

C.V.

Rich Fortenbery

Madison, Tennessee

HISTORICAL HIGHLIGHTS:

- > Registered Nurse, retired;
- > Emergency Medical Technician (EMT). retired
- > EMT Instructor and Examiner for Commonwealth of Kentucky, retired
- > Formerly Registered Lobbyist in the Tennessee General Assembly for various progressive causes and groups, and particularly for people living with HIV/AIDS
- > Founder and Original Director, Heartland CARES Clinic in Paducah, KY.

CURRENTLY:

- > Living in Nashville/Davidson County, Tennessee
- > Assisting individuals living with AIDS in providing understanding of complications of AIDS, treatment modalities and support in struggling with the physical and emotional challenges of living with advancing AIDS
- > Working to provide education regarding prevention, treatment and access to care for individuals with HIV and AIDS
- > Advocating for, participating and receiving care at the Comprehensive Care Center and Vanderbilt University Medical Center in Nashville, Tennessee. Vanderbilt is an original site of the AIDS Clinical Trials Group (ACTG). The Comprehensive Care Center also houses the Tennessee AIDS Education Center (AETC)
- > Monitoring Federal and state legislation and advocacy on behalf of access to healthcare and treatment, particularly for people living with HIV
- > Notary Public, Tennessee State at Large

Rich Fortenbery is a retired registered nurse (RN-Retired) who has been HIV+ for over 20 years without developing an AIDS diagnosis. Rich was disabled as a passenger in an automobile accident in 1995 with extensive back and other injuries, after which he was

declared disabled. At that time, HIV was a “death sentence” and only 4 drugs were available for treatment, each used alone and largely ineffective.

He had a prolonged period of recovery at his mother’s home in Paducah, Kentucky and learned over a dozen friends had apparently died of AIDS without access to care and only two physicians, both oncologists, in town would treat people with HIV at all.

Using his nursing knowledge and understanding, Fortenbery closely followed the early progression of developments in research, clinical knowledge, treatment options and modalities and the political and legislative aspects of HIV. During the governmental shutdown in 1996 and delay in reauthorizing the CARE Act scheduled for 1995, the Commonwealth of Kentucky stopped their meager services to people with HIV/AIDS under Title II and closed the state ADAP program.

This compelled Rich to become a political HIV activist in 1996 in a very conservative and largely hostile environment socially and politically. Fortenbery incorporated Heartland CARES, Inc. in Paducah, Kentucky, registered the organization as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and obtained a Ryan White Title III planning grant.

The following year, Heartland CARES received over a million dollars in a Title III operational grant, along with over \$660,000 in funding from the Department of Housing and Urban Development for housing services for people with HIV in Western Kentucky, Southern Illinois, Southwestern Missouri and Northwestern Tennessee.

“I am a thinker, dreamer and activist, not an administrator,” says Fortenbery. He located a well experienced Executive Director for the clinic who is still in that position. Once opened and operating, Rich retired from the project. Today, the Heartland CARES Clinic is a national model for the Title III program of Ryan White. After the clinic was opened Fortenbery moved to Washington, DC to work with T*II*CANN in lobbying for the Ryan White CARE Act of 2000.

“Working with T*II*CANN and Bill Arnold in particular, I learned the science, art and finesse of lobbying as well as administrative advocacy. My time with T*II*CANN gave me the background and skills to get things accomplished in bureaucracy and legislatures,” says Fortenbery.

After President Clinton signed the CARE Act of 2000, Rich moved back to his “previously adopted” home of Nashville, Tennessee in the Spring of 2000 to work on the campaign of Al Gore for President. He has been there since, working to advance the message of prevention and helping individuals with HIV as well as continuing to work for progressive HIV policy on the local, state and national levels.

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