



AIDS RESOURCE CENTER OF WISCONSIN

*Excellence in HIV Health Care*

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**For immediate release**

## **AIDS Resource Center of Wisconsin Announces 2013 AIDS Leadership Award Winners**

Milwaukee... Michael McCleary, an HIV activist from Eau Claire, Nita Soref, a philanthropist from Milwaukee, and Diverse and Resilient, a leading HIV prevention organization, are all being recognized by the AIDS Resource Center of Wisconsin (ARCW) for their indelible contributions to the fight against AIDS in Wisconsin. Together, these three outstanding AIDS Leadership Award winners will be recognized at the annual Make A Promise spring gala, dinner and auction to be held at 5:30 pm on April 27, 2013 at the Potawatomi Casino.

“Michael, Nita and Diverse and Resilient have each left their outstanding mark on Wisconsin’s response to the AIDS epidemic. In their own way, each of them has made sure Wisconsin remains a national leader in the fight against AIDS, demonstrating how to proactively and compassionately address HIV in our communities,” ARCW President and CEO Mike Gifford said. “ARCW is proud to stand arm-in-arm with these outstanding leaders and is honored to recognize their contributions in what will be an incredible evening.”

This year’s Courage Award winner, is Michael McCleary of Eau Claire, Wisconsin. Recognizing the need for enhanced services for people facing HIV/AIDS in rural areas and smaller cities early in the epidemic, McCleary organized HIV patients and worked with public health leaders in Eau Claire to transition HIV prevention, care and treatment services to a private, non-profit organization dedicated solely to the fight against AIDS.. This organization would eventually merge with ARCW.

After this new organization in Eau Claire was developed, McCleary became a regular, long-term volunteer providing HIV education and outreach throughout Western Wisconsin, working in the ARCW food pantry and speaking to agencies, schools, companies and others about living with HIV. Today, McCleary remains steadfast in his dedication to improving the lives of people living with HIV and truly exemplifies courage.

“Early in the AIDS epidemic, there were not a lot of options for HIV services in northwestern Wisconsin. However, I saw what was available for patients in Milwaukee and Minneapolis and committed myself to make sure people with AIDS in Eau Claire could get the same level and quality of treatment. I wanted to make sure all patients have access to the best possible services available,” McCleary said.

Nita Soref of Milwaukee is being recognized with the 2013 Philanthropy Award for her unwavering support of AIDS Walk Wisconsin – the state’s largest fundraiser for HIV prevention, care and treatment services – and other fundraisers supporting the fight against AIDS. Soref began participating in AIDS Walk Wisconsin 22 years ago and has donated \$128,420 for HIV prevention, care and treatment.

“When I’m asked ‘why get involved in the fight against AIDS,’ I respond, ‘it’s not why, it’s why not!’ There are so many people living with HIV who are in need of health care and medications.” Soref said. “I participate in AIDS Walk Wisconsin every year because it’s important to make sure everyone living with HIV has the chance to live.”

Since its founding in 1995, Leadership Award winner Diverse and Resilient has developed into a leading voice and agent for change by supporting lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people in Wisconsin. In addition to working toward the healthy development of LGBT people, Diverse and Resilient is delivering thought-provoking and attitude-changing programs that will reduce stigma and discrimination against LGBT individuals while also integrating HIV counseling, testing and referral services into all it does.

President and CEO, Gary Hollander, said in learning of the Leadership Award, "Diverse and Resilient is honored by this recognition. Our focus to end HIV is not done with recognition in mind; we simply want to address the private crises associated with HIV transmission and reduce the public cost of lost lives. An award from one of our most important community partners is a valued surprise."

To turn around the alarming increases in new HIV infections among young African American gay and bisexual men, Diverse and Resilient is leading the way in developing and carrying out effective peer, group and community HIV interventions that will help save lives. With its deep connections to LGBT individuals from across the socio-economic and cultural landscape of Wisconsin, Diverse and Resilient is providing the leadership necessary to help turn the tide of the AIDS epidemic.

#### **About Make A Promise**

Make A Promise is the annual formal gala and auction fundraiser supporting ARCW. The event attracts 1,000 community and business leaders, philanthropists and friends of ARCW for an evening of fine cuisine, stellar entertainment, premier silent and live auctions, awards and dancing - all while raising critical funds for the fight against AIDS. Taking inspiration from *The Great Gatsby*, “The Promise is Roaring” is the event’s theme, recalling the glitz and glamour of a bygone era.

#### **About the AIDS Resource Center of Wisconsin**

The AIDS Resource Center of Wisconsin is home to the ARCW Medical Center - Wisconsin's largest and fastest growing HIV health care system. Through its integrated medical, dental and mental health clinics along with its pharmacy and dedicated social services that include food pantries, a legal program, and social work case management, more than 3,000 HIV patients in Wisconsin gain the health care and social services they need for long-term survival with HIV disease from ARCW.

ARCW is also a leading provider of innovative and aggressive prevention services to help at-risk individuals stay free of HIV.

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