



A PUBLICATION FOR THE FRIENDS
AND SUPPORTERS OF THE
BOSTON LIVING CENTER

MEALS LIFE

A Celebration of



Thanksgiving Dinner

FALL 2008



A Celebration of Life This Thanksgiving

The Boston Living Center continues a proud tradition this year by holding the annual Celebration of Life Thanksgiving Dinner at the Hynes Convention Center on Tuesday, November 25th. The event offers a free delicious Thanksgiving feast to over 600 HIV+ people and their families. This year, long-time BLC supporter Liz Walker will return as host along with the many celebrity servers – including Mayor Tom Menino – and amazing volunteers who make this event successful.

The BLC community is built on a tradition of gathering together over meals to honor life, build relationships with each other, and remember those who have supported the community over the years. Holidays can be a difficult time for those living with a chronic illness. With an emphasis on gathering with friends and family and celebrating all there is to be thankful for, this time of year can feel isolating to someone living with HIV. For those living with the virus depression is often a constant companion. The stress of maintaining strict medication regimes, dealing with side effects, navigating the grating stigmas that still plague the HIV+ community – not to mention the toll all of this all takes on work and personal lives – are just some of the reasons people living with HIV can find themselves struggling with depression and feelings of isolation. Each year the Celebration of Life dinner, through the generous donations of time, food and decorations, helps to strengthen the spirits of those living with HIV/AIDS.



Through sponsorship of the Celebration of Life Thanksgiving Dinner, the BLC raises money to support all of our programs throughout the year. The Hynes Convention Center is transformed from a big empty hall to a bustling and energetic party. To see our members and their friends and family dressed to the nines enjoying an amazing party and full service is unbelievably enjoyable. All too often these folks live on the margins, made to feel small and less than they are by the larger world. Their lives pass by ignored. Well not on this night! As in the everyday operation of the BLC, the Celebration of Life Dinner lifts up the lives of those living with HIV/AIDS, celebrating and honoring them. The fun and festive nature of the dinner – dancing is encouraged – always brings out the joyous spirit. The dinner will include entertainment from local musicians and HIV+ performers, ensuring a good time for all in attendance.

The Celebration of Life Thanksgiving Dinner can't happen without volunteers. This year individuals and teams of volunteers will be able to take part in the TIPS (Thanksgiving is People Serving) Program. Volunteers collect their "tips" in advance from family, friends, neighbors, employers and co-workers. The tips will go to assist the BLC in programs and services throughout the year. The top individual TIPS fundraiser will receive two round-trip airline tickets courtesy of JetBlue Airways! And the top team will receive a full-course dinner at one of Boston's finest restaurants.

We trust that the Celebration of Life will be full of laughter, hope, and of course giving thanks for the generous community support shown to the BLC and its members throughout the year!



BOSTON LIVING CENTER'S

A Celebration of Life Thanksgiving Dinner

Hynes Convention Center • November 25th, 2008

BLC Member Spotlight:

Peer Advocate and Friend Donna G.

For Donna G. life at the BLC comes down to this: "I love the people; I love the staff. They support me in everything I do."

Donna has been coming to the BLC since 2000. A case manager recommended to Donna that she check out the BLC as a good place to get peer support and meet new people. "At first I was leery

of coming," said Donna. "There weren't very many other women." But after only a few months as a member, Donna became more

involved. She started to meet people and see familiar faces each time she came to the Center. Donna joined the Women's Support Group, a group she would later go on to facilitate.

Before the BLC Donna was a volunteer at The Dimock Center, facilitating a group that organized community events, including the annual AIDS Walk Boston. In fact, it was Dimock that recommended the BLC for Donna.

Three years ago Donna applied and was accepted as a Peer Advocate at the BLC. "When I first came to the BLC, I had a buddy who had been a member for a long time. He offered me support and explained a lot." Donna's buddy experience was instrumental in Donna's pursuing the Peer Advocate program, for members



that want to give back to the Center, gain job and leadership skills, and earn a stipend. "I want to learn more so I can help people more," she said. Peer Advocates help new members and the newly diagnosed adjust to the BLC, get support and connect with different services. For many people, just walking in the doors of BLC takes courage. For some it is their first experience of being open about their HIV status with other people. Peers like Donna are a crucial part of welcoming and helping people face the stigma of HIV they have internalized and become actively involved in the community through significant relationships with others in the same boat. "Anytime they need help, I'm there," said Donna. "I love it! I can't wait to come to work."

Donna has seen more women coming into the BLC over the years and worked to welcome them with programs designed for women, such as the Women's Support Group, Ladies Night (the Women's Dinner), the Women's Luncheon and special events. Donna works on all these projects and encourages other women to get involved as participants or leaders.

Donna helps spread the word about BLC programs and services in her larger community. "I tell people it's a safe and comfortable space they can come to meet new people and get support," she said. "The supervisors and staff are my 2nd family," said Donna. "I'm happy to see all my friends when I come in."

Donna not only receives much needed support but she is able to do the same for others. The rewards for her are immense. "I'm happy to give back, after all I've received from the Boston Living Center."

Message from the Chair of the BLC Board

In 2009, The Boston Living Center will celebrate its 20th anniversary, an amazing milestone for our members, volunteers, staff, donors, and community partners. For the past ten of those years, Cathy Morales led the Center in expanding its presence and services to those living with HIV/AIDS. This September we said goodbye to Cathy, wishing her well on the next stage of her life in the Washington,



D.C. area. Cathy's amazing contributions to the BLC, however, will not be forgotten. During Cathy's time the Center received its largest single gift – \$500,000 from the Opler Foundation – and became the first AIDS Service Organization in the

Northeast to implement the Learning Immune Function Enhancement (L.I.F.E.) Program. This program has taken off, enriching the offerings here at the BLC in an invaluable way.

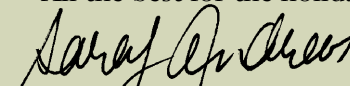
While we were sad to say goodbye to Cathy, we are also fortunate to have Valerie Tebbetts to step into the role of Interim Executive Director. Valerie was a member of the staff from 2000 through 2004 and returned in 2007 as the Director of Finance and Administration. It is with confidence and gratitude that we welcome Valerie into this interim position. Her enthusiasm and years of experience and leadership are proving to be cherished assets to the BLC during this time of growth and transition.

We are especially pleased to see the Center grow and expand its commitment of care for the diversity of people living with HIV/AIDS. In October, our Meals Program began its expansion by offering additional dinners each week. The new Wednesday and Thursday night meals will bring with them more programming and access to services for BLC members. We are thrilled to see the BLC Comedy Club Connection take off on the 2nd Thursday of each month and to enjoy Soul Food Salon once a month instead of once every three months.

On November 25th, the BLC will host the annual Celebration of Life Thanksgiving Dinner. This unique event offers our members a chance to celebrate their growth, health, relationships, and community in a space that is fun and festive. The occasion to dress up, be waited on, enjoy gourmet hors d'oeuvres, laugh and dance with friends and family is something of a remarkable treat for members of the HIV+ community. Dancing, laughing and high spirits for all are the most enduring characteristics of the dinner as they remind us of the abundance of life and hope there is among those living with HIV/AIDS and their supporters. I invite you to join us in this joyful and life-affirming event in whatever way you are moved to participate. The event is always in need of volunteers, financial donations and sponsorship. You can learn more about how to contribute by visiting our website or giving us a call.

As we move into 2009 all of us at The Boston Living Center are looking forward to continued success in our mission of building healthier lives for the HIV/AIDS community.

All the best for the holiday season.


Sara Andrews
Chair of the Board

Shop at Whole Foods to Support the Boston Living Center!

We know you're busy with holiday shopping, plans, and activities. If you shop at Whole Foods Market, there's an easy way to support our work at the BLC. Throughout November, at any of the 18 area Whole Foods Markets, we invite you to buy a meal for someone living with HIV/AIDS. At checkout, you can purchase a coupon to support the BLC Meals Program. The coupons – \$3.50 for a lunch and \$5.00 for a dinner – will provide a warm, nutritious and of course delicious meal for a BLC member.



The BLC is very thankful for our partnership with Whole Foods Markets. So as we gather with friends and family to give thanks around wonderful meals, we invite you to help people living with HIV/AIDS to do the same. Participating stores are located in Andover, Bedford, Bellingham, Boston (Brighton, Charles River Plaza and Symphony), Cambridge (Central Square, Fresh Pond, and River Street), Framingham, Hingham, Medford, Newton, Newtonville, Swampscott, Wayland, Wellesley, and Woburn.

The Art of Living 2009 Desk Calendar

The artwork of talented Boston Living Center members is again featured in the Art of Living desk calendar. This full color calendar exemplifies the talent and creative expression of BLC members. Plus, each calendar sold helps support art classes for BLC members!

You can order your 2009 Art of Living Calendar for \$10 by calling the BLC at 617-236-1012 x 256 or on our website, www.bostonliving-center.org.



New Member of the BLC Board: Craig Robbins

The staff and board of the BLC are pleased to welcome long time BLC supporter and friend Craig Robbins to the Board of Directors.

In the late 1980's and early 1990's Craig lost many friends to AIDS. He was living in Connecticut at the time and like many people didn't know what to make of this new threat to his community. Eighteen years ago Craig moved to Boston for work and not long after relocating he began to support the BLC. "Everything about the Center is comfort and warmth; the pictures of the original members, the arts and crafts, the delicious meals."

Craig's involvement began through Dinnerfest, an annual benefit for the BLC where restaurants donate meals which supporters can bid on; others host dinner parties at their homes. Craig's first house party was hosted by Frank Ribaud. "It's a great way to have a party: celebrating with friends for a great cause." Eventually Craig was asked to become co-chair of Dinnerfest, which he managed for three years.



Earlier this year when Cathy Morales, former BLC Executive Director, called Craig to invite him to join the board he couldn't refuse. After so many years of supporting the BLC Craig is excited to step into this new role. "This is a very welcoming board. Everyone works well together while coming from very different backgrounds."

Currently Craig is Vice President/Store Manager of Macy's Hanover Mall, and he's been with the company for 25 years. This September he helped the BLC connect with the Macy's "Shop For A Cause" fundraiser. This was a new, innovative way for the BLC to raise funds and spread the word about the Center at the same time.

Outside of work and the BLC Craig has volunteered as a Big Brother. After 8 years together, Craig's Little Brother is now a senior in high school, preparing for graduation and the next steps in his life. "I'm so proud of how he has grown up," Craig remarked.

Everyone here at the BLC is excited to have Craig join the Board of Directors. He has always been a wonderful member of the BLC community of supporters and friends.

Tom Zylicz

One of the BLC's most enthusiastic and long time volunteers, Tom is a familiar face around the dining room and friend of many here at the BLC.

Volunteers are a vital and essential part of the BLC community – giving their time, hearts and hands to help us with a variety of tasks from serving meals to making copies to cutting hair. Many of our volunteers are also members and see their involvement as a way to give back to a place that has helped them and to build positive social interaction that sustains them into their daily lives.



Tom Zylicz is one such member. Tom has been HIV+ for 20 years and for the last 10 years he has been coming to the BLC as a member and volunteer. If you eat lunch at the BLC you may know Tom from his post running the salad bar. "When I've got things on my mind it's very relaxing; I'm in a world of my own," says Tom to describe preparing the salad bar, chopping vegetables, and deciding what items will best compliment the hot meal. "Its common sense really; today is turkey so make sure to have cranberry sauce. Stuff like that."

Tom started come to the BLC on the recommendation of his doctors. They saw that Tom was such an outgoing person and thought it would help to alleviate some of the isolation and depression Tom was dealing with at the time. "I take this as a job," he says. "Michael (Bacon, Meals Program Manager) has been a wonderful and great friend. I love working in the dining room. We're all friends here."

When he's not volunteering at the BLC Tom does his best to stay active and social. In good weather Tom will hop on his bike and ride over to Cambridge or along the Charles River. On the weekends Tom will take his bike up to Rockport on the train and go for a ride. "I love it there on the water. It's so peaceful and calm."

Tom was born and raised in Cambridge where most of his family still lives. "I have an amazingly supportive family. They are always checking in on me, making sure I'm doing well and taking care of myself."

For Tom the Center is a place to socialize and remain active both important things for keeping him healthy. "I love it here. I leave everyday on a high note looking forward to coming back the next day."

State Street Foundation, Inc.

Since 2003 State Street Foundation, Inc. has generously supported the work of the Boston Living Center. In 2008, the Foundation's grant of \$35,000 help make it possible for the BLC to offer two additional dinners each week, on Wednesday and Thursday nights, starting in October.

State Street Foundation, Inc. is a non-profit corporation founded in 1977 that makes programmatic support grants to community organizations around the world. Its mission is to help support those working with the less advantaged. Grants are made in communities where State Street Bank has a presence: 30 cities in 19 countries, including Boston. The foundation is funded by State Street Bank, which donates a portion of its pre-tax profits to the foundation each year.



Because grant allocation decisions are partially made locally, State Street staff in the area are allowed input into the approval process. Who would know the issues important to the local community better than the people who live and work there? For the BLC, this means that local State Street staff value our work in the Boston area and want to see us supported.

The BLC stood out to the State Street Foundation this year when we submitted a grant application for support of expanding the meals program. The Foundation saw an opportunity to support capacity building and to see a local organization help more people, particularly low-income members.

Everyone here at the BLC is grateful for the continued generous support of State Street Foundation, Inc.

To learn more about ways to give to the BLC and about volunteer opportunities please visit our website, www.bostonlivingcenter.org or call us at 617-236-1012

Runners Ready!

BLC Running for Life Marathon Team Shapes Up for Another Year



Kevin Hourihan

For most of us, running 26.2 miles seems like a daunting challenge. Not for Kevin Hourihan, who completed this year's Boston Marathon in 4 hours, 6 minutes. Kevin participated as part of the Boston Living Center's "Running for Life" Team. So not only did he post an impressive time, his athleticism and commitment raised \$4,888 for the Boston Living Center. Now Kevin says he can't wait to do it all over again next April!

Together Kevin and the entire 2008 Running for Life team raised \$66,500 for BLC programs. And our "Buddy Program," which paired runners with BLC members, helped create friendships and understandings between people who may not otherwise have met. The runners learned from their buddies more specifi-

cally what living with HIV/AIDS is really about, enabling them to speak more passionately about why they were running.

2008 was the Boston Living Center's first year as an official charity of the Boston Marathon ®. We are proud to be the first AIDS Service Organization to be chosen to run in this prestigious race. In addition to helping raise needed funds for the BLC, the Marathon also introduces new people to our work and underscores the urgency of need for services for the Boston HIV/AIDS community.

For more information, or to donate to our team, please visit our website www.bostonlivingcenter.org/marathon.shtml or call 617-236-1012 x256.

Thanksgiving Co-Chairs

Liz Walker

A familiar face will be joining the BLC for Thanksgiving again this year. Liz Walker, acclaimed local TV news anchor and community activist, is returning as Co-Chair and host of the Celebration of Life Thanksgiving Dinner. Currently Liz is the host of Sunday with Liz Walker on WBZ-TV. Liz's face is familiar to Bostonians from her decades of work as a news anchor. But she is also known to many for her incredible work in the community. Liz

has volunteered with the BLC Meals Program and has hosted the Celebration of Life for many years. Liz is always quick to point out that while she is always happy to give back to the BLC, it is more about what she gets in return from the welcoming and supportive members and staff of the BLC that keep her coming back.



Joe Smith

When a friend asked Joe if he would come and help out with set up for a big Thanksgiving Dinner for people living with HIV/AIDS, he couldn't have guessed it would lead to years of involvement with the BLC. After that night of volunteering Joe continued to be involved in the BLC. His passion for the work and mission of the BLC comes from his excitement of being able to help out an organization serving a community he cares about. Joe has lost friends to AIDS over the years and still sees other friends struggle with their HIV status. Joe joins us this year to be a co-chair of the Celebration of Life Thanksgiving dinner, a role he is excited about taking on as another way to give to the BLC.

BOSTON LIVING CENTER

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Expansion of Meals Program Means Dinner Three Nights a Week at the BLC!

Many of you know that the Boston Living Center was founded around weekly Monday night dinners. For years HIV+ people gathered to reflect, discuss and support one another in the face of a new and frightening threat to their communities. As the disease spread and the epidemic changed, the need for services grew. In this context, the BLC was born. Since the Center's opening in 1989, the tradition of Monday night dinners has continued.

Starting the week of October 6, dinners are now being offered Monday, Wednesday and Thursday nights. "The decision to expand the dinners to three nights a week wasn't made in a vacuum; it included program staff and members. We want to improve the overall access members have to BLC services," explains Michael Bacon, Meals Program Manager. The Center's Meals Program and Member Services staff, along with the Consumer Advisory Board, agreed on the change after extended dialogue and analysis of meals utilization data. As people are living longer, healthier lives with HIV, many members cannot access services during the day because they're working, in school, or taking care of family. The hope is that more evening meals will increase access to programs and social support for a broad range of people thriving with HIV.

Member Services staff will be offering special programming for the new dinners. Dinners also offer a great opportunity for volunteers who work during the day to participate and serve at the BLC. We have a com-



Rafael Garcia, BLC Staff

mitted group of Monday night volunteers from the larger LGBT and business communities who serve dinner with pizzazz, and hope to welcome new friends and supporters as part of the expanded meals program.

Each Wednesday will feature programming to address HIV issues in a specific community: Gay and Bisexual men, African Americans, La-

tino/as and Women. The schedule will be more regular in the hopes that members will find it easier to remember. As always, the meals will be open to all members. The new dinners also include peer-led programming focused on living fully and joyfully, "Fun at the BLC". Coordinated by the BLC Consumer Advisory Board, Thursday dinner will feature entertainment and focus on socializing, laughing, and relaxing. Professional comedians, jazz musicians and singers are all being scheduled for dinners on the first and second Thursday of each month. The remaining Thursday dinners will feature Gay Movie Night and Chick Flick.

Adding dinner means Saturday Brunch will no longer be offered. Because Saturday brunch was historically attended by members along with their kids and families, the Center will continue to host family-centered Saturday activities quarterly. The next family-focused event will be the annual member Holiday Party on Saturday, December 20th.

The more access the BLC can offer to new and existing members the more successful they can be in building community, friendships and realizing full and rich lives. The BLC staff is looking forward to watching the dinners thrive and with it the lives of our members.