

Central New York man breaks long silence... Now he's *talking the talk* and *walking the walk*

For six years an Auburn man kept his HIV diagnosis secret, now he's talking about his disease and challenging Central New Yorkers to outdo him raising money for AIDS Community Resources at the AIDS Walk/Run.

Six years ago this spring Andrew DeMarzio learned that he was HIV positive. At the time, he was living in Atlanta with his sister; his mother was visiting for the Easter Holiday. "I always thought the hardest thing I would ever have to tell my family was that I was different, that I was gay," Andrew DeMarzio said. "That happened when I was 22-year-old and I survived." Telling them he had HIV, the virus that causes AIDS, would be much harder – nearly impossible, he felt, as he struggled to find the right words.

When he had heard the words "HIV positive" the only thing that registered was an intense visual distortion. "I remember that the room turned totally white. I wasn't sad. I didn't cry. I wasn't afraid." Andrew knew that with treatment and medications being HIV positive was no longer a death sentence. The only thing he was truly afraid about was how he would tell his family.

Back home with his new reality, Andrew paced. His sister observed that he was behaving out of character, all quiet and reserved, and asked what was wrong. "When I told her I had HIV, she embraced me and said that everything would be okay." For Andrew, the important step was yet to come. He needed his mother's acceptance before he could come to grips with his diagnosis. However, the timing could not have been worse. His mother was in Atlanta to visit her children but she was also caring for her only sister, his aunt, who was dying from cancer. "Thankfully, my mother openly accepted the news and both she and my sister swore they would always be there for me and guide me through the difficult times."

After that, Andrew didn't feel the need to tell anyone except immediate family and closest friends. But as the years went by and HIV infections rates went up from 40,000 to 56,300 (infections per year in the United States) he started feeling some responsibility toward those newly diagnosed with HIV. He remembered having sex education in school, but it was far from comprehensive. In his opinion, sex education about HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases was incomplete or non-existent.

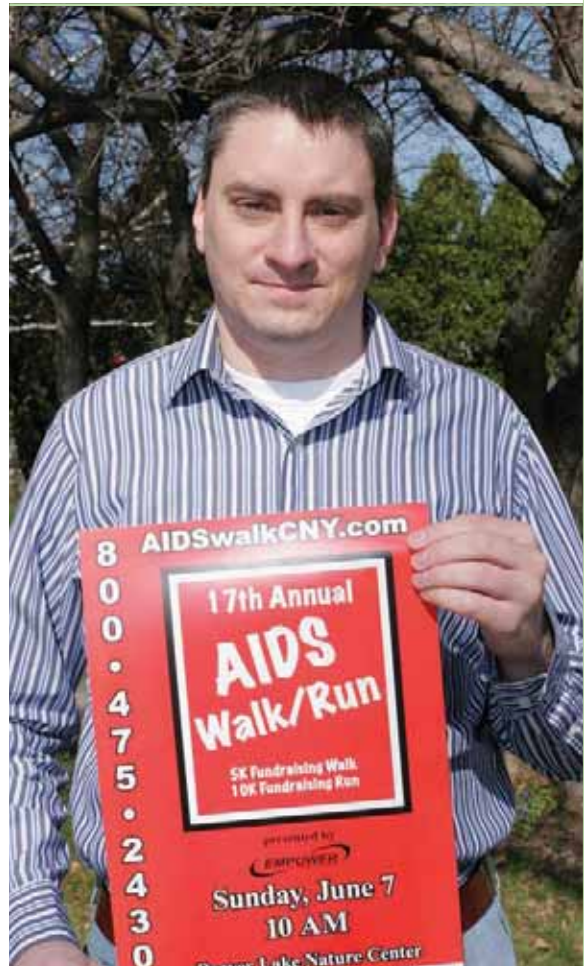
So now he's trying to do his part: volunteering, educating, and fundraising. "I am raising money for AIDS Community Resources. All that I raise I am specifically donating to the Teen AIDS Task Force program. TATF gives young people the straight stuff about HIV prevention."

Andrew told his story publicly for the first time on the www.AIDSwalkCNY.com Web site when he registered to take part in the 17th Annual AIDS Walk/Run on June 7th at Beaver Lake Nature Center in Baldwinsville.

He said telling his story on the AIDS Walk/Run Web site gave him closure; that it was time to be open and honest about his infection. "I have always accepted my responsibilities and choices I have made in life, and have never looked back with regrets."

You can donate now: www.AIDSwalkCNY.com. Click on "Sponsor a Participant" and read Andrew's story.

100% of the money raised at the AIDS/Walk Run stays in Central New York for youth prevention programs and emergency client services.



Andrew DeMarzio promoting his participation in the AIDS Walk/Run by holding a poster advertising the June 7th event.