

## Helping People With AIDS

In August, 1986 a group of concerned citizens organized to raise money for Rochester area AIDS patients. The community-wide committee was represented by actively interested business people. At the time Dr. William Valenti, a member of the "Helping People With AIDS" committee and a doctor at Strong Memorial Hospital's Infectious Disease Clinic, said "this committee has been established to raise funds for immediate aid for uninsured AIDS persons." The goal that year was to raise money to hire a full-time nurse-practitioner for the clinic at Strong Memorial Hospital.

The committee held 3 private parties which raised just over \$2000. Future plans included: the sale of "Bob Damron's guide to the USA; a series of raffles with prizes from flowers to theatre tickets to Baccarat crystal; two nights of the upcoming Gay Men's Christmas concert focused on Helping People With AIDS; Halloween party. On Saturday, September 27, 1986 the first "Dining For Dollars" was held. Friends across the city hosted small dinner parties for 6 – 10 guests with cocktails and dinner for a \$20 donation to Helping People With AIDS. At 9:30 pm all dinner hosts and guests gathered at village Gate for dessert, cocktails, entertainment and a raffle. This first "Dining For Dollars" as were all those that followed, was non-exclusive to the gay population of Rochester, but rather was a community wide event. The organizers of the first "Dining For Dollars", Dan Meyers, Jerry Algozer and Dr. William Valenti declared the event an unqualified success. Close to \$19,000 was raised to benefit the AIDS Clinic at Strong Memorial Hospital. The money raised was used to pay for medication and medical treatment for patients who were otherwise unable to do so. At the time HPA was also paying for expensive prescriptions which in some cases cost \$100 or more per month.

Members of the community volunteered time, talent and money to plan the second "Dining For Dollars" held on Saturday, September 26, 1987 at Midtown. Neil Parisella, one of the founding members of Dining For Dollars, approached his very good and close friend, Nancy Delancey, Director of Marketing for Midtown, with the idea of holding the event at Midtown. Nancy pursued it with management and the rest is history. Midtown donated props/displays and staff to put it together. John Haldoupis did the design work and Gary Sweet donated the liquor. The event raised \$31,000. HPA fundraising was off to a great start! By 1992, a quarter million had been raised. In 1995, Dining For Dollars X moved to the Rochester Riverside Convention Center. Success after success brought HPA's 17 year fundraising total close to \$1,000,000.

By 1991, a Wish List Fund had begun. This was a fund dedicated to fulfilling the needs of people with AIDS. A wish could be anything from a trip that never was, to a television set that many of us took for granted, to providing money for veterinary care for a favorite pet. The Wish Fund List was born out of a need in the community to provide people that were living with AIDS, because of the astronomical medical costs at the time, with money for the little things in life that added to the quality of their life. The fund could be accessed once a year for up to \$100. The wish List Fund was maintained by funneling 10% of the money raised from Dining For Dollars into it.

Prior to 1992, all of the donations collected were given to the AIDS Clinic at Strong Memorial Hospital for direct treatment and distribution. As of 1992, HPA handled the distribution which insured that the

money was disseminated to as many organizations as possible who were working with infected HIV people. In the beginning of the epidemic, Strong was the care giver and care provider for people with HIV. The increase in AIDS cases drastically changed the picture. By 1992, there were a full range of agencies in a nine county area that served people with HIV and who benefitted from the money that Dining For Dollars raised.

By 2003, AIDS had become a disease that you could live with. The treatments and drugs were constantly improving. Funding for AIDS organizations was flowing through the pipeline, and there was less and less need in the community for financial support for people with HIV. In November, 2003, the HPA Board, chaired by Tim Tompkins, voted to dissolve the corporation and donate the remaining funds to AIDS Rochester.

For the 17 years of its existence, Helping People With AIDS gave the Rochester community a way to fight this deadly disease and respond to the crisis with hope. HPA gave many people with HIV a sense of dignity, and a quality of life they would not have had without the Wish List. The Rochester community owes all of those who were involved with HPA a debt of gratitude for the care and compassion it showed to people with HIV.