



The Asian Pacific AIDS Intervention Team affects the quality of life for Asian and Pacific Islanders living with or at-risk for HIV/AIDS by providing a continuum of prevention, health and social services, community leadership and advocacy to the Southern California region.

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vilion in Los Angeles Chinatown on May 19th. With a projected audience of 150 of LA County officials, community leaders, as well as popular API spokespeople, APAIT hopes to initiate a national dismantling of impervious stigma and discrimination towards HIV-related issues.

The effects of HIV-related stigma and discrimination in API communities can be devastating. HIV services are not utilized; HIV-infected APIs are isolated from communities and families; API HIV cases continue to be underreported; and consequently, more and more APIs become infected with the deadly virus everyday. The taboo that is culturally attached to HIV-related issues is probably one of the primary reasons why Asia's HIV epidemic is spiraling out of control. According to Amfar, by the end of 2003 as many as 4.58 mil-

lion Indians were living with HIV/AIDS. India is expected to outpace South Africa as the nation with the highest HIV prevalence rate in the world. Last year, 96 new cases of HIV infection among APIs were found in Los Angeles County. This is a big deal especially when one considers the fact that there are only 87 known cases among API women in an API population of 1 million plus. And that's just the reported cases.

Although India is said to be home to the world's largest and oldest banyan trees, the banyan tree incurs cultural and spiritual importance in the various Asian cultures because of its unique method of growing. As the trunk grows, its branches spread out, stretching and bending and eventually touching the ground. As they grow into the ground, they become the roots and in turn, the roots produce the sap that ultimately provides support for more branches.

Take a stand for API's nationwide by signing the pledge below!



The Banyan Tree Project
Rooted in Acceptance

SIGN ON TODAY!

I believe...

- 1 All A&PIs deserve **access** to HIV care, testing, treatment and prevention in their native languages, regardless of their immigration or economic status.
- 2 A&PIs who are living with HIV/AIDS and A&PI lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transgenders should be **treated with dignity**.
- 3 Discussion of sexual health, reproductive health, and safer sex should be open, accurate and support informed decision-making—especially among **young people**, who make up half of all new HIV infections in the U.S.
- 4 Health and HIV data on A&PIs should be reported **by ethnicity** in order to deepen our understanding of the HIV epidemic and to strengthen the ability of health providers to meet community needs.
- 5 The U.S. government has a responsibility to **fulfill and increase its commitment** to fight HIV/AIDS in the U.S. and the growing pandemic in the Asia Pacific Region.

Signed, _____

Mr. Ms. Mrs. Dr. Rev. Hon. _____

(First name) (Last/Family name)

City State/Jurisdiction Occupation (optional)

The Banyan Tree Project (www.banyantreeproject.org) was formed to promote acceptance and fight HIV-related discrimination and stigma in A&PI communities in the U.S. Sponsored by San Francisco-base Asian & Pacific Islander Wellness Center and in collaboration with partner organizations across the U.S., the Banyan Tree Project is collecting signatures for **The First Annual National A&PI HIV/AIDS Awareness Day on Thursday, May 19, 2005**. Our goal is to obtain 2,005 Banyan Tree Pledge signatures. This historic occasion will be commemorated with a program at Yerba Buena Center for the Arts in San Francisco and with concurrent events in Honolulu, Los Angeles, Chicago, Washington DC and Boston.

Please return this Pledge by **May 5, 2005** to Elizabeth Mediano, FAX (714) 636-8828 or MAIL to APAIT • 12900 Garden Grove Blvd., Suite 214A • Garden Grove, CA 92843 • TEL (714) 636-9115 • elizabethm@apaitonline.org • www.apaitonline.org



construction under

Welcome to the new issue of APAIT PULSE! We're currently in the process of redesigning the publication, but as you can tell with our first issue of *point PACIFIC*, APAIT's plans for its publications will tend towards the proactively informative. Taking a cue from our year-end news summaries, we have decided to trace the ongoing developments in world policies and programs against HIV/AIDS in each *point PACIFIC*. We have also decided to start including first-person narratives from Asian and Pacific Islander clients in a different API language each issue, so as to expand our HIV/AIDS coverage for our populations. This issue we're starting with Chinese.

Stay tuned for more developments in the works within the next few issues, too, including professional printing and a potential redesign of the entire masthead. Tell us what you think, and if there's anything else you'd like to read in APAIT's publications.

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Cheer Squad, APAIT Style



Noel Alumit cheers on team walkers for the Congresswoman Millender-McDonald's 5K AIDS Walk. For event information, turn to page 2. (Photo courtesy of Kenneth Mok)

Pride Season Starts in Long Beach

By Noel Alumit

We will be marching at the 22nd Annual Long Beach Pride Parade on Sunday, May 22nd. The Parade's theme is *Equal Rights—No More, No Less*. APAIT's contingent will dress as characters from the Quentin Tarantino movie "Kill Bill." APAIT's stance is to kill Assembly or Senate Bills that oppress the rights of gays, lesbians, bisexuals, transgenders, and, of course, people living with AIDS.

Long Beach Lesbian & Gay Pride, Inc. (LBLGP, Inc.) was established in October 1983 and produced the first annual Long Beach Lesbian & Gay Pride Festival & Parade in June of 1984. While the main project of Long Beach Lesbian & Gay Pride, Inc. is the annual Pride Parade & Festival, the organization operates year-round and sponsors other philanthropic projects. Since the begin-

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Banyan Tree Project Recognizes API's

By Michelle Morales

In the city of Mahbubnagar, India visitors will find what Indian natives have called their own for more than 700 years—the Banyan Tree known as Pillalamarri. Pillalamarri, whose name is derived from the local dialect's words for "children" and "banyan tree," is more than seven centuries old and covers an area of more than three acres. Pillalamarri has offered its loyal Indian caretakers shade from the sweltering sun, shelter from everyday troubles, a place of meditation, and even inspiration for Islamic and Hindu folklore. It is the Banyan Tree that national API HIV leaders have chosen to represent the first ever National API HIV/AIDS Awareness Day in the United States.

APAIT and five national partners will launch the *Banyan Tree Project* on Thursday, May 19th, 2005. The Banyan Tree Project is the first annual National API HIV/AIDS Awareness Day in the United States. Through public service announcements, community events, API mainstream role models and religious leaders, as well as API at risk for or infected with HIV, the Banyan Tree Project will promote healthy images and positive attitudes towards the HIV affected and

Like the banyan tree, the Tree Project hopes to break new ground in the HIV/AIDS affected and infected community by intertwining the old with the new—old deep-rooted cultural beliefs with new and ever-expanding ideas of acceptance and equality.

infected API community. For a complete list of the Banyan Tree Project's national partners, please visit the website www.banyantreeproject.org.

APAIT will host a luncheon at the Empress Pa-

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agency news

It's an auspicious start for 2005. Lots of change and lots of good news...

Congratulations to **Michelle Morales**, who was accepted into Master's programs for social work both at UCLA and UC Berkeley. Michelle, who was originally from the Bay Area, will be returning to the region of fog and bridges by late June. Well, actually—we're trading off, since new Men's Health Educator **Brad Estrin**, who moved from the Bay Area, started in March.

In addition to being resident



beef-cake and ex-contestant on *American Idol*, Brad welcomes your inquiries into APAIT's newly inaugurated Men's Program (see right).

Sayonara, Miss **Linda Akatsu**, our Case Manager. After duking it out in southern California for all of her twenty-something years, she's taking a bite out of the Big Apple when she transfers to another metropolis in early June.

UCLA's taking **George Liou** into its social work program for Fall 2005. George will pursue his Master's degree and, while at UCLA, probably win over everyone with his toothy grin. Congratulations!

Rynn (pronounced just like RYAN but more special) **Chua** also joins APAIT in May 2005 as the Youth Health Educator. Rynn recently completed his degree from Cal State Long Beach and served as a counselor for pregnant teenage mothers at St. Anne's.

Beginning with the hiring of APAIT's new prevention staff in March, the fate of its future programming was determined by the starting of two new energetic staff: Lillian Chu and Brad Estrin. Shirley Bushnell started one month later. In collaboration with the Foothill AIDS Project from the Inland Empire, they will work to implement new ideas to eradicate the spread of HIV in at-risk populations. All programs will incorporate one-on-one counseling and community-based social events, with the ultimate goal of promoting behavior change. Here's a run-down of their programs' new goals and solutions:



STAR: Serving Transgenders At Risk (STAR) program wants to empower transgender women with knowledge and skills necessary to make informed choices regarding individual beliefs and behavior to prevent HIV infection. Transgender women estimated HIV infection rates range from 14% to 28%, and transgender women of color are particularly at risk.

HERO: H.E.R.O. (HIV Endeavor for Reaching Out) is designed to provide social support networks, empowerment and education for men seeking to educate themselves about "at-risk" behavior and HIV. H.E.R.O. hopes to address the growing concern between Crystal

Meth use and its connection to HIV. Future events include "3MV," a weekend long retreat for men "at-risk," "Crystal Town," a quarterly rap group on Crystal Meth and HIV, and "Let's Talk About It," a series of informal rap groups on sex and relationships.

WONDER WOMEN: APAIT is launching its sparkling new women's program, **WONDER WOMEN**, this May. The program will offer a series of fresh, exciting workshops that will enlighten and energize attitudes about women and HIV. **WONDER WOMEN** adds a focus on educating and empowering Asian Pacific Islander women to challenge gender-power imbalances and take HIV prevention into their own hands.

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ning, LBLGP, Inc. has spearheaded a toy drive for disabled and disadvantaged children. In 1994 alone, the toy drive collected over 1500 toys distributed in cooperation with Catholic Charities.

Over the past several years, the Long Beach Lesbian & Gay Pride Festival & Parade has become the 3rd largest in the nation, now attracting over 125,000 participants over the two-day celebration. More than 200 marching groups and floats comprise the parade entries since 1995, representing various religious, human service, governmental and social organizations.

We Love to Walk, Especially with Banners!



On April 23, more than 15 staff and volunteers from APAIT and Foothill AIDS Project went to Cal State Dominguez Hills to walk with other socially conscientious individuals in the annual 5K Walk to benefit minority women and children. Sponsored by Congresswoman Juanita Millender-McDonald and the African American Health Forum, this is the fourth year APAIT has benefited from and done the approximately three-mile stride. APAIT's team alone raised \$1700 for the cause. Women's Walk APAIT team coordinator Lillian Chu (second from left) jokes with John Caranto here.

Aggressive HIV strain found in NY By Marie Auyong

In early February, reports of an HIV "superstrain" came out of the New York City Health Department. The subject in question, a 40-something gay man, had a strain of HIV which advanced within four months into full-blown AIDS. Since then, the individual's health has only responded to one of 21 available drugs. Not since the early 80's, when HIV/AIDS was first named, had medical officials seen someone deteriorate so quickly. Soon thereafter, many public health officials were careful to state that although there wasn't necessarily a new "superstrain" on the loose, more research had to be conducted to determine the virus' severity in terms of its progression and extent of infection.

Thusfar, the response by AIDS social service providers has been complicated. The New York Times announced the discovery about the virus with the headline, "Report on new form of HIV brings alarm, not surprise." This lack of surprise was partially fueled by an expectation on the part of researchers that a drug-resistant strain of HIV could emerge. Social service providers had

What this [the new HIV] means for the gay community, however, is a potential crisis that is *must* actively confront... HIV's history is a narrative that continues to dominate gay culture and consciousness, but less so in the last 15 years with the advent of life-prolonging HIV treatments.

also began to document the problem of "safer sex message burn-out," in addition to the rising role that crystal meth plays in risk factors for HIV. Initially, however, some activists considered starting quasi-vigilante efforts—including disrupting Internet chat arranging for sexual liaisons for example, or confronting participants at sex parties.

What this means for the gay community, however, is a potential crisis that it *must* actively confront. While worldwide the HIV pandemic is generally caused through heterosexual sexual transmission and intravenous needle sharing, in the United States HIV has largely been limited to MSM (men who have sex with men) behaviors. HIV's history is a narrative that continues to dominate gay culture and consciousness, but less so in the past 15 years with the advent of

life-prolonging HIV treatments. Social service providers have already documented the rise of sexually transmitted infections (STI's) in young people 18-24—who never had to live through the onslaught of deaths their older mentors did—to indicate the decrease in urgency they might feel about the disease.

Furthermore, with a new strain that is still so little understood, and in a political climate that has been—let us say, slightly less than enthusiastically supportive—of research in traditionally marginalized populations (drug users, sex workers, transgenders, and gay men), no one can predict what kind of backlash could occur towards the gay community.

While it probably will not do much good to panic about an isolated case of a drug-resistant HIV (about which we still know very little), these

investigations are significant because they point to the future of HIV prevention and treatment: that is, addressing the underlying causes of STI's. Today this means crystal meth usage, the culture of partying, and public health campaigns which apparently don't register on the

radar as strongly as they used to. The Centers for Disease Control have also initiated new prevention methods focusing on positive individuals, which emphasize testing and partner notifications/counseling. For HIV-positive peoples, this also means a call-to-action to protect themselves and their partners from superinfections.

One of the major continuing challenges of HIV work is preventing a disease which carries weighty stigmas, both for its affected populations and transmission methods. How to effectively address the socio-economic-physical causes of HIV in a compassionate manner, while maintaining the assertive overtone needed in prevention messages, requires a delicate balance. In the face of this aggressive strain, APAIT will have to adjust once again.

agency news

This is **Shirley Bushnell**, leader of APAIT's new STAR program. An advocate of transgender rights for many years, Shirley has been researching and working on transgender health issues. Independently of APAIT, she was just awarded the Connie Norman Award and will be accepting



it at this year's Christopher Street West in mid-June.

Noel Alunit, whose first novel *Letters to Montgomery Clift* already won the Violet Quill, keeps us all expectant now that his second book has been picked up by a publisher. His latest authorial adventures include a spread about his trip to the Philippines in the May/June edition of *Out Traveler* magazine, as well as teaching a course on creative writing through UCLA extension.

She was once a Peer Health Educator, and now she runs the department. **Lillian Chu**, recent UCLA graduate (we traded her for George Liou), now runs the Women's Program. See what happens when you get sucked into volunteering?



Finally, a warm welcome to the members and communities of our partner organization Foothill AIDS Project. We'll introduce our collaborators to you in the next edition of PULSE.