



# ***MEDIA RELEASE***



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## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **AWARDS GALA HONOURS HEROES IN THE BC AIDS MOVEMENT**

VANCOUVER – On Sunday, April 22<sup>nd</sup>, the 6<sup>th</sup> annual AccolAIDS awards gala took place in the elegant Crystal Ballroom of the Pan Pacific Hotel Vancouver. This recognition and fundraising event, produced by the BC Persons With AIDS Society (BCPWA Society) with title sponsors GlaxoSmithKline in partnership with Shire BioChem, honoured outstanding achievements of individuals and organizations working in the BC AIDS movement. A record-setting \$90,000 in proceeds, generated from the event, will be used to support BCPWA Society's programs and services for people living with HIV/AIDS.

In his opening remarks, BCPWA Society Chair Paul Lewand invited everyone in attendance to raise their glasses in a toast to recognize an "entire room full of individuals who—in so many different ways—have improved the lives and circumstances of HIV-positive British Columbians through tireless dedication, commitment, and care." Similar sentiments were expressed by the Honourable George Abbott, Minister of Health, in an official message and greeting that was read by AccolAIDS event host and emcee, Senator Larry Campbell.

AccolAIDS Awards were presented in eight categories. Winners of the 2007 AccolAIDS Awards are:

### **HEALTH PROMOTION AND HARM REDUCTION - CAROL ROMANOW**

Carol is deeply committed to ensuring that those who are most disadvantaged have a voice in constructing the programs and policies that affect their lives. She was director at the Downtown Eastside HIV/IDU Consumers Board for many years, and was instrumental in establishing the needle exchange at the Washington Hotel. She has helped organize many community events, including the Consumers Board Annual AIDS Day, the first national Hepatitis C Day, and other AIDS and HCV forums. She is a central force within Downtown Eastside organizations that promote health and aim to reduce harms. Since relocating to Victoria, Carol has worked with the Society Of Living Intravenous Drug users (SOLID), a remarkably successful needle exchange which she operates, on a shoestring budget, out of the back of her vehicle.

### **MEDIA - NICHOLAS READ**

Nicholas is currently a Science Reporter with the *Vancouver Sun* where he has been a reporter, feature writer, columnist, editor, and layout artist. He has been a journalist for 27 years both in Canada and the UK, but has spent the majority of his career writing in Vancouver. As a journalist, Nicholas believes passionately in giving a voice to those who may not always have one. Through his writing, he has made an important contribution to those living with HIV/AIDS, most recently through a front page story in the *Vancouver Sun* entitled "AIDS: 25 Years of Anguish." The feature was a frank and sensitive exposé of the experiences of several long-term survivors living with HIV. By exposing the human side of AIDS, Nicholas has helped promote greater understanding and improved social attitudes associated with the disease.

### **PHILANTHROPY - NATHAN FONG**

Nathan is helping to extend lives of people suffering from HIV/AIDS and provide them with comfort and care. A top graduate from the Dubrulle French Culinary School, he has become one of Canada's premiere food and props stylists for culinary print and film advertising. Nathan started fundraising for AIDS organizations for his 40<sup>th</sup> birthday. He invited 200 of his friends and 9 of his chef-friends for a lavish dinner that raised \$7,000 for A Loving Spoonful. This event led to his current work with the Dr. Peter Centre. Each year since 2004, Nathan has volunteered tirelessly to create their annual Passions dinner, a fundraising evening that has raised over \$100,000 in the past three years.

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## **SOCIAL/POLITICAL/COMMUNITY ACTION - PIVOT LEGAL SOCIETY**

Pivot Legal Society is a non-profit legal advocacy organization located in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. Many of Pivot's clients are people living with HIV/AIDS, and are experiencing extreme hardships due to poverty. Pivot Legal Society's mandate is to take a strategic approach to social change, using the law to address the root causes that undermine the quality of life of those who are most disadvantaged. The Society contributes to the protection of community housing, health centers, drug treatment programs, and services for the prevention and treatment of HIV/AIDS. The organization's main campaigns are focused on addictions, child apprehension, housing, policing, and sex work. Pivot operates by taking informed direction from marginalized groups rather than providing legal services as charity.

## **KEVIN BROWN PWA AWARD - JOHN SPENCER (POSTHUMOUS)**

In September 1985—a time of extreme AIDS fear, before AIDS services were even available—John co-founded AIDS Vancouver Island (AVI). He undertook many roles in the community and continued to be involved with AVI until his death. He served the community as director of the Vancouver Island Persons With AIDS Society and as President of the Victoria AIDS Resource and Community Service Society. John was often sent as a delegate to the Canadian AIDS Society Forum and AGM, and to the Pacific AIDS Network Forum and AGM. Despite many health challenges, John remained dedicated to advocating and improving the lives of people living with AIDS. He viewed his contributions as neither extraordinary nor glamorous—but simply an expression of his commitment.

## **INNOVATIVE PROGRAMS AND SERVICES - POSITIVE WOMEN'S NETWORK**

Since its inception in 1991, Positive Women's Network (PWN) has been a vital service for women and their families affected by HIV/AIDS. PWN provides innovative and highly accessible support for HIV-positive women. The network is recognized for its effectiveness in addressing the diverse needs of its members through programs such as the Women and AIDS Virtual Education website (WAVE) and Women's Initiatives for Support and Education program (WISE). Most importantly, PWN is a safe environment where women can socialize and have a meal. A recipient of the services at PWN said: "The programs at PWN have helped me to see the future and not the fear, they have truly helped me with accepting my status, and speaking honestly and openly to others to help women who are newly infected, in denial, or lost."

## **SCIENCE/RESEARCH/TECHNOLOGY - CAITLIN JOHNSTON & STAFF OF VANCOUVER INJECTION DRUG USER STUDY**

The Vancouver Injection Drug User Study (VIDUS) is a project that provides a means of tracking HIV incidence and prevalence among injection drug users over time. VIDUS data has been used to justify the implementation of HIV prevention programs for injection drug users, including the expansion of the city's needle exchange, the first supervised injection site, and the NAOMI Project. Most significantly, the data results in policy interventions for persons with HIV and those at risk of infection. Caitlin Johnston has been the project coordinator with VIDUS since its inception and oversees research at the Downtown Eastside office. According to Dr. Julio Montaner, the Director of the BC Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS, "The output from VIDUS is of utmost importance to those working with at-risk populations, often the work is done with little or no recognition. This research has been the basis for many groundbreaking endeavors in Vancouver".

## **UNsung HEROES AWARD - SISTERS OF PROVIDENCE**

St. Paul's Hospital was founded in 1894, by the Sisters of Providence, to respond to the health care needs of the community. From the very beginning, the Sisters were committed to providing compassionate care for all patients, regardless of financial or social circumstances. In the early 1980s, St. Paul's Hospital in Vancouver was the only hospital in BC that willingly treated people with AIDS. Later in the decade, St. Paul's was the first hospital in Canada to take the extraordinary and progressive step of integrating AIDS patients into their palliative care unit. The hospital, under the tenure of the Sisters of Providence, viewed care of patients with HIV/AIDS as part of their mission. Their leadership inspired others inside the hospital and beyond its doors to respond with compassion to the AIDS epidemic. Because of this dedication, St. Paul's Hospital became home to the internationally renowned BC Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS.

**The British Columbia Persons With AIDS Society is dedicated to empowering persons living with HIV disease and AIDS through mutual support and collective action. Unique among major HIV/AIDS agencies in Canada, the Society's Board of Directors is composed entirely of HIV+ members. The organization provides support and advocacy services, treatment information, and volunteer opportunities for its 4,400 members province-wide. The BCPWA Society is the recipient of the prestigious BC Association of Broadcasters' Humanity Award for the 2006/2007 year.**