

AOF to announce grantees at reception

by Kevin Davis

Participants at San Francisco's Lavender Youth Recreation and Information Center will receive needed funds for their AIDS education and outreach efforts thanks to fans of Hollywood and cocktail parties. On September 30 the Academy of Friends names LYRIC and 13 other service organizations as beneficiaries of its upcoming 25th annual Oscar night fundraising gala.

Next week's affair at the Metrocon's fourth floor terrace also serves as a promotional event aimed at attracting more individual underwriters willing to pledge AOF's minimum membership of \$300 per year.

Although best known for its opulent \$200 per ticket Oscar night party, (but free to AOF members), AOF holds events year-round hosted and underwritten by sponsors such as Williams Sonoma.

"We seek out new and different venues, caterers, and wineries to

put them on," said board member Eric Vanderpool, the corporate sponsorship chair, citing as examples movie previews at Pixar, the annual Christmas party at the W Hotel, and events at Brooks Brothers and the Clift Hotel.

Corporate underwriters include Wells Fargo, San Francisco magazine, Nordstrom, and MAC Cosmetics, with Levi Strauss, AT&T and Mercedes Benz each donating over \$50,000.

"AT&T relies on us to do their legwork [in researching HIV services worthy of donations]," said Vanderpool. "We're their right hand. It's a special relationship."

Mercedes also donates a car raffled at a special reception for its 300 individual underwriters before Oscar night. Last year's raffle raised \$125,000 at \$50 per ticket.

"There are companies looking for ways to give back to the community," said T.J. Snyder, one of 29 AOF board members. "It gives them an opportunity to be showcased."

The nonprofits each make grant requests but the amount they receive depends on the success of the February event.

"We're expecting to do very well," said AIDS Emergency Fund Executive Director Mike Smith, whose organization requested \$40,000 this year. "It's a successful event."

AOF's Oscar night party benefits community services in two categories: direct care grants for

items such as food, housing, counseling, financial assistance, and legal services; and HIV prevention education grants that cover things like peer outreach work and employment training.

The Marin AIDS Project also requested \$40,000. MAP staff members will volunteer at the February 27, 2005 gala as part of their commitment. "It's a team effort," said MAP's director Jennifer Malone.

AOF was founded in 1980 by Kile Ozier as a small, private Oscar night party. Over the years, the party attracted ticket buyers, corporate donors, and underwriters to raise funds for HIV/AIDS services. It has grown into the largest

Oscar night celebration outside Los Angeles and distributed over \$4 million in the past two decades.

"A huge part of revenue making is done through personal underwriting founded on friends asking friends to support the cause," said Jeff Vanleuven, the AOF gala's chair.

"Generally for these events you're suggested to volunteer, sell tickets, and get sponsorships," said Jessica Berhan, development manager for Shanti, which also benefits from the Macy's Passport fashion show and will attend both the AOF beneficiary naming this week and the Oscar night affair next year. "We're thrilled about it," she said.

"We work in collaboration with the beneficiaries throughout

the season," said AOF Executive Director Elizabeth Loeffler. "They help us bring in volunteers and sell tickets."

"We're stakeholders in the success of the event itself," said Joy Iwasa, special events director for Project Open Hand, which has received a total of \$200,000 from AOF.

"We hope to get attendees to be underwriters, to have a good time a nice social aspect to it, but also provide constituents with the current state of affairs, why we're there," said Vanderpool of next week's reception. "It's near and dear to my heart."

Each AOF board member serves as a liaison to an agency. Vanderpool is the liaison for the East Bay's Pittsburgh Community Council, which provides rapid HIV testing of farm workers, pre- and post-counseling, and case management referral services.

"Each agency has its own unique story," said Vanderpool. "It's really tough to choose where the greatest need is. We want to make sure the funds are given effectively." ▼

The September 30 reception starts at 6 p.m. at Metrocon, 101 4th Street, in San Francisco. For more information, call AOF at (415) 995-9890 or visit www.academyoffriends.org.