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## NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## LOCAL HIV-POSITIVE STUDENT TRAVELS COAST TO COAST WITH NATIONAL HIV AWARENESS & TESTING CAMPAIGN

STATE COLLEGE, PA – Beginning on October 15, 2006 Kahlo Benavidez, a twenty year old Latino sophomore at NMSU and local Las Cruces resident will board a 45-foot, twelve person sleeper tour bus to embark on the ride of his life. As part of the groundbreaking nationwide youth driven initiative **Operation Get Tested; Infected Affected Real Stories Real People**, Benavidez will travel across the U.S through 22 states, stopping 34 times with a team of 5 other HIV positive youth, staff and one reporter to humanize the face of HIV and provide opportunity for his peers to be tested for HIV.

*Operation Get Tested*, the latest outreach effort of the non-profit, national organization, **Who's Positive**, is a U.S mission led by youth, performed by youth and driven by youth to prevent and reduce HIV infection rates among their peers. The tour will empower, encourage and provide opportunity for youth to get tested at no cost at each of the stops. The 48-day tour will begin at New York University on October 15, National Latino HIV Awareness Day and end in Los Angeles, CA on December 1, World AIDS Day.

As audience participants walk through the venue doors, they will receive a sealed hypothetical HIV test card that will reveal their own fate at the end of the 90-minute program. The audience is challenged to consider their own actions and behaviors while they listen to the HIV-positive youth tell their stories. Once the speakers are through illustrating the challenges of living with HIV/AIDS, the audience is given time to reflect upon the results of their own hypothetical HIV status on the test cards. An open forum will provide opportunity for youth to discuss HIV/AIDS throughout this ninety-minute program.

After learning he was HIV positive nearly 2 years ago, Benavidez began sharing his story to educate others and hopes that his peers will learn from his mistakes. "I refuse to let others make the same mistakes I made without knowing what the consequences could be." He said. "We learn from not only our own experiences, but from the experiences of others, as well."

Half of all new HIV infections in the U.S. occur in youth under age 25, and half of those infections occur in people under the age of 21. According to the HIV/AIDS resource, *The Body*, in 2003 an estimated 10,041 young people with AIDS died. It was these statistics and many more that spurred the national non-profit organization **Who's Positive** to launch **Operation Get Tested**. Twenty-seven year old HIV positive founder and executive director Tom Donohue said, "This fresh, new approach to HIV prevention allows youth to talk to youth -- no statistics, no lectures, just stories. This tour will bring the next movement and discussion about HIV/AIDS towards youth, a place where discussion should have gone many many years ago"

As a way for their communities to support this endeavor, **Who's Positive** is providing opportunity for hometown businesses, individuals and organizations to 'sponsor' their hometown speaker. \$2500 sponsorship supports a \$2000 honorarium as they travel nearly two months across the country and \$500 goes towards air travel to and from home. Local sponsorship will be recognized throughout the tour on the **Who's Positive** website and profiles of each speaker.

-more-

KAHLO BENAVIDEZ/2

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“Our community needs to embrace and support Kahlo, his brave and energetic approach to HIV awareness must be recognized by our own community, I know I am proud to have Kahlo in my community” said Martin Walker the director of HIV prevention and education at the International AIDS Empowerment in El Paso Texas.

Working part-time as a prevention specialist at Camino De Vida, a local HIV service center, Benavidez hopes that businesses and individuals alike will take this opportunity to become part of a movement that will bring much needed attention to the AIDS crisis affecting American youth.

**Who's Positive** is especially thankful to *OraSure Technologies*, the manufacturer of the OraQuick(R) ADVANCE(TM) Rapid HIV-1/2 Antibody Test and *Roche Pharmaceuticals* for supporting efforts to elevate disease awareness and encourage testing among America's youth through **Operation Get Tested**.

Founded in 2003, **Who's Positive** is a national non-profit organization which foregrounds the reality of living with HIV through first-hand accounts of young adults coping with the disease. In telling the stories of people living with HIV, **Who's Positive** hopes to reduce the transmission of HIV among teens and young adults - a population with one of the fastest growing infection rates.

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