

OBITUARY

Schawne Anthony Parker

(January 7, 1967 - June 26, 2004)

BY JASON MICHAEL

DETROIT - Schawne Anthony Parker, executive director of Community Health Outreach Workers, Inc. and longtime community activist, died of a brain aneurysm on Saturday, June 26. He was 37.

A Detroit native, Parker graduated from Chadsey High School in 1985. He attended General Motors Institute on a full academic scholarship before transferring to Michigan State University, where he received a bachelor's degree in chemistry in 1992. The following year he became the first president of Men of Color Motivational Group, at the time a social and support group for men of African descent.

Two years later, Parker started work as a patient advocate with the Detroit Medical Center and also spent time with the City of Detroit Health Department. His greatest contribution to the community, however, would be the work he did at CHOW, a coalition of community health outreach workers throughout the state. The agency, which provides advocacy, risk awareness, prevention and intervention education strategies to populations at risk for HIV/AIDS due to drug use, homelessness, sexual activity, economic ability and mental impairment, earned its 501c3 status as a nonprofit organization in 1991. But due to the perception of its work as controversial it was forced to operate for years on limited funds.

Undeterred, Parker pressed on, doing all in his power to bring awareness to the ravaging effects of HIV/AIDS on the African-American community. "When we first learned about HIV/AIDS, it was regarded as a gay disease having a white face," Parker told the Detroit Free Press in 2003. "Today, one need only look at the continent of Africa to see that that face is changing."

In May, CHOW was awarded a substantial grant from the Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta to expand the Detroit agency's successful capacity building assistance throughout the nation.

"Schawne Parker was a go-getter," said community activist Curtis Lipscomb. "He worked hard. He was a determined man. When he was focused on obtaining something he was proven to get it. I'm not surprised that CHOW grew from his hire to the time that he left us. He helped change CHOW's image and he made us of aware of it."

In addition to his work at CHOW, Parker served as the chair of the Michigan HIV/AIDS Council's Statewide Prevention and Care Planning Council, the HIV/AIDS planning body for the state of Michigan. He was also a speaker for Gospel Against AIDS, an agency he helped found in 1997. In his spare time, Parker enjoyed fishing, golfing, camping, gardening and working on his antique collectible cars.

"I found him to be a man of honor," said Atiba Seitu of the Ruth Ellis Center. "He was just a person that if you needed to get a rational perspective, he was a good person to bounce ideas off of. He would give you a pretty clear-cut direction. He just always handled himself with dignity. I never heard him say anything bad about anybody. He was just a great guy."

Funeral services for Parker took place last week in Detroit. He is survived by his longtime partner, Marius Padieu, his mother and nine siblings.

