

# Gold Coast

F O R T

D A L E

## THE TOP DOCS

304 OF THE VERY  
BEST IN 44  
SPECIALTIES

THE  
HEALTH  
ISSUE

HEALTHY  
STAYCATIONS  
15 SOUTH  
FLORIDA  
RESORTS  
WITH  
WELLNESS  
OFFERINGS

UP AND  
AWAY  
PREVIEW  
THE FORD  
LAUDERDALE  
AIR SHOW  
(No, this isn't  
a typo)

**PLUS:**  
MEET THE  
FOODIE  
PHYSICIAN

FEATURE // HIV

# A MILLION CRISES



HIV IS A SINGULAR DISEASE, BUT IT AFFECTS AN EXPONENTIAL AMOUNT OF LIVES—ESPECIALLY HERE IN SOUTH FLORIDA. HOWEVER, WHERE THERE'S TRAGEDY, THERE'S USUALLY A GROUP OF ORGANIZATIONS, SCIENTISTS AND SUPPORTERS WHO ARE WORKING TO HELP.

By Ben Wolford  
Photography by C&I Studios



**H**IV isn't in the news very much anymore, but that doesn't mean the crisis is over. South Florida is helping lead the race for a cure. However, the region also leads every other U.S. metropolitan area in new HIV diagnoses, with 39 new cases a year per 100,000 residents.

But that doesn't tell the whole story. Any public health crisis is actually a million personal crises. And for some non-profits trying to help people who are HIV positive, it means trying to help people no matter what's troubling them—from their employment to their mental health to their immigration status.

One summer afternoon in 2014, what troubled Frank Guida was leaving his home, and he turned to his blog to unload how he felt. "I'm fearful. I'm fearful. I'm fearful," he wrote.

Guida, who was living in Los Angeles at the time and now lives in Fort Lauderdale, had spent the last two days under the covers with the shades drawn, financially strained and physically and mentally ill. He had lived with HIV nearly half of his life, but the virus is seldom the only thing afflicting those who have it. He had \$8.16 in his checking account, and he couldn't bear to leave the house with so little to spare. What if something happened?

"Even walking from my apartment

to my car I have a fear of what's around me, including all the new neighbors," he wrote. "I don't know them, and I feel like a cat in water. Not happening. ... This fear is real in my head, and it makes me scared, so I hide and hide."

Now 59, Guida is less anxious. But he still depends on a constellation of non-profits that cater largely to the broader needs of the HIV-positive community. SunServe in Wilton Manors helps him with his mental health. But money is still tight, and he struggles to get enough healthy food to eat. The Poverello Center, also in Wilton Manors, helps keep the fridge full. "I haven't had a haircut in probably two-and-a-half years," he says. Not a professional one, that is. Those cost too much. He trims it himself.

"I've been through the mill," Guida says. He and about 51,500 others in the area. There are more people with HIV in South Florida than there are residents of Aventura. By a lot. And the number is growing every year, driven by surging numbers of adolescent cases.

"It's a really bad, out-of-control epidemic for adolescents right now," says Dr. Ana Puga, a pediatric infectious disease specialist at Broward Health. "And they're coming in younger. My newly infected teens used to come in at 17, 18. Now they're coming in at 15."

In 2013, there were fewer than 600 people ages 13 to 24 living with HIV in Broward County. That number has nearly tripled, partly, Puga says, because of "the whole invincibility neurodevelopmental stages. They think

it's never going to happen to them." Moreover, today's teenagers didn't grow up with the AIDS crisis dominating the nightly news; they're less aware of it and less afraid of it. But there's still much to fear: HIV means a lifetime of unpleasant, daily medication with the highest possible stakes: illness or death.

"The fact that South Florida is a hub of HIV, that should bother all of us," says Ken Rapkin, executive director of The Campbell Foundation in Fort Lauderdale.

The Campbell Foundation is one of the last small organizations still granting money for AIDS research, providing \$10.4 million to more than 140 projects during its 22 years. It's not a whole lot of money in the grand scheme of things: \$40,000 here, \$100,000 there. By comparison, amfAR, the Foundation for AIDS Research, awards more than \$10 million a year.

But those small grants are important. A lot of times, they help researchers develop the basis for a proposal to amfAR or the National Institutes of Health. Rapkin likes to say The Campbell Foundation is searching for "the next Marie Curie" (the physicist conducted her Nobel-winning work in a shed). And a good amount of that research is taking place

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## A HISTORY ON THE CAMPBELL FOUNDATION

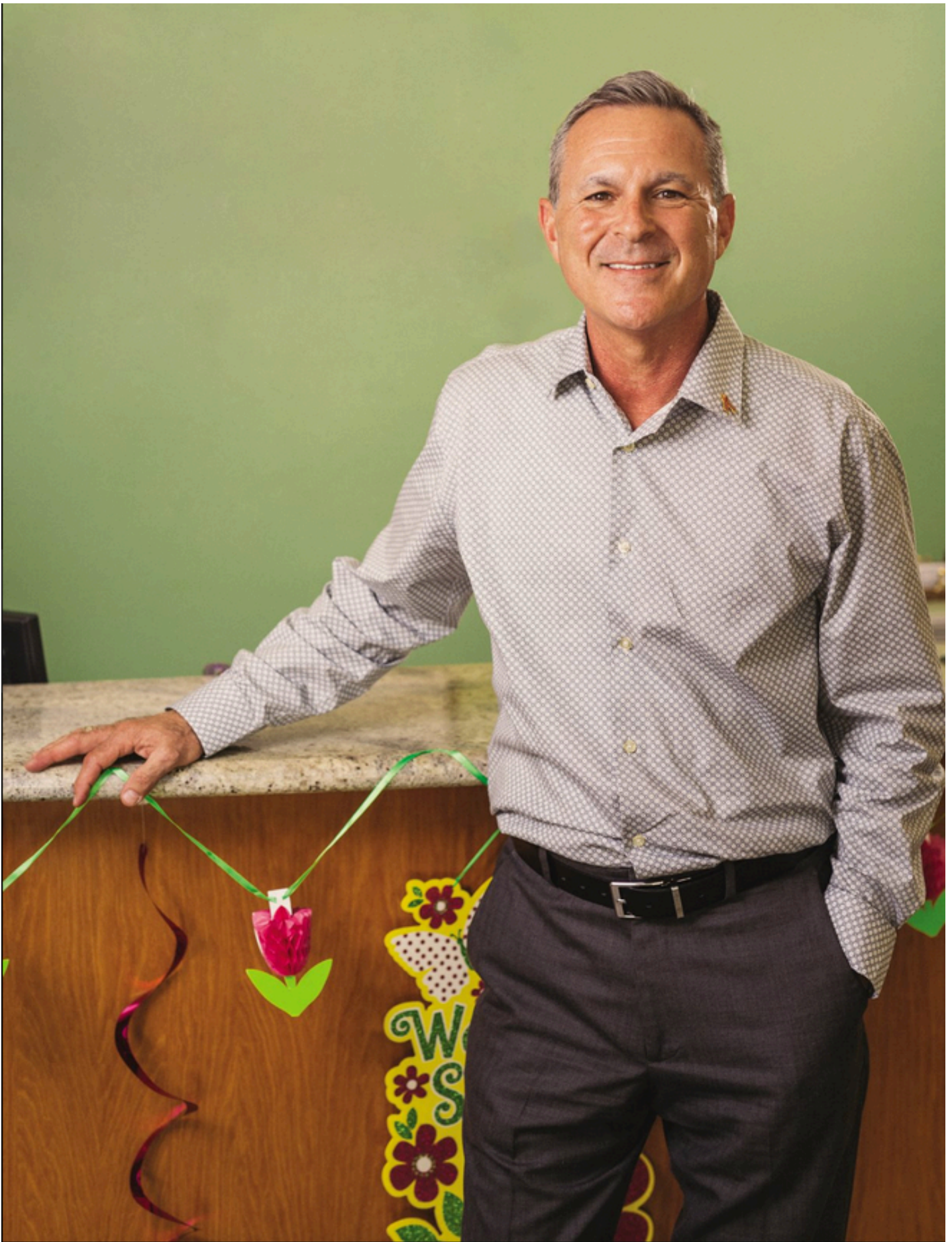
The Campbell Foundation was created in 1995 by the late Richard Campbell Zahn, a Fort Lauderdale chemist who developed Herpecin-L Lip Balm for the treatment of cold sores and fever blisters.

After his death from AIDS complications, Zahn's company, Campbell Laboratories, was sold and the proceeds were used to form the foundation. Now in its 22nd year, The Campbell Foundation has given away nearly \$10.5 million.

Funds are used to support cutting-edge clinical laboratory-based research into the prevention and treatment of HIV/AIDS, and related conditions and illnesses. Grants have gone toward research into a variety of AIDS-associated conditions, including brain inflammation, mental decline and dementia, vascular and heart disease, as well as toward the development of new drugs and drug delivery systems.

Many of the foundation's grant recipients have been able to use the funding as a stepping stone toward the acquisition of additional grants that help them further their research.







here in Florida. At The Scripps Research Institute in Jupiter, Susana Valente, Ph.D., is conducting tests on mice with a new drug that, if successful, could fundamentally change the way scientists think about curing HIV/AIDS.

Valente's research is worth explaining because it also helps explain some of the basic facts about HIV.

HIV is a virus that weakens human immune systems. It is mainly transmitted through sex and needles. HIV is very smart: The human body can't entirely kill it, and there is no cure. So once you get it, you've got it. If left untreated, it can progress to a more dire stage, AIDS, where the risk of cancer is elevated and things like pneumonia are fatal.

To keep HIV from becoming AIDS, scientists have developed dozens of drugs that reduce the number of viruses in the body, essentially turning the battle into a lifelong stalemate. These treatments, called antiretroviral therapy (ART), can have nasty side effects, particularly after decades of daily medication. Diabetes, fragile bones and liver problems are typical complications for long-term survivors.

ART can't cure HIV because the viruses utilize insurgent warfare: Reservoirs of latent viruses lay low like sleeper cells, undetected by antiretroviral drugs. If a patient ever stops taking medication, these latent viruses spring into action. Much of the research into a cure for HIV right now is focused on "waking up" those reservoirs so that ART can finish them off.

So far, no one's figured out how to perfect that strategy. As Valente puts it, latent HIV is a boiling pot of water, and every time you take the lid off it just boils over. "Maybe we can cool the water to such a point, freezing point, that you take the lid off and there's no overflow," she said at a recent fundraiser for The Campbell Foundation, which commended the "refreshing novelty" of her approach. With help from the foundation's \$79,151 grant, her drug is having some success. (The mice would disagree.)

A cure is still many years—perhaps decades—away. In the meantime, other HIV/AIDS research funding is destined for projects focused on making side effects more tolerable or figuring out ways to make the treatment regimen more flexible.

And then there are all those millions of little crises. Like Guida's deep moments of anxiety. Or like one down-and-out guy in Fort Lauderdale

who finally got a job but didn't have a way to get to work.

"He grew up in poverty, and he spent some time in jail," says Stacy Hyde, president and CEO of Broward House, which supports the HIV community. She didn't want to give the client's name, in part because there's still so much stigma around HIV. "It's hard with his background to be able to get a job."

But then Broward House got a phone call from a restaurant owner. He wanted to give a job to somebody who needed a second chance. The restaurant was seven miles away, and there wasn't a public transit option. So Hyde used part of a check from The Campbell Foundation (it gives small amounts to direct care providers around the holidays) to buy him a bicycle. Stable employment means stable housing and a stable life. And people with stable lives are more likely to stay on their drug regimen.

"When somebody tells you they aren't worth anything, you start to believe it," Hyde says. "But when somebody gives someone a chance who hasn't had one, it changes their perspective of what they're able to do. It gives them hope. It makes them realize they have value."

Florida has a plan to cut the number of new HIV diagnoses, increase access to care, and reduce the disparities of infection among blacks, gay men and Latinos. The plan also explicitly singles out South Florida: "By Dec. 31, 2021, reduce the rate of new HIV infections ... so these counties will no longer be in the top three U.S. MSA/divisions with the highest rate of new HIV infections diagnosed."

That's a distinction Florida doesn't want. ■



Stacy Hyde, president and CEO of Broward House

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- Stacy Hyde

**Local Impact:**

This fall, Broward House will host its annual SMART Ride, a charitable biking event that takes participants from Miami down to Key West in support of the organization's mission for providing services to those affected by health challenges including HIV.

SMART Ride; Nov. 17 to 18; Miami to Key West; \$95; [browardhouse.org](http://browardhouse.org)