

December 29, 1991

# AIDS group treasurer quits, admits federal funds misuse

By Kevin Dayton  
Advertiser Capitol Bureau

Prominent gay rights activist Bill Woods has resigned as treasurer of the Hawaii AIDS Task Group after admitting to board members he used \$2,050 in task group money to pay for improvements to his Honolulu home, Woods and a task group attorney said.

The task group directors have arranged for a full audit of the finances for the federally funded non-profit agency, which provides a discussion forum for public health workers and others working to fight AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases.

The group also promotes research, study and programs related to AIDS.

Woods, who is editor and publisher of the monthly Gay Community News and executive director of the Gay and Lesbian Education and Advocacy Foundation, has long been an outspoken advocate on issues of concern to the gay community.

"It's been a very sad situation, and I've been deeply sorry about what has happened," Woods said in an interview after a board meeting Friday. He said he was sad "to have let them down in this way."

Woods said he is meeting with other groups he is associated with to explain the incident and ask if they want him to remain involved in their activities.

Woods was chairman of the Gay Pride Parade last year, and was a founder and executive director of the Gay Community Center. He is no longer connected with the center, however.

David Brustein, a volunteer attorney for the task group, said the board learned of the incident from Cheryl Embry, editor and publisher of Island Lifestyle Magazine.

Island Lifestyle is a monthly news magazine for the gay and lesbian community in Hawaii, and competes with Woods' publication, Embry said. She said a confidential source gave her copies of three checks Woods had written for the carpentry work.

Woods admitted to writing five checks on a task group account worth a total of more than \$2,000 for the home improvements, Brustein said.

Brustein said Woods also disclosed he had used \$2,200 in task group funds to buy a fax machine for the Gay and Lesbian Education and Advocacy Foundation (GLEA), which Woods runs.

On Dec. 20, Woods apologized to the board and agreed to resign, and also "agreed to help minimize the damage to the group and the community as much as possible," Brustein said.

He has since used GLEA funds to reimburse the board for the fax machine, and delivered a \$500 check to the board as his first restitution payment, Brustein said.

Woods said Brustein's account was "basically" correct. He said he was trying to help out a carpenter, whom Woods had known for a long time. Woods said he hired the carpenter as a favor when the

man was unemployed.

"It was not completely self-serving, although it was completely inappropriate," he said.

The task group has an annual budget of \$30,000 to \$40,000, most of which comes from federal funds, said board chairman Milton Diamond. The federal funding is administered by the state Health Department.

The Health Department plans to notify the state Attorney General's office, and it will be up to the attorney general to decide if any criminal action will be taken, Brustein said.

State Health Director John Lewin said he is waiting for a written report before taking any further action.

"We're happy that such a rapid response to the irregularities was effected by the AIDS task group," Lewin said.

The task group had all of the proper accounting and book-keeping safeguards in place for non-profit organizations, Brustein said.

Embry and some board members worried that there could be political fallout from the incident, particularly since Woods has been an outspoken advocate who appears frequently in media accounts.

But Diamond said he doubts the incident will do serious damage to the task group, which he said is a valuable organization.

The group brings together various agencies that work on the AIDS epidemic to exchange information, he said, adding: "Those that know we're doing a good job, they'll still know we're doing a good job."

"We know what we're doing is unique," he said. "The reason no other city has it is they fight with each other."



Woods

## MAILBOX

### STILL IN THE WOODS

Dear editor, community, and friends,

At last the gay and lesbian community has proof of the wrong-doings of Bill Woods. For all these years I've seen a man not only destroy a community but destroy new and fresh people moving here from the mainland, pushing them away to a little corner never to be heard from or seen again.

I speak from experience when I say he has destroyed organizations by either planting stories within the organizations about their members or attending meetings just to cause a disturbance.

Although I am strong and stuck in there in the face of Mr. Wood's abuse, many haven't. Some lives will never be the same again.

One man in our community has taken both personal and

public humiliation from Bill. That man is Scott Foster, who is a man I am proud to call my friend. He always knew what Woods was up to. He has gathered information, creating a file on Woods, from people and friends of the community,

many of them scared to lend their name to this file. Many would be surprised by what this file contains, but Scott has always known the score.

The investigation is still going on. For twenty years some of you have trusted Bill and donated money to organizations that Woods has been involved with. The truth must be told now.

Anyone involved in an organization or who is a community leader is subject to scrutiny and must take the good with the bad.

This is only the beginning of a long, hard investigation into Woods. What's going to come out of this is not pretty and, yes, in the short term it may hurt our community, but in the

long run, we can all be more proud of our community here in Hawaii.

—Garrett Oritani  
P.S. This is an independent letter and does not represent the views of any organization/business or person apart from my own.

Letter to Editor:

So glad to hear that Bill Woods got caught red-handed! Many of us know about other things he's done, but have had trouble proving it. He can talk his way out of anything, so watch out.

He is not to be trusted as a leader in our community. Not all gays and lesbians are good people—some are liars, thieves, and murderers.

Mr. Woods, get out of Hawaii. This state's had it up to our crowns with you and your kind of "leadership!"

—Jay Mays

P.S. You can forget about my future contributions to any

organization Bill Woods is a part of.

To the Editor—

To me, the single most heartbreaking aspect of the entire prolonged Bill Woods scenario is the fact that our copious warnings to many individuals in the community went unheeded for so very, very long. Those people need to do some serious soul searching because anyone who took the position of "I get along with him," or "he's never done anything to me," is no better than the Germans living downwind from Dachau who, even after smelling the burning flesh and hair, did nothing—because "he's never done anything to me."

It was not Bill Woods who divided and held our community back for so long. It was those individuals who empowered him.

It is very, very sad to think of all the wasted time, energy, and resources that might have been put to use toward a more productive end. This is the real tragedy.

Scott Foster

ISLAND LIFESTYLE MAGAZINE

Letters To The Editor

February, 1992