

# AIDS task force neglects gays

by Valerie Ruth Legge

The presentation of the Nova Scotia Task Force on AIDS report has resulted in anger and disappointment within the gay community and those infected with the AIDS virus.

The general consensus is that all of the benefits in the report are directed toward people who are not infected. "The report as is has been accepted by the govern-

ment has absolutely no direct benefit for people who are HIV infected," says Peter Wood, director of the Nova Scotia Persons with AIDS (PWA) Coalition.

The report was presented to government a few weeks ago and 40 of the 47 recommendations suggested by the task force were accepted. But, says task force member Eric Smith, "The seven they did accept are probably alto-

gether more important than the forty they did."

Four of the seven recommendations have been referred to the AIDS Advisory Commission for further consideration, while the three most controversial issues have been rejected outright.

The task force recommended 2 amendments to the Human Rights Act, one to provide protection on the basis of sexual orien-

tation and the other to provide protection for those who test HIV positive or have AIDS.

The government rejected these proposals, saying a policy is already in place and being used. But, says Wood, "That policy is just policy. It's not a law. They say they use it but that doesn't place any obligation on anybody else in the province to use that same policy."

Ken Belanger, spokesperson for Lesbian and Gay Rights Nova Scotia, says gay people in Nova Scotia are losing their jobs and their housing, and nothing can be done about it until the Human Rights Act is amended. "When it comes to a court case you need specifics. The preamble to the act is not enough," says Belanger.

The Human Rights Act falls under the jurisdiction of the Hon. Tom McInnis, Minister for the Department of Community Services. Numerous messages were left with McInnis but he did not return the Gazette's calls.

Sexual orientation is already included in the human rights legislation of Quebec, Ontario, Manitoba, and the Yukon, but Smith does not expect the Nova Scotia government to follow suit for another five years. "When I go to the hospital to talk to somebody who is in there with AIDS, five years is of no use to them," says Smith.

The Task Force's proposal for anonymous testing has also been rejected. Under the current system, the names of those testing HIV positive are given to the Health Department. The position of the Task Force and the PWA Coalition is that the fear of breach of confidentiality discourages people from having themselves tested.

"Why would you be tested if your name is going to be splashed all over the newspapers, or if you're going to be thrown out of your job or your home? You have no protection, so the only way to keep other people from finding out is to not find out yourself," says Wood.

Health Minister Joel Matheson said at the press conference that people have no fear their names will be made public. This statement angered Eric Smith, who lost his teaching job two years ago when it became public knowledge that he was carrying the AIDS virus.

Apart from the confidentiality issue, there is also concern that with the present system of testing we are not getting a true picture of how widespread the disease is in Nova Scotia. Smith feels that anonymous testing will provide the best picture. But Dr. David MacLean, director of the Atlantic Health Unit, says that the only way to get a true statistical sample is through random testing drawn from the entire population, and that people who volunteer for anonymous testing are mainly from high-risk groups. "But I would caution," says MacLean, "that random sampling will also provide a biased sample."

MacLean stresses that people should not rely heavily on testing. "Testing is not a feature of control. What we have to get through to people is the importance of behaviour."

Wood agrees. "The responsibility clearly lies with every individual to protect him- or herself. It's not easy to get this disease — you have to deliberately put yourself at risk — so you don't have sex with anybody you don't know well, and if you do you use a condom — that just makes sense."

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## There's a party!

by Lyssa McKee

Dalhousie Days '88, the first university-wide open house in a decade, will be held on campus from Friday October 21 to Sunday October 23.

Dalhousie University will open its doors to the public from 10 am to 5 pm each day, in order to present a number of static displays, open classes, lectures and demonstrations.

Visitors can, for example, try their hand at panning for gold, watch seals perform, learn how glaciers carved the Nova Scotia landscape, and see chemistry magic shows.

They will also be able to spend some time in leisure studies classes, listen to Russian poetry, take part in a student union-sponsored street dance, try their hand with computers, see the dental clinic, look at a variety of medical displays, and take in a concert or two. Afternoon tea will

be served at the University Club, and for the energetic, the Dalplex will offer a fitness class or a free swim and there's a skating party in the arena.

Planning for Dalhousie Days '88 has taken almost a year. Professors, students and support staff sat on the organizing committee and they have come up with the biggest open house the university has held.

"Dal is more than a bunch of buildings. It's people and programs," says public relations director Marilyn MacDonald, the co-chairperson of the organizing committee.

"Linda Frum, in her *Guide to Canadian Universities*, said Dalhousie is the best place to study outside central Canada. But more than that, we have a great deal to share with the community, and this open house is one way of letting the community know what a great resource Dal represents."