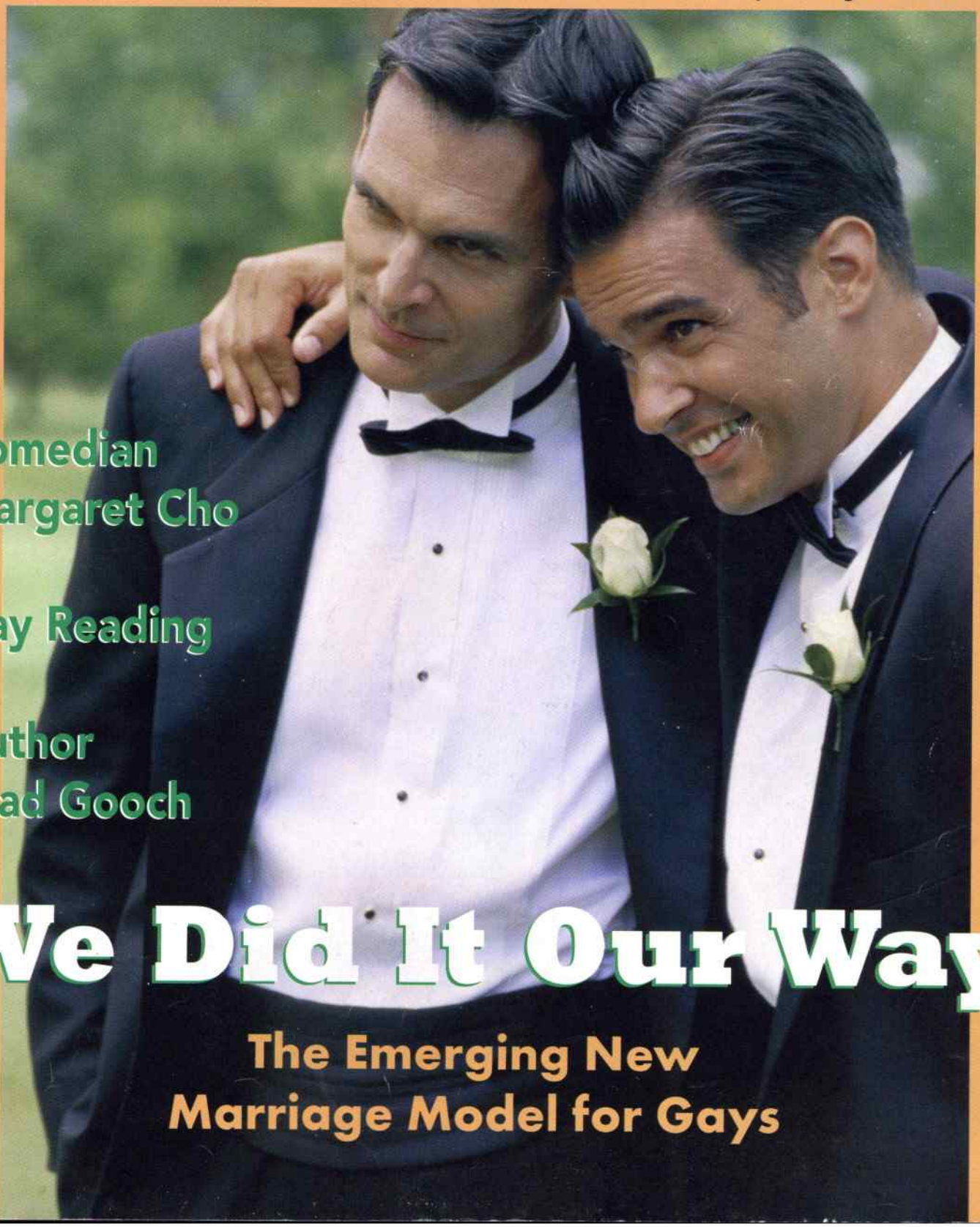
JULY 1999 • COMPLIMENTARY

Out▼Smart

Houston's Gay & Lesbian Monthly Magazine



Comedian
Margaret Cho

Gay Reading

Author
Brad Gooch

We Did It Our Way

The Emerging New Marriage Model for Gays

TimeOut

by Steve Poruban

AIDS FOUNDATION HOUSTON

...Working Until It's Over



Stone Soup Food Pantry was moved to 608 Westheimer on Valentine's Day as pictured in 1985.

In Houston in 1982, as in countless other cities around the world, an increasing number of people were becoming infected with, and subsequently dying from, the then little-understood HIV virus. It was around that same time, too, that a group of civic-minded Houstonians and medical professionals joined forces to aid in making a difference and hopefully to save some lives.

The end result was a nonprofit agency committed to "improve the quality of life in the greater Houston community through HIV/AIDS education, health care, social services, and volunteerism," better known to most of us as AIDS Foundation Houston (AFH).

"AFH has really evolved over the years," explains Ken Kelly, AFH's director of communications. "It started out with a group of people trying to make a difference and has grown into a $4.2 million agency. We currently have a complete array of client services and our education department is very much out there in the community and abroad, and has won numerous awards."

And Kelly couldn't be more correct. AFH is one of the most multifaceted organizations in the Houston area, if not in the country. And like many nonprofit agencies, at the core of the wide success and continued growth of AFH is its volunteers, who, after attending a one-day training program, are placed in one of many client service areas. Programs such as Stone Soup and the AFH hotline are completely volunteer-driven services.



The McAdory House was the nation's first privately funded residence for people with AIDS and the home of Stone Soup Pantry in 1984.

"Bragging on our staff here," says Kelly, "we have an incredible volunteer department. They do a really good job in managing and having a good relationship with all of our volunteers. Plus I think that they see that, with the work they do, they really do make a difference."

Education has been at the center AFH's work since its inception. In 1982, AFH created the first educational booklet on AIDS, the AIDS-Talk manual, which is still used to this day, albeit in an updated form.

"I think that's why it was significant, because it was the first," recalls Kelly. "And it's my understanding that it was just so well written." So well written, in fact, that the Texas Department of Heath recommends the booklet as "the model prevention curriculum for Health Education/Risk Reduction service providers in Texas."

Every year, AFH's education department, also started in 1982, reaches as many as 50,000 individuals. The department's current project is AFH's gay men health initiative, Project CAESAR (Community Advocates for Education, Safer sex And Risk reduction).

"Recently, we are working within the prison system," said Kelly. Working with the Texas Department of Criminal Justice, AFH is training inmates to become trainers for peer-based education and to teach about HIV and AIDS transmission. "It has proven to be quite successful so far," says Kelly. The program, like many of the services provided by AFH, already has a waiting list filled with interested participants.

TIMELINE 1982-84

Each month OutSmart will feature sections of the Houston gay history timeline as featured in the January issue.

1982 A group of medical professionals and other civic leaders joined forces against the growing crisis of HIV and AIDS in Houston, forming AIDS Foundation Houston (AFH). For more information on its genesis, see related column, opposite page. Now in its 17th year, Basic Brothers was founded by Richard Wiederholt. Now retired, Wiederholt and his first lover, Jerry Prox—who has since passed away in 1989—opened



Basic Brothers first location at 1624 Richmond Ave.

up a 400-sq. ft. shop at 1624 Richmond Ave. that featured resale merchandise such as antiques, bricabrac, and clothes—particularly Army clothes and combat boots. The couple chose the name "Basic Brothers," says Wiederholt, "because we didn't know what we were going to be doing, or which direction we were going to be headed." About 12 years ago, the store was moved to its present location on Westheimer, at which time the couple abandoned resale completely and began to carry new clothes, including drag gear. The store's key to success? "You need to listen to your customers," Wiederholt told *OutSmart*, "because they know the market as well as we do, and they know what they want." Besides listening, Basic Brothers also is involved in the community: selling tickets to countless community events and donating gift certificates to numerous of Houston's nonprofit organizations. "I've always felt, from the time we opened the store, that the more we give to the community, they're going to give it back to us," notes Wiederholt.

1983 Texas Gay Rodeo Association (TGRA) started as a nonprofit organization, which helped to raise funds for charities through events preceding and including the Houston rodeo, held every year in November. The slogan of TGRA members, comprising both men and women, is "to accomplish the common goal of community spirit, public benefit, and a better gay profile overall." Starting as a Halloween party, Outrage Inc. was organized to "put on fabulous events to raise funds for Houston area HIV/AIDS charities." Since that time, Outrage has put on its Hallowween Party event, raising more than $93,000 for local charities through 1997. Outrage now produces the Construction Party, one of the hot events during Pride.



Basic Brothers (l-r) Richard Wiederholt, Cody Holt, Ken Claude, and Bill Pearse.

1984 Two social organizations formed to add to the realm of recreational activities for gays and lesbians: Frontrunners and the Houston Outdoor Group (HOG). While the former of the two promotes competitive and recreational running for men and women, the latter is all about roughing it through camping, hiking, biking, and other outdoor-related events. And things get even busier from 1985-1987, so look for the happenings of these times next month.

Timeline constructed from personal interviews, personal recollections, and from information found in the Houston Gay & Lesbian Yellow Pages.

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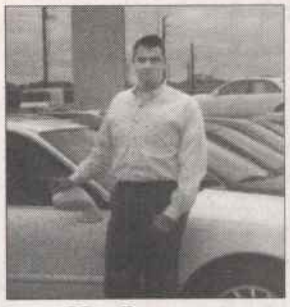
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Also helping "get the word out" about HIV and AIDS is AFH's hotline, started in 1983. Today, the service responds to 2,500 callers every year. "When we answer the phone," explains Kelly, "we not only answer questions about our services we offer or programs we are involved in, but it's a complete resource guide to anybody who can call in. Anything from, 'How do you get HIV?' to 'What is HIV?' to 'Where can I get a test done?' to 'What services are in areas outside what we do here at AFH?' It's a wealth of information."

AFH has discovered over the years that working toward conquering AIDS, oftentimes, takes more than education. Its housing programs, for example, set a precedent for many such programs around the country. The latest of these, Project LifeRoad, is a multi-leveled program that combines several services offered by the agency.

"LifeRoad is becoming an incredible model," says Kelly. "We feel here at AFH that, the 'AIDS system' throughout the country has set up an incredible system of taking care of HIV-positive individuals and those with AIDS with regard to shelter, food, and drug-assistance programs. I think that LifeRoad encapsulates all of these elements.

"It's really anything that anybody who is HIV positive and homeless could hope for. You have your housing, furnishing, medical care, psychosocial care, job and educational training, substance abuse support groups all encompassed in a collaboration between eight other agencies," says Kelly.

These agencies are: Bering-Omega Services, CASA, Milam House, People With AIDS Coalition-Houston, Steven's House, The BLOCK, Vita Living, and Sage & Associates.

Kelly notes: "We already have some folks going through the different levels, and people that want to work the program, it really works out really well for them. We've actually had at least two people returning to work through our partnership with Vita Living. The goal is to get the people with HIV empowered, get them, first of all, cleaned up and off of drugs and alcohol, get them stable, get them on the proper HIV medication, and then empower them to get their life back."



Groceries for Stone Soup are collected from the Houston Food Bank and private donations.

The work remains challenging for organizations like AFH. At the top of the list of challenges for the new millenium? The increasing

number of HIV infections continues to climb, even with education programs such as these.

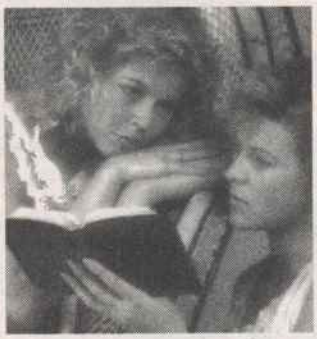
"If you look at the increasing rate of new HIV infection and couple that with people with HIV living longer—which in itself is incredible news—it puts a strain on those organizations like ours because we're having to take care of both ends," explains Kelly.

"We're getting new people each month and still taking care of the existing clients. So it continually puts a strain on our resources to provide food or shelter or whatever. That would be our challenge, I think, keeping pace with the growing numbers, and unfortunately they're growing."

Are we close to finding a cure for AIDS? Kelly would like to be more optimistic:

"There has been incredible amounts of progress made in cocktail therapies, and progress made toward an AIDS vaccine but there is still no cure and it's important for people to understand that."

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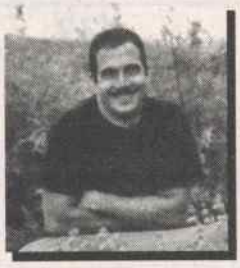
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