



**RED RIBBON
FOUNDATION**

Contact:	Nicole Hazard Executive Director Red Ribbon Foundation 270 Greenwich Avenue Greenwich, CT 06830 (203) 861-2775 nhazard@redribbonfoundation.org
----------	--

Press Release

Greenwich-based Red Ribbon Foundation promotes awareness of World AIDS Day at local schools

Greenwich, CT, December 8, 2009: The Red Ribbon Foundation (RRF), a Greenwich-based non-profit organization committed to winning the war against AIDS, hosted noted AIDS activist Regan Hofmann and local congressman Jim Himes at Greenwich High School last Friday. In recognition of World AIDS Day, Hofmann and Himes spoke with over 300 students about the impact of HIV on communities like Greenwich, as well as ways young people can get involved in the fight against AIDS. Established in 1988 by the World Health Organization, December 1st is internationally recognized as a day when governments, national AIDS programs, faith organizations, community organizations, and individuals can raise awareness and focus attention on the global AIDS epidemic.

Over a million Americans are estimated to be living with HIV. Worldwide an estimated 33 million people are said to be living with HIV. In Fairfield County alone, nearly 4,000 individuals are living with HIV/AIDS and last year over 100 new cases were reported locally, three of which were children

Ms. Hofmann, editor-in-chief of POZ Magazine and POZ.com, chose to share her HIV status with the world in 2006, after hiding the disease from all but close family and friends for 10 years. A graduate of Trinity College with a long career as in communications field, Ms. Hofmann has become an internationally recognized spokesperson for those living with HIV, appearing on Good Morning America, Oprah, CNN, as well as several print media outlets such as New York Magazine and Vogue. She recently authored a book, *I Have Something to Tell You: A Memoir*, about her courageous journey to disclose her status to the world, hoping that her story would help fight the stigma around HIV/AIDS.

Ms. Hofmann told Greenwich High School students that by the mid-1990s, “no one thought that a straight woman could get HIV”; she contracted the disease through unprotected sex during a stable relationship with a partner who was unaware he was infected. Starting antiretroviral medication almost immediately after contracting the disease, Hofmann has led a life without medical complications. “I’ve come to understand that I didn’t do anything that the majority of adults have done at one point, but I was just unlucky,” Ms. Hofmann told students. “HIV does not discriminate. Everyone who is sexually active should be tested regularly.”

Representative Himes has taken the need for more access to HIV funding to Capitol Hill. In October, he helped pass legislation to provide life-saving care, treatment, and support services to nearly half a million Americans living with HIV and AIDS. The Ryan White HIV/AIDS Treatment Extension Act makes vital investments in research and care to ensure that Americans living with HIV and AIDS can maintain the highest quality of life as we strive to find a cure. He underscored the need for all of us to talk to our representatives in Congress and locally to ensure that those with the disease get access to the services and mediations they need to be well.

Echoing his longtime friend Ms. Hofmann, Himes' word of the day was prevention: "It costs \$20,000 to \$30,000 per year to live with this disease on ARV [anti-retroviral medication]....good education and good prevention is a lot cheaper." Representative Himes gave the students a call to action: "there are over a quarter of a million people out there who have [HIV] and don't know it. Your generation could eliminate this disease or be riddled with it."

Later that day, Ms. Hofmann joined approximately 40 students from Brunswick School and Greenwich Academy, in Greenwich Academy's Black Box Theatre for a frank discussion about the transmission of the disease and promotion of basic health practices: "You put a helmet on when you ride a horse. You keep bandaids available for when you get a cut. Why is it different for condoms? We should all be prepared."

The Red Ribbon Foundation's program in support of World AIDS Day will culminate on December 11th with *AID for AIDS*, a fundraiser dance at Arch Street Teen Center in Greenwich. Over 300 local students are expected to attend.

The Red Ribbon Foundation raises money to fight AIDS through several fundraising events held each year. The proceeds of these events are then awarded as grants to organizations that demonstrate results as well as promising ideas for preventing the spread of AIDS. Red Ribbon's grantmaking priorities are prevention education programs for high-risk individuals, cutting-edge research to eradicate the disease, and assistance programs for those living with HIV/AIDS. Red Ribbon, founded in 1994, has given over \$2 million to HIV/AIDS organizations worldwide.

For more information about the Red Ribbon Foundation, visit www.redribbonfoundation.org.