

bright lights, little

THE PEOPLE, PASSIONS AND POLITICS

That Linking feeling

AIDS Link wakes up AIDS Week in Metro with Awake the World, a multi-media meditation

ROY ELLIS DRIVES A CLASSIC PREACHER'S CAR, but says he doesn't "preach." Ellis, an interfaith chaplain, drives a 1988 Buick Regal. It's white. "I got it cheap," Ellis laughs. "My preachermobile."

Ellis is AIDS Link's spiritual caregiver. He visits people with AIDS and their families, helping with personal, spiritual issues. He's not of any specific faith—and says his work isn't necessarily about god.

"You get someone in Toronto who has AIDS, and they go home to Cape Breton, and Mom and Dad are keeping everything down, pretending he has cancer or whatever. Where do they talk to someone?" he asks.

AIDS Link, brainchild of CARAS (Churchmembers Assembled to Respond to AIDS) is a non-profit organization representing eight major faith communities in Nova Scotia. Ellis travels where he's needed in Nova Scotia—and has gone as far as Moncton—to help people.

"This is the first place in Canada, as far as I know, where a counselling service for people with AIDS is linked with church groups, or faith groups, rather than out of hospitals, or clinics, or hospices. There's a real misconception out there that all church groups don't give a damn about gays, lesbians and people who are HIV-positive. My job is to show people they do care."

In his effort to "make peace" between AIDS organizations and religious ones, Ellis created Awake The World—"a multi-media meditation on AIDS." Capping off AIDS Week in Metro on Sunday, November 29, the event is "a celebration of the support for AIDS victims with emphasis on bringing together those who wouldn't usually be together—gays, lesbians and church folk."

The evening at St. Matthew's church on Bar-



photo Greg Baller

The Linking man: Roy Ellis takes his message of acceptance for people living with AIDS to the street.

rington Street features music, poetry reading and guest speakers, including Anne Derrick and guest host Carmen Klassen, CBC arts reporter. Performers include Celtic harpists, Aboriginal drummers and the St. Matthew's Choir. Proceeds from the \$5 admission fee will go to next year's celebration.

"I only started putting this together a month ago," Ellis says. "Next year, I'd really like to have more multicultural and multifaith performances."

While he admits some churches and faiths do not accept gays or lesbians, he says they're not the

majority anymore. "They're just the loudest."

He says it has become harder to get out the message that AIDS is still around. The Nova Scotia AIDS Coalition—where AIDS Link has an office—received less money this year than it did last.

"We have all these drugs nowadays, and people seem to think that AIDS isn't as scary. But drugs just prolong life, they don't cure the disease. And the longer someone's living with AIDS, the longer they have, through simple human errors, to spread this disease."
—KRISTA SIROTA