

Panel discusses art exhibition

Mountain State AIDS Network, artists collaborate to bring World AIDS Day 'Close to Home'

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The emotional, medical and artistic issues involved with the Close to Home art exhibition on AIDS were discussed by a panel Thursday night at the Creative Arts Center.

The exhibit is a collaborative effort of the Mountain State AIDS Network and artists. MSAN matched an artist with a person with AIDS for the project.

The exhibition began on Nov. 28 and will last until Jan. 27.

Iain Machell, who is the exhibition curator, a University Assistant Professor of Art and an artist, said he wanted to do the exhibition in support of World AIDS Day.

The exhibition is also a way to display artistic, educational and community objectives, he said.

Machell said artists whose art showed social issues were picked to work with clients from MSAN. The exhibition will have immediate social impact that will help educate people about the disease and bring the emotion of AIDS close to home, he said.

The finished artwork shows the effort of the artists and clients of MSAN. Audio-taped conversations accompanied the artwork, even personal items used from the MSAN participants were included as the artists got close to the clients, Machell said.

Thomas Waters, one of the artists for the project, said art has been a way to raise money for AIDS as a commodity.

Art about AIDS can effect lives; it can even change them, he said.

Waters said the AIDS Project Quilt is the most important piece of artwork for AIDS awareness.

The first time he saw it, he said he was overwhelmed.

Waters has been working with the AIDS issue in art for seven years.

He has, and continues to, work with his own blood as well as condoms, obituaries and coffins in his artwork. He also uses poetry in his artwork and encourages people to write on his pieces.

AIDS affects all of us, he said, noting that it is not just a gay disease. This disease also demands that people learn to give unconditional love to all human beings, he said.

For his display at the CAC, Waters had people with the HIV virus write on pages of the Bible.

Roger Banks, a developmental advising specialist at

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Roger Banks
HIV/AIDS Activist

the University Academic Service Center and AIDS activist, was a collaborator for the exhibit.

"On May of this year, my life was turned upside down," Banks said.

He said his reason for being at the panel discussion was to connect a face with the disease. He maintains that his life is not over and he does not intend to die for a very long time.

Waters said this exhibition has allowed him to clarify what he wants for himself. He also said the experience has helped him live with the disease in a more effective manner.

By having the HIV virus, Waters said, he learned the importance of being a human.

"I am no different from anyone else in this room," he said, "You could become me."

Ann Simon, a health educator at Morgantown High School and Vice President of MSAN, said as she walked down the ramp into the gallery she had mixed feelings about the exhibit—a feeling as if she were attending a funeral and a feeling of the celebration of life.

As an educator, Simon said she did not want to teach a child and find out five years from now they have become infected.

Dr. Melanie Fisher, Interim Section Chief for Infectious Disease and Associate Professor at the University School of Medicine, said the purpose for World AIDS Day is twofold.

One purpose is to heighten awareness and the other is to promote cooperation.

The theme for the 1994 World AIDS Day was "AIDS in the Family." Family is defined as a group of persons linked together by trust, mutual support and destiny, Fisher said.

Since the virus that causes AIDS has been identifiable, 17 million people have been infected.

Each day, an additional 6,000 persons realize they are HIV positive. Ten million children are orphaned because their parents died of HIV.

Kristina Olson, panel moderator and curator of the Mesaros Galleries, said bringing this varied group together was a special aspect of the exhibit.

A member of the audience asked the panel how long it would take before the disease was no longer associated with shame.

Simon hoped that the next generation would have a better understanding, a new open-mindedness. A change of opinion is coming, she said.

Following the panel discussion, a theater production was performed by Jerry McGoingle.