

BLACK HOLLYWOOD HEADS TO OHIO IN FIGHT AGAINST AIDS STATEWIDE CELEBRITY TOUR URGES BLACK COMMUNITY TO GET TESTED FOR HIV

For a few days in late April, the Buckeye state will become Black Hollywood East, as movie and TV stars flock to participate in the Test 1 Million Ohio Celebrity Tour.

From April 21 to April 24, 2010, celebrities Danny Glover ("Death at a Funeral" and the Lethal Weapon series), Rockmond Dunbar ("Prison Break" and "The Family that Preys"), Lamman Rucker ("Meet the Browns" and "Why Did I Get Married Too?"), Vanessa Williams (Showtime's "Soul Food") and Sheryl Lee Ralph (original Broadway "Dreamgirls" and Tony Award nominee) will visit Dayton, Oxford, Cleveland, Cincinnati, and Columbus, Ohio, to fight AIDS stigma, raise awareness about the magnitude of HIV/AIDS in Black communities, and encourage people to get tested for HIV.

"There has never been an effort to mobilize the Black community in Ohio like this," says Mamie Harris, CEO and founder of IV Charis, a Cincinnati- and Northern Kentucky-based AIDS-service organization and the event co-sponsor. Other tour supporters include the Ohio Minority Health Commission, Orasure Technologies and a statewide coalition of 27 organizations (see below). "We hope that combining the efforts of local organizations, including colleges and universities, churches, elected officials and health departments, with a mobile 'billboard' featuring Hollywood celebrities that will travel from Detroit to Cincinnati and then across the state of Ohio will get people's attention," says Harris.

"Rockmond Dunbar and Lamman Rucker are two of the hottest young actors in Hollywood, and to have them participate is spectacular. Danny Glover is an acting legend and a leading human rights activist. He has traveled the world and seen the devastating effects of HIV/AIDS first hand. In addition, having a brother living with HIV, Danny knows how HIV impacts Black Families. So when he speaks about the disease, it carries a lot of weight," says Phill Wilson, President and CEO of event co-sponsor the Black AIDS Institute, the only national HIV/AIDS think tank in the United States focused exclusively on Black people. "We are also lucky to have actress Vanessa Williams and Sheryl Lee Ralph, both Black AIDS Institute board members, on the tour to share their voice and knowledge."

Part of the Greater Than AIDS/Test 1 Million campaign, a national media and mobilization initiative managed by the Black AIDS Institute and the Kaiser Family Foundation, the Ohio tour will call Black leaders to action and engage Black individuals and institutions in a community-wide effort to end the AIDS epidemic.

"The tour started off as a pilot project in Cincinnati but expanded across the state," explains Liz Presley-Fields, project director of EPIP, Central Community Health Board. "All of these events are organized by local Test 1 Million Ohio partners. IV Charis enhanced them and put the tour together. Things get stale when people hear the same statistics and messages over and over. The tour will refresh and reinforce the importance of HIV testing in the Black community," she adds.

Kim Glenn, President of the Cincinnati Queen City Alumnae Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority Inc. agrees. "Partnering with IV Charis, the Ohio Minority Health

Commission, Orasure Technologies, MAC AIDS fund and the other organizations involved in the Ohio tour is exactly the kind of synergy that is needed to keep the fight against this devastating disease in the forefront of concern in the Black community where it needs to be," she says.

"The messenger matters. The biggest hurdle in our community regarding HIV/AIDS is mistrust; we don't believe the statistics because we don't trust the messenger," says Harris. "But if the messenger is from our community, our people will take it more seriously".

The tour kicks off on Wednesday, April 21st, at HBCUs Central State and Wilberforce Universities and features a rally, a celebrity speaker, spoken-word performances and a step teaser by fraternity Alpha Phi Alpha. On Thursday April 22nd, the tour stops at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, where representatives of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., will host a Q&A and issue a call to action.

In Cleveland on Friday, April 23rd, the department of health will partner with Radio One station 107.9 WENZ-FM to host the theatrical HIV/AIDS and STD-awareness play "Secrets," performed by students from the Cleveland School of the Arts. Ms. Ohio, Ashley Miller, will make an appearance and speak to the youth participants.

The last day of the tour sees events in two cities. On Saturday morning April 24th, Cincinnati's Queen City Alumnae Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta will host its 4th annual walk. That afternoon the African Heritage Festival will be held at Ohio State University. HIV testing will be available at all tour events.

"We are looking for big turn outs at all of the stops on the tour," Harris says.

The Test 1 Million Celebrity tour is funded in part by the Ohio Commission on Minority Health, Orasure Technologies, the MAC AIDS fund, the Ohio department of alcohol, and drug addiction services. Gilead Sciences, the Kaiser Family Foundation, the Black AIDS Institute.

About IV-CHARIS:

The mission of IV-CHARIS (Compassionate Hearts Assisting Rebuilding Instructing Serving) is to reduce the transmission of HIV/AIDS in underserved communities by creating a non-traditional, holistic healing environment that is committed to providing safe and confidential testing, education, prevention, and intervention serviced by caring and well-trained people. IV-CHARIS services over 1,500 – 1,800 people per year.

Executive Director: Mamie E. Harris

About the Black AIDS Institute:

Founded in 1999, The Black AIDS Institute (The Institute), a 501(c) (3) nonprofit organization, is the only national HIV/AIDS Think Tank in the United States focused exclusively on Black people. The Institute's mission is to end the AIDS epidemic in Black communities by engaging and mobilizing traditional Black leaders, institutions and individuals in efforts to confront HIV/AIDS. The Institute offers training and capacity building, disseminates information, interprets and recommends public and private sector HIV policies, and provides advocacy and mobilization from a uniquely and unapologetically Black point of view.

Marc Alexander is a writer and TV producer living in Los Angeles.

TEST 1 MILLION OHIO COALITION ORGANIZATIONS

The organizations that have taken an active role in programs for the Test 1 Million Ohio Celebrity tour are in bold

CITY OF CINCINNATI

IV-CHARIS

Early Prevention Intervention Project (EPIP)

STOP AIDS

**The Queen city Alumnae Chapter of
Delta Sigma theta Sorority, Inc**

Inspirational Baptist Church

Infectious Disease Center

The Cincinnati Health Department

The Prospect House

The Center for Closing the Health Gap

UMADAOP of Cincinnati (Urban Minority

Alcoholism and Drug Addiction Outreach

Program)

HIV Early Intervention Program, University

Emergency Physicians

New Prospect Baptist Church

Northern Kentucky Independent Health

Department

CITY OF DAYTON

Public Health Department of Montgomery
County

Wright State University

AIDS Resource Center of Ohio

CITY OF COLUMBUS

**The Ohio Commission on Minority
Health (Major Sponsor)**

Columbus Public Health

TOBIAS Project

The Columbus AIDS Task Force

The Columbus Urban League

CITY OF AKRON

Akron AIDS Collaborative

Akron Local office of Minority Health

CITY OF TOLEDO

Toledo-Lucas County Office of Minority
Health

CITY OF CLEVELAND

**Cleveland Local Office of Minority
Health**

Agape Program – Antioch Development
Corporation

Cleveland Department of Public Health

TEST 1 MILLION OHIO SUPPORTING DIGNITARIES

Former Lieutenant Governor Lee Fisher

Dr. Alvin Jackson (Director, Ohio

Department of Health)

Angela Cornelius Dawson (Director,

Ohio Department of Alcohol and Drug

Addiction Services)

The Ohio Legislative Black Caucus

Senator Eric H. Kearney

Bishop C. Garnett Henning (Presiding

Bishop, 3rd Episcopal District, AME

Church)

Dr. Leah Fitchue (President, Payne

Theological Seminary)

Councilman Cecil Thomas (Cincinnati

City Council)

Karen Butler (City of Cleveland

Commissioner of Health)

Marco Sommerville (President, Akron

City Council)