



NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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WEST COUNTY HOSTS FIRST ALL-FAITHS HIV SUMMIT MARKING AIDS AWARENESS MONTH IN CONTRA COSTA COUNTY

Supervisor John Gioia to give opening remarks

What:	Faith In Yourself, Faith In Your Community HIV Faith Summit
Where:	Lovonya DeJean Middle School 3400 MacDonald Avenue, Richmond, CA
When:	Saturday, May 17, 2003 9:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.
Cost:	Free and open to the public

RICHMOND, Calif., The West County AIDS Task Force, a coalition of policy makers, service providers, medical experts, and clients, is hosting the community's first inter-faith summit about HIV/AIDS. The summit is a forum for pastors and key faith leaders to learn about the impacts that HIV/AIDS has on a community.

"Faith leaders have great influence in our community," said Supervisor John Gioia. "We're calling out and inviting them to this summit. They're essential to the health of this community."

The Summit will begin at 9:00 a.m. with opening remarks by Supervisor Gioia, Richmond Mayor Irma L. Anderson, and former Richmond Mayor Rosemary Corbin. Supervisor Gioia and Corbin created the West County AIDS Task Force in 1999 in response to the alarming number of reported AIDS cases in Contra Costa County, most of which are in West County.

Twenty years after the first clinical evidence of AIDS was reported, it has become the most devastating disease humankind has ever faced. Since the epidemic began, more than 60 million people have been infected with the virus. Globally, approximately 42 million men, women, and children are living with HIV/AIDS. 3.1 million people worldwide died from AIDS related deaths last year.

According to the latest HIV/AIDS epidemiology report issued by Contra Costa County Health Services this past February, approximately 4,900 Contra Costa residents have been infected with HIV since reporting regulations went into effect July 1, 2002. Countywide, approximately 2,400 residents have been diagnosed with AIDS. West Contra Costa County continues to have the highest rate of AIDS cases.

Summit workshop sessions include setting up HIV/AIDS ministries; grant writing; a consumer panel consisting of those affected by the disease, and a course for faith leaders about the basics of HIV.

The Summit will end at approximately 3:00 with a wrap-up led by Rev. Phil Lawson of Easter Hill United Methodist Church in Richmond and recipient of Contra Costa County's 2002 Humanitarian of the Year Award.

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2-2-2-2-2 WEST COUNTY HOSTS FIRST INTERDENOMINATIONAL HIV SUMMIT

Workshop organizer Willa Sudduth has been attending Rev. Lawson's church for more than 20 years.

"I'm blessed to have a pastor who's willing to speak about HIV and inclusiveness," said Sudduth who's also the AIDS Coordinator for the Church's Health Ministries. "People of faith, we need to help others with, not just their spiritual health, but their physical health as well."

A special lunch-time ceremony is scheduled at 12:30 when the Task Force will present John Camp with a proclamation from Contra Costa County for his dedication working with individuals with HIV/AIDS. Camp started Richmond's Tranquillium Center, a one-stop support center for people with HIV.

Entertainment will be provided by the Vukani Mawethu Choir, a world renowned multiracial choir that sings the freedom songs of Southern Africa, primarily of South Africa in Zulu, Xhosa, Sethu, and English.

Concurrent with the Summit will be a day-long health fair in the school's multi-purpose room. The fair, sponsored by Easter Hill United Methodist Church, Zion Hill Baptist Church, Sojourner Truth Presbyterian Church, and St. John Missionary Baptist Church, will include information about blood pressure, breast cancer, dental care, and safer sex practices.

Lunch and refreshments will be provided.

Note to editors/reporters: Event organizers will be available at the Faith Summit to assist with interviews.

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