

AIDS Walk draws 5,000 people, but fundraising down

BY MELISSA POORE • MPOORE@COURIER-JOURNAL.COM • SEPTEMBER 26, 2010

As a social worker for Volunteers of America's Kentucky Care Coordinator program, Beth Harrison Prado sees the many needs of people living with HIV and AIDS.

She said they may need help with health-care costs or other needs, and that's why the annual Louisville AIDS Walk is so important.

Now in its 18th year, the walk raises money for a variety of programs and services, including medical co-pay assistance, housing, children's programs and counseling.

Sunday, Prado put on her sneakers to join the 5,000 people who walked across the Clark Memorial Bridge, raising \$147,078.

But that amount is down from last year, which Prado finds disappointing.

While medical advancements have helped people live longer with the disease, that means the need for help is even greater, she said.

"When donations are down, it has a direct and indelible impact on the people I work with every day, and the numbers are not going down," she said.

Event director Brad Hampton said donations are down about \$50,000 from last year, and unless the difference is made up by Dec. 31, services will have to be cut next year.

He said he fears many people don't think of the needs as urgent because there are more medications to treat the disease.

"People have the misconception that AIDS is not the crisis it used to be," he said. While there have been advancements, that means more people in Louisville are living with HIV/AIDS than ever before.

"We're struggling to do more with less," he said.

The event, however, offered more than it has in the past. This year included a 5K run and a pet walk that brought out dozens if not hundreds of pooches, many of which wore red ribbons around their collars. There was also a children's area and a performance by the River City Drum Corps. Alvin Holbrook of Jeffersontown brought his dogs Princess Honey, a Chihuahua, and Roxy Divine, an Akita and St. Bernard mix. He said many walkers stopped to pose for pictures with Princess Honey, who wore a hot pink sweater with a fuzzy collar.

This was Holbrook's third year attending the event and while he was disappointed with the low turnout, he said it's understandable given the current state of the economy.

"It's hard to get anybody out to do anything," he said.

But many of those who participated did so in a big way, with one man wearing a rainbow striped gown and tiara while his friend carried a rainbow umbrella. Many people, including Chelsea Taylor of New Albany, decorated the bridge using chalk, which she said was a fun touch. While she said she doesn't know anyone personally affected by the disease, she said it's important to get out and support the community. "Seeing so many people come together for one cause – I love it," she said.

Volunteer Terry Price helped by filling small wading pools with water for all of the dogs that walked. He joked that by helping, he had it easier than the people trekking across the bridge. As the crowd passed his station, he said, "Isn't it beautiful? That's why I volunteer. You get to see the parade go by."

But he also gave a more serious reason for his involvement. He said he knows many people who've had HIV/AIDS, and the walk represents hope.

"I know many. I've been to many funerals. Let's find a cure."

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