

REGIONAL AIDS INTERFAITH NETWORK

Spring RAIN

RAIN's director of development and marketing, Nathan Smith, did not miss the screening of *Dallas Buyers Club* at the Manor. In case you do not know what RAIN stands for, it's the Regional AIDS Interfaith Network. And in case you missed the film and the 2014 Academy Awards, we will let you in on the excitement: Matthew McConaughey won an Oscar for Actor in a Leading Role and Jared Leto won for Actor in a Supporting Role for their appearances in the movie, which explores the struggles of men and women, both homosexual and heterosexual and living with HIV/AIDS during the 1980s, to get their hands on the medications they needed survive. Leto, who portrayed a transgender woman, said in his acceptance speech: "This is for the 36 million people who have lost the battle to AIDS and to those of you out there who have ever felt injustice because of who you are or who you love."

SPEAKING OF LOVE Smith loves the depth of the lyrics of the song "Brave" by Sara Bareilles and was thus inspired to dub this year's AIDS WALK Charlotte theme: Be Brave. He said, "It's about raising your voice and giving yourself a voice." RAIN has been a voice in the Charlotte community since 1992, when Rev. Deborah Warren and a group of volunteers were brave enough to involve the faith community in addressing the struggles caused by HIV/AIDS. *Since its founding, the organization has coordinated programs in more than 100 congregations from 20 different denominations and faith traditions across 13 counties in the Carolinas.* Of every dollar received by RAIN, 74¢ goes to direct services. The rest goes to fundraising and administrative expenses. Over the years, RAIN developed its focus toward caring for those living with HIV/AIDS through compassionate programs including Empowering Positive Youth, awareness and prevention education, advocacy, faith-based initiatives and CARE Management.

LET'S DELVE INTO CARE This program caters to adults ages 25 years and older who are HIV positive. CARE Managers ensure that these individuals have access to medications and a physician, as well as proper housing, mental health services or substance abuse treatment. The younger clients receive compassionate care through Empowering Positive Youth, one of the few HIV youth support groups in the area. Ultimately, the 14 members of the RAIN staff strive to make sure that all clients are medically compliant—that they understand what their doctor is telling them and that they are taking the medications they need. "We're

basically the middle man for them, Smith said. RAIN representatives will often accompany clients on their medical visits, helping prompt proper questions to their physicians or helping with copays through Broadway Cares. This benevolent fund is a last resort following other assistance resources like Crisis Assistance Ministry, House of Mercy and Hope Haven. Each client has access to this fund up to a certain dollar amount.

AS FAR AS EACH CLIENT IS CONCERNED They range in ages starting at 13 and up, with support groups spanning from youth-focused to senior-focused. Of the individuals that access RAIN's services, 98 percent are low-income. The plus side: "People can live a normal, long, healthy life ... as long as you take care of yourself," Smith said. "It's a manageable disease." Those managing it are diverse in age, sexual orientation, gender, ethnicity and the source of their illness. RAIN mostly sees clients whose disease was transmitted by sex, needle usage or birth by a mother with HIV.

REGARDLESS, RAIN DOESN'T JUDGE Neither do the nonprofit's supporters. The AIDS WALK in particular features a diverse group uniting for a common cause. "It's an event where you can have a priest and a drag queen standing next to each other and they're not judging," Smith said.

BEING BRAVE, ACCORDING TO RAIN, IS ABOUT TAKING THE PLUNGE AND GETTING TESTED FOR HIV/AIDS FOR YOURSELF. IT'S ABOUT RALLYING AROUND THE CAUSE FOR OTHERS.

Thanks to its supporters, RAIN has devoted more than 150,000 hours of service to more than 1,100 HIV/AIDS positive people and their families; coordinated HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention education programs for more than 50,000 people; and trained more than 5,000 volunteers.

YOU'RE IN LUCK Volunteer training is available on April 17. Volunteers who want to work with clients go through more intensive training, plus a yearly review. But orientations occur every other month for potential volunteers. After a one-hour session, they can choose to contribute as much as they please, whether they participate in a



RAIN-organized fundraising event or create their own. "We leave it in your hands," Smith said. For others looking to offer low-key contributions, RAIN always has a wish list, including gift cards and bus passes for clients.

WALKING FORWARD AIDS WALK Charlotte, set for May 3, is in its 18th year and has never had a registration fee. Note that there is a fundraising incentive: walkers must raise a minimum of \$20 to snag a T-shirt. On the whole, Smith said, "It's about celebrating life that has gone but life that is still around." The scene will be set with booths for sponsors and other nonprofits in the AIDS service industry as well as a program spotlighting testimonial speakers, radio personalities and a zumba session—what Smith referred to as "the modern day jazzercise." There will also be a visual timeline representing the past 30 years of HIV, a disk jockey for great tunes like the "Electric Slide"—"Our CEO does it every year," Smith promised. This year, the route will roll through the heart of Uptown to make it more public, with the party can continue: Hartigan's will be opening its doors early, with a live band in full swing.

FOR THE PARTY PEOPLE Get warmed up for the AIDS WALK with the Amazing Race Bar Crawl on April 19, starting at Brixx Wood Fired Pizza Uptown. Throw together a team of five friends and race to seven bars while completing a challenge at each location to win the ultimate prize:

gift cards from participating bars and restaurants. The event is produced by Bars Against AIDS Respond, a group of Charlotte community leaders and a sub-committee of AIDS WALK Charlotte.

BRING ON THE BRAVERY Being brave, according to RAIN, is about taking the plunge and getting tested for HIV/AIDS for yourself. It's about rallying around the cause for others. Smith said: "It's being brave about saying, 'I support AIDS and HIV. I support RAIN. I support the Walk.'"

GET INVOLVED

RAIN: carolinarain.org
704.372.7246

COMING UP:
April 17
Volunteer Orientation
April 19
Amazing Race Bar Crawl
May 3
AIDS WALK

Written by Katie Toussaint.
Image courtesy of RAIN.



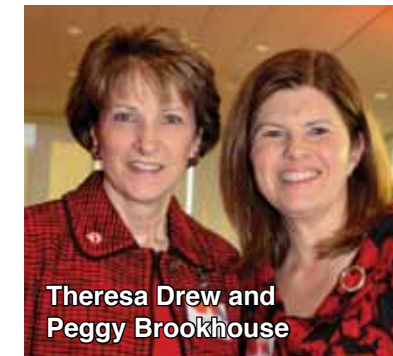
Jill Dinwiddie and Susan Tannehill



Amy Kochan and Bob Sanchez



Tom Lane and Amy Pack



Theresa Drew and Peggy Brookhouse



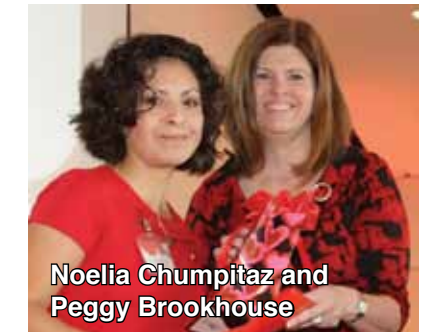
Lina Komanduri, Michelle Manha and Rachel Cayne



Beth Perry



Terri DeBoo and Francene Marie Morris



Noelia Chumpitaz and Peggy Brookhouse



Judy Jay and Beth Perry



Nancy McNelis, Audrey Rudisill and Amy Kochan

Color for a cause

American Heart Association

There was no question—it was National Wear Red Day. About 150 guests dressed in accents of red joined the American Heart Association (AHA) at Mint Museum Uptown for the **Charlotte Go Red For Women Breakfast in Red** on February 7.

"Go Red For Women is the American Heart Association's national campaign to increase awareness of heart disease, the leading cause of death for women," said Peggy Brookhouse, chairwoman of the Go Red For Women 2014 campaign in Charlotte, "and to inspire women to take charge of their heart health."

Beth Perry of Signature HealthCare presented steps to better heart health to this audience, after which guest speaker Noelia Chumpitaz said her attendance at another AHA event saved her life. At age 40, she had a stroke. But she recognized the symptoms and has since recovered after receiving proper medical care. Her advice to all: "Talk about what you learn here ... don't be fooled about your age."

Another AHA supporter, Terri DeBoo, took charge of her health by losing 103 pounds by the time of the breakfast through modifications in diet and exercise—she won a Go Red Total Makeover sponsored by Macy's.

Brookhouse shared ways to get involved with the movement, including the new Men Go Red campaign for men who want to support the battle against heart disease. Carl Armato of Novant Health has joined the inaugural campaign as chairman.

No matter how the community chooses to go red, Brookhouse said, "Our goal this year is to raise \$500,000 for the cause in the greater Charlotte area." ■

get involved

American Heart Association • www.heart.org • 704.417.5751

Written by Katie Toussaint. Photos by Dianna Augustine.
More photos at www.societycharlotte.com

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