Latino AIDS Activist Dies in Plane Crash

February 18, 2009 By Oriol R. Gutierrez Jr.

Ronald Gonzalez--the former executive director of Alianza Latina, an AIDS service organization for Latinos in Western New York--was one of the passengers who died in the plane crash of Continental Flight 3407 near Buffalo, NY, on February 12, which killed 50 people, The Star-Ledger reports. Gonzalez, 44, was planning to visit his relatives in Buffalo.

Most recently, Gonzalez was director of a New Jersey-based youth services program, New Brunswick Tomorrow. Outcome Buffalo reports that Gonzalez also was an openly gay man who worked to educate LGBT youth through his AIDS advocacy work and in collaborative programs with Gay and Lesbian Youth Services of Western New York.

Gonzalez told The Star-Ledger in a 2007 interview about his work at New Brunswick Tomorrow:

> “I know it’s part of my mission in life to help people like that because I was that person. I’m here to tell people: Don’t throw your stereotypes at people.”

This plane crash has taken the lives of many extraordinary individuals, including a 9/11 widow, a human rights activist and many others. Sadly, Gonzalez also is on that list. I did not know him, but Gonzalez was clearly the kind of person that we cannot afford to lose in the fight against HIV/AIDS.

Many thanks to Barry Walston of New York State’s AIDS Institute for contacting me about the death of Gonzalez, who was both his friend and colleague.

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