

*The Niagara County AIDS Task Force welcomes all of you to World AIDS Day 2010. Thank you for braving the weather tonight and being a living testament of your compassion for people who are living with HIV/AIDS.*

New Faces: New Challenges is the topic for this year's World AIDS Day. Over the years, World AIDS Day has become a global phenomenon that has prompted massive media coverage, raised awareness, encouraged people to get involved and helped amplify the voices of those living with HIV/AIDS. Today, as a gift of our humanity let us take the next 24 hours to commemorate those who have died, acknowledge those who live and those who fight on the frontlines of the battle against HIV to ponder what it will take to eliminate the virus once and for all. Let those that are new faces know that we love them and pray for their healing and quality of life as they face the new challenges of being infected with the virus. In the nearly 30 plus years that the AIDS epidemic has raged, there has never been more hope than this year. Three striking developments have taken place: UN officials said new HIV cases are dropping dramatically worldwide. A study has shown that a daily pill already on the pharmacy shelves could help

prevent new infections in gay men. And the Pope opened the way for the use of condoms to prevent AIDS.

This year brought in the U.S. its first-ever National HIV/AIDS Strategy; the lifting of its travel ban; a resurgence of people on AIDS Drug Assistance Program waiting lists; the debut of a remarkable HIV/AIDS documentary, *The Other City*.

In the midst of this hope ~ we still have fallen short of taking our hope past midnight. There is still pathetically little attention paid to the HIV/AIDS in mainstream society - and often, the attention that HIV does get only serves to reinforce the stereotypes and strengthen stigma. World AIDS Day does not end at midnight.

We need more people living with HIV/AIDS to tell their stories on their own terms. We need individuals living with AIDS to talk about raising their families, addressing stigma, battling housing and economic issues; dealing with dating, sex and love, and navigating homophobia, racism and gender issues.

*New Faces - New Challenges* is a call to action to try to break down the walls of HIV stigma, it's very clear that if we want to bring about real change - we're the ones - you

and I who are going to bring about this change. One person at a time; one community at a time; from the ground up. Its this in mind that tonight we are going to look beyond this midnight to carry the torch into 2011 and beyond. Before midnight we have the opportunity to become true activists in our own way. That could be simply wearing a red ribbon. Or you could volunteer at the Niagara County AIDS Task Force. You could write a letter to a politician. You could encourage your peers to get tested. You could e-mail media outlets and demand that they report more on the epidemic in your area. You could ask your pastor, imam, or other religious leader to start an AIDS education and support group. You could use your Facebook and Twitter accounts to send messages of compassion, prevention and awareness out to people that are close to you. Whatever you do don't let the flame of hope flicker out at midnight when December 1 ends.

God Bless you all...

Now I would like to introduce the Niagara County AIDS Task Force members that are present tonight:

- Richard Haynes - the new Coordinator of the Task Force.
- AIDS Community Services
- AIDS Family Services
- AIDS Network
- HANCI
- MOCHA
- Mt/ St. Mary's Hospital
- Niagara County Dept. of Health
- Native American Community Services
- Pride Center
- Gay and Lesbian Youth Services
- Alianza Latina

Let's give the Task Force a big hand for being a beacon of Hope since 1988.