

local news

Judy Shepard no longer an 'accidental activist'

Mother of Matthew Shepard speaks out telling the world, 'It's time to grow up.'

By JEN MABE

FAIRFAX, Va. — By now, most gay men and lesbians know who Judy Shepard is. Since her son Matthew's brutal murder in 1998, Shepard has been traveling the country speaking to audiences about ending hate crimes, passing gay rights legislation and educating society.

Shepard spoke Oct. 4 to a standing-room only crowd at George Mason University's Harris Theater, ushering in "End Violence Week." The event took place just days before the Oct. 13 four-year anniversary of the attack that led to her son's death.

"Ladies and gentlemen, the reason that I'm here, the reason that I travel the country to speak to audiences, is because I don't want this to happen anymore," Shepard said, after reading the victim impact statement that she presented in open court at Russell Henderson's sentencing hearing.

The statement, filled with horrifying details of her son's murder, gave the audience a highly personal view of her son in an effort to connect them to what she had to say.

"We don't know how to hate or why we hate when we're born," Shepard said. "I think that it's a learned behavior, and we



At an appearance in Fairfax, Va. just days before the four-year anniversary of her son's murder, **Judy Shepard** remembered Matthew Shepard, and called on gays to learn from his death. (Photo by Jen Mabe)

learn it from all parts of our society. ... It's a choice. We learn how to do it. We can learn how not to do it."

At the appearance, part of a book fair at George Mason's Fairfax campus, Shepard suggested ways that gays can bring an end to hate, bigotry and bias. For Shepard, it all boils down to respect. Respect for ourselves and respect for others. And it boils down to society allowing everyone to be who he or she is, "who we are born to be," she said.

"It's time to grow up," she said. "It's time to move on. It's time to be a society that welcomes and accepts everyone for who they are."

'Throw-away kids'

As National Coming Out Day, Oct. 11, arrives, Shepard reminded gays to again say, "We're here."

"Since Matt died and I have been doing this, I've discovered a very disturbing aspect of our country," Shepard said. "And that is throw-away children. Children's whose homes are no longer open to them, whose parents reject them."

She shared statistics that say 13 "throw-away children" die on the streets every day because they were rejected by families, friends and schools and were forced to live on the streets, some of them because they are gay.

"I know that Russell Henderson's parents and Aaron McKinney's parents write to them, visit them, care about them, miss them," Shepard said. "They're murderers who will be in prison for the rest of their lives. Does that make being gay worse than being a murderer? Food for thought."

"The loss of Matthew, the senseless violence, to give him up voluntarily?" she asked. "Not in my lifetime. No sir. I always thought ... the job for parents was to love, nurture, respect your children, no matter what."

During her stay in the area, Shepard joined playwright Moisés Kaufman, author of "The Laramie Project," and others Oct. 8 for a panel discussion following a viewing of the movie on the University of Maryland campus.

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Clinic to decide whether to cancel 2003 AIDS Walk

AIDS WALK, continued from Page 1

said. The yield to the agency was less than one cent of every dollar raised by walk participants.

This year's walk was expected to generate "considerably more" in net proceeds, but Cover declined to disclose further details, saying the clinic would not release final figures until late this week or early next week.

Before the event, clinic organizers said they hoped to raise \$840,000 in gross receipts from the 2002 AIDS Walk, and expenses were expected to come in at \$540,000. At that rate, Whitman-Walker would receive only 35 cents of every dollar raised, a percentage that is below the 50 to 65 percent that is considered the minimum amount a fund-raising event should yield to the beneficiary.

The AIDS Walk reached its peak in 1997, when between 25,000 and 30,000 people participated in the event. In 1998, net proceeds reached \$1.6 million, or 74 percent of the total amount raised by walk participants. In 1999, the clinic received less than half that amount, \$755,896, which represented 49 percent of total AIDS walk donations. The decline continued in 2000, when the

walk yielded \$123,990, which was 14 percent of the total raised.

The number of walkers has similarly declined, and clinic officials have said they were devastated over the poor turnout last year, when record-low participation may have been caused largely to bad weather and the aftermath of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

AIDS ride cloud?

Although the terrorist attacks may have affected last year's event, clinic officials have said the gradual decline in participation after 1997 appears to be due to a number of factors. The apparent confusion among some members of the public between the AIDS Walk, which the clinic produces itself, and the Washington, D.C. AIDS Ride, a marathon bicycle fund-raising event benefiting Whitman-Walker but produced by the financially troubled and controversial Los Angeles for-profit firm Pallotta TeamWorks.

Whitman-Walker and Food & Friends, another location AIDS service group, ended their association with Pallotta TeamWorks earlier this year.

Food & Friends is organizing its own

AIDS ride, called Tour d' Friends, next year while Whitman-Walker chose not to participate, opting instead to recoup the funds it received from the AIDS ride through an expanded corporate and foundation donor program.

But the flagging U.S. economy and the decline in the stock market have resulted in cutbacks by corporate donors and foundations, placing Whitman-Walker in a precarious financial situation, according to Cover and A. Cornelious Baker, executive director of the clinic.

Clinic officials have said an overall decline in news media's attention to AIDS, along with reports that improved drug therapies have greatly curtailed AIDS-related deaths, has also been a factor in the decline in participation for the AIDS walk, Cover said.

"We are forming a task force to look at the future of the walk," Cover said. "We will bring the recommendations of the task force to our board in December, and the board will decide whether this will be continued next year."

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