gala fundraiser.

January 5, 2026 By [Trent Straube](#)

[Hyacinth AIDS Foundation](#) first opened its doors in New Jersey in 1985. In 2025, the HIV service provider marked that milestone with a 40th anniversary blowout celebration and silent auction in Short Hills, New Jersey.

The Hyacinth gala also issued a call to action and resilience.

"We will not relive the 1980s," declared executive director Kathy Ahearn O'Brien onstage. "We will fight to keep our doors open for another 40 years." Her message earned a standing ovation.

Over 200 guests, including celebrities, lawmakers, advocates, board members from across the country and other community members, showed support for Hyacinth's services as well as the dedicated folks who provide them and those who rely on them. The gala included an auction and fundraiser.

The gala also shined a spotlight on advocates and supporters who represent the organization's courage and commitment to justice:

- Dominique Jackson received the Riki Jacobs Social Justice Award. Known for playing Elektra Abundance Evangelista on the TV series Pose, Jackson is also an author, ballroom icon and outspoken advocate for the transgender and immigrant communities. At the gala, she delivered a passionate reflection on visibility and the ongoing struggle for equality.
- New Jersey State Assemblywoman Shanique Speight received a Hyacinth Award. Her leadership

in securing substantial state funding was instrumental in strengthening Hyacinth's programs. Speight spoke about the importance of investing in communities that too often go unseen and unheard.

- Public health leader Ketlen Baptiste Alsbrook, MPA, received a Hyacinth Award. She is the director of Newark's Department of Health and Community Wellness and executive director of the Mary Eliza Mahoney Health Center. Hyacinth recognized Baptiste Alsbrook for her transformative leadership in public health and her tireless pursuit of equity for Newark's most vulnerable residents.
- Peter Jewell received the Deloris Dockrey Community Advocate Award. Hyacinth honored his lifelong commitment to advocacy for both the LGBTQ community and people living with HIV.