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## **Dell'Abate advocates for AIDS awareness at GHS event**

<p>Staff report</p><p>&nbsp;</p>

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Gary Dell'Abate is accustomed to the ribbing over his personal life that he takes on "The Howard Stern Show," whose audience knows him best as "Baba Booeey."

But it was no joke for the Old Greenwich resident Friday morning when he spoke to a packed Greenwich High School auditorium of more than 320 students about his involvement with the fight against AIDS.

Recounting a story from his younger days in the 1980s, Dell'Abate recounted the fear surrounding the virus.

"I remember being at a Halloween party with a guy who had a cough," he said. "He was dead (from AIDS) by Thanksgiving. No one knew what was wrong with him."

Dell'Abate also described the early days of AIDS as a time when "no one wanted to get tested, no one wanted to know. ... If you got AIDS, you were going to die. There were no treatments."

His brother died of the disease in 1991. The tragedy spurred Dell'Abate to become an advocate for AIDS education and prevention, and ever since, he has been involved the national AIDS awareness organization Lifebeat: Music Fights HIV/AIDS.

The Red Ribbon Foundation's Youth Council, an umbrella group of students from local high schools, hosted Dell'Abate as a speaker for World AIDS Day, which is Dec. 1. The internationally recognized day is when governments, national AIDS programs, faith organizations, community organizations, and individuals can raise awareness and focus attention on the global epidemic.

This year marks 31 years since the epidemic was initially reported. Worldwide, an estimated 33 million people are said to be living with HIV and 30 million have died. In the United States, more than 1 million people are estimated to be living with HIV. Locally, recent statistics report that about 2,700 people in Fairfield County are living with the disease, with 3,200 as the statistic for neighboring Westchester County, N.Y.

Dell'Abate also stressed the importance of educating youth about a disease that continues to be

shrouded in ignorance. Many young people today, he said, think AIDS is a curable, easily treated disease, or that you can "tell" if someone has HIV/AIDS by looking at them. His work with Lifebeat informs youth that there is no cure for the disease, that it remains serious and deadly if untreated, and that poor judgment influenced by drugs or alcohol can play a role in its transmission.

In recognition of his work with Lifebeat, Dell'Abate is being honored at the Red Ribbon Foundation's SAFE gala, rescheduled for April 6 at the Capitol Theatre in Port Chester, N.Y. The Red Ribbon Foundation is a Greenwich-based nonprofit committed to winning the war against AIDS.

Friday's assembly was kicked off by two Red Ribbon Youth Council members, GHS seniors Weronika Filarska and Megan Mahoney. To promote awareness of World AIDS Day, Mahoney, Filarska and the Youth Council have tied red ribbons along trees on Greenwich Avenue, and are hosting a fundraiser, "Ho Ho Hope for AIDS," at the Arch Street Teen Center Saturday.

The Red Ribbon Foundation raises money to fight AIDS through several fundraising events each year. The proceeds of these events are then awarded as grants to organizations that demonstrate results, as well as promising ideas, for preventing the spread of AIDS. Red Ribbon's grantmaking priorities are prevention education programs for high-risk individuals, cutting-edge research to eradicate the disease, and assistance programs for those living with HIV/AIDS.

For more information about the Red Ribbon Foundation, go to [www.redribbonfoundation.org](http://www.redribbonfoundation.org).

[See the topic on aegis.org](http://aegis.org)