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## Desert AIDS Project executive director David Brinkman faces the challenge.

In January, Desert AIDS Project welcomed residents to its new 80-unit Rick Weiss Apartments.

“Anybody who owns and rents a home in Southern California realizes it’s very expensive to live here. When you add a devastating illness like HIV, it brings people to the margins of homelessness,” says David Brinkman, DAP’s executive director. The housing, adjacent to the nonprofit’s Palm Springs headquarters, gives HIV/AIDS victims ready access to 27 service programs, including medical care and medicine, case management, therapy, food, and vocational training.



Prior to joining DAP in August 2006, Brinkman headed My Friend’s Place, a resource center in Los Angeles for homeless youth. He continues his involvement with that nonprofit, as well as the Liberty Hill Foundation, bridging the gap between privilege and poverty in Los Angeles. More recently, he committed his energies to Grassroots Junior Tennis, a Coachella Valley charity providing after-school athletics to at-risk youth.

Brinkman has followed the nonprofit career path since he graduated from school in the '90s when HIV/AIDS “was taking many of my peers.” He first worked for the Cascade AIDS Project in Oregon, where he helped clients prepare for the end of their lives. Then, HIV meant a lifespan of three to five years, he says; medical advances have increased that lifespan to 24 years.

While that’s a positive factor, it underlies what Brinkman calls DAP’s greatest challenge.

“Fifty percent of new HIV [cases] in the United States are youths under 24. They perceive HIV as a manageable disease,” he says. “It is my challenge to garner enough community support to provide education that inspires youth to protect themselves and realize HIV is still a devastating disease.”

Brinkman emphasizes that HIV and AIDS are more than gay issues, with more women and children being diagnosed.

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“As the demographics of the disease continue to expand, I will expand our programs and missions,” he says, noting that he is working to assess the Coachella Valley’s needs to prepare a “strategic direction” for DAP’s next five years.

“We serve 30 new clients every 30 days,” Brinkman says. And that’s what makes the Steve Chase Humanitarian Awards black-tie gala an important event to the community.

“It celebrates our agency’s founder, Steve Chase, who dedicated his professional and personal energy to establishing the Desert AIDS Project,” Brinkman says. “It inspires 1,700 philanthropists in attendance to continue the fight through their contributions. And, being the largest black-tie event of the season, it speaks volumes about our community’s dedication to people living with HIV/AIDS.”

The gala raises about \$900,000, which provides medical care, education, and social services for 2,700 DAP clients.

— Janice Kleinschmidt

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