



Magic Johnson on HIV Awareness in 2023

The basketball legend was honored at ETAF's annual ball.

November 13, 2023 By Laura Schmidt

In September, the Elizabeth Taylor AIDS Foundation (ETAF) honored NBA Hall of Fame legend, philanthropist and businessman Earvin “Magic” Johnson and his wife, Cookie Johnson—also a philanthropist and entrepreneur—at the fourth annual Elizabeth Taylor Ball to End AIDS fundraising gala.

Johnson, perhaps the most famous face of the HIV epidemic, told the crowd: “What a true blessing it is to be here tonight, to receive an award from the woman who Cookie and I cherish and worked so hard with to change the face of the disease, to bring awareness, to raise money, to care for people who were living with HIV and AIDS, to provide housing for them and, last but not least, to stop discrimination against people living with HIV and AIDS.”

“Elizabeth meant so much to us,” Cookie said onstage. “She was one of the first to stand up for the disease. Despite the ridicule she got for it, she just kept pledging ahead and look at what it has done.”

On November 7, 1991, at the height of his fame, Johnson shocked the world by announcing that he had tested positive for HIV and was retiring from the Los Angeles Lakers immediately. He remains an advocate for HIV and other health issues, speaking out, for example, about the importance of COVID-19 vaccines and against misinformation and conspiracy theories.

In a related interview with *Variety*, the Johnsons recounted their HIV journey and advocacy over the past three decades. The Johnsons’ foundation has given over \$15 million to underserved communities of color across the country.

“There are a lot of people living healthy lives now who got diagnosed just like me [decades ago],” Johnson told *Variety*. “That couldn’t happen back then because we didn’t have the drugs. We didn’t have the information on how to be here for a long time. A lot has changed for the good.”

“It’s great to see the advancements we made, but I think because people are so healthy and living long lives on medication, the young people are not scared,” Cookie said, adding: “I think the answer is to continue to educate.”

