

AIDSWalk 2009

By Perry Junjulas

Executive Director of the Albany Damien Center and person living with AIDS since 1995

What an incredible week this has been for those of us living with HIV and AIDS. News that we are finally after 28 years making some progress towards a vaccine for HIV fills us with hope. While a truly effective vaccine may still be years away, this news is shining a light at the end of this very long dark tunnel. And if we are making some progress on a vaccine, maybe we can get closer to a cure. Every 9 ½ minutes, someone is infected with HIV. That is too many people being infected way too fast.

Today I think about how lucky I am to be here with you today – for so many of our friends living with AIDS who used to come to AIDSWalk are not here with us now. Today with the news of this progress, I stand here with other people living with AIDS – people just like yourself from all walks of life. Men, women, gay, straight, young, old, black, white, Latino – all standing together with one thing in common – we all have the hope we can find a cure.

Our hope is increased by seeing you all here today. Because of all of you, we can help the agencies and wonderful people who are helping us living better right here in our community.

To those of you who haven't had a recent HIV test – I encourage you to get one. Early treatment will save your life.

If you are HIV+, look around you here today. There is so much love and support in this room – we are truly a community who is here for those of us struggling with this disease.

I would like everyone to repeat after me

WE HAVE HOPE

That we can find a cure

That we will be there as a community for all those living with HIV and AIDS

That we all will be here next year to be there for one another.

Thank you for your hope, love and support.

Perry Junjulas resides in Albany, NY with his partner Rev. Anthony Green. He is the Executive Director of the Albany Damien Center, the Capital Region's AIDS Community Center which provides services and support for individuals and families living with HIV/AIDS, which is one of the beneficiaries of today's AIDSWalk.

Since his HIV diagnosis in 1995, Perry has worked to ensure a better quality of life for those infected and affected by HIV/AIDS here in the Capital Region. He is open about his AIDS diagnosis and can be quoted as such. He may be reached for further comment at 961-0071 or perryj@albanydamiencenter.org