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NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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

Passing of Speakers' Mother and Sister Due to AIDS Prompts Tour Dedication

STATE COLLEGE, PA – Beginning on October 15, 2006 nineteen year old Santa Rosa resident Richard Powell, will board a 45-foot, twelve person sleeper tour bus to embark on the ride of her life. As part of the groundbreaking nationwide youth driven initiative *Operation Get Tested; Infected Affected Real Stories Real People*, Powell 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.

HIV positive from birth, Powell inspires peers with his powerful life story and amazing attitude. At age three he lost his older sister, Toni Powell when she was 4 years old and later his mother, Louana Powell in 2003. Both were Santa Rosa residents living with AIDS at the time of their death. Powell misses his family. "My mother was very strong willed; she wanted to make sure that I'd live a long life." He said. "She didn't let having HIV control her. Like her, I don't let HIV ruin my life; I do normal things like anyone else and have plans for my future."

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"

-more-

RICHARD POWELL/2

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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.

"Our community needs to embrace and support Richard, his brave and energetic approach to HIV awareness must be recognized by our own community, I know I am proud to have Richard in my community" says Remi Newman, Powell's case manager at **Sunburst Projects**, a local non-profit dedicated to serving the needs of families living with HIV/AIDS.

Powell's story doesn't end with facing the loss of his mother and sister; he was rejected from schools, isolated and made fun of. He had few friends growing up, and if their parents found out he was HIV positive, Powell would not hear from those friends again. His community was not supportive either, at one point, Powell's mother kept a fire extinguisher by her bedside to put out burning rocks and hateful messages that were thrown through their windows.

Through it all Powell's mother was his rock, he said "She didn't feel it was the end of the world, she felt we could continue." It was evident that Louana and Toni Powell played a big role in Powell Jr's life, and to honor their memory, *Operation Get Tested* has been dedicated to them. "Dedicating this tour to the memory of Richard's mother and sister was an honor we at Who's Positive wanted to extend to him and his family. Richard's story touched us all and I know it will touch his peers across the county, Donohue said.

Today working part time for the Santa Rosa City Schools WorkAbility Transition Partnership Program , Powell plans to return to school to study massage therapy. In the meantime he does what he loves to do, sharing and educating people about HIV.

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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