

The Dallas Examiner

Taking a closer look at your world...



HIV/AIDS Initiative – Battling AIDS In Our Community



Mollie Belt, Publisher

As Branch Chief of Investigations for the Office for Civil Rights U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, I supervised investigations of some of the first complaints of discrimination against persons living with HIV/AIDS in Texas, Louisiana, Arkansas, Oklahoma and New Mexico. During this period, I recognized a need for increased awareness of HIV/AIDS. As the numbers increased in the United States and especially in the African American community, I knew there was something I had to do about it.

Publishing *The Dallas Examiner* has given me an opportunity.

We featured various articles regarding HIV/AIDS awareness in our 1998 Health Probe. The following year *The Dallas Examiner* published a series entitled, The Faces of HIV/AIDS. For several weeks, an article ran on the front cover of the paper highlighting the faces of AIDS, women, children and men, all victims of this devastating disease.

In 2001, Phill Wilson spoke at a National Newspaper Publishers Association meeting in Florida. After hearing him, I made up my mind to do more. I began to solicit the support of pharmaceutical companies and various organizations demonstrating an interest in fighting the spread of HIV/AIDS and assisting those already battling HIV/AIDS. In December 2002, I sent our new editor, Sharon Egiebor to the AIDS Media Roundtable sponsored by the Black AIDS Institute. She came back also committed to do something to increase awareness of HIV/AIDS and how it is affecting the African American community. Hence, we established the HIV/AIDS Initiative.



Sharon Egiebor, Executive Editor

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported in the 2002 International AIDS Conference in Barcelona, Spain that the number of HIV and AIDS cases in African Americans in America was on the rise. And although they said at the time that African American women were particularly at risk, it seems as if no one noticed.

By World AIDS Day in December, more statistics were released that banged with a loud thud, nearly 64 percent of all new AIDS cases in women were in African American women, and these women received their diagnosis late and died sooner than necessary.

I attended a Black AIDS Institute Black Media Task Force meeting in December and came back on fire.

The publisher and I agreed that *The Examiner* had to become the warning knell. We started an HIV/AIDS Initiative as part of our ongoing commitment to health news. This was a major goal for a paper our size.

Through our yearlong effort, people made significant changes in their behavior and many talked openly for the first time about HIV/AIDS' impact on the African American community.

The stories we researched and reported shed important light on cultural problems in the African American community that had prevented previous discussions on HIV/AIDS. Since there was so little discussion, few people were willing to be tested for the disease and many were inadvertently spreading the virus.

We had to be resourceful, figuring out a way to keep our readers from tuning out to all the bad news. Instead of doom and gloom, we offered a glimmer of hope by providing stories of people living successfully with HIV or those who had overcome "near" misses with the disease. We let the women, children, men and medical professionals tell the story from their perspective.

Our "Betrayal" story hit home for many of our readers because it talked about the painful issues of revealing secrets and what love means in a marriage. The wives shared intimate details of their relationships with their spouses and other family members.

The supplement was published June 19, timed to coincide with HIV National Testing Day. The underlying message then and now is this, as Phill Wilson says, get informed and get tested and get treated.

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