

## 2010 Howard J. Berman Prize Awarded to HealthFriends, Inc.

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*Bob Kloster, executive director for HealthFriends (fifth from left) was joined by Eve Van de Wal, Excellus BCBS regional president (first from left), Dr. Frank Dubeck, Excellus BCBS chief medical officer and HealthFriends board member (second from left), Joan Grande, HealthFriends board president (third from left) and members of the HealthFriends board of directors as the organization was honored with the 2010 Howard J. Berman Prize.*

Utica, NY – HealthFriends, Inc. and its founders, Keith Fenstemacher of the Mohawk Valley Network, Inc. and Fr. Fred Daley of St. Francis De Sales Parish have been honored with the 2010 Howard J. Berman Prize in recognition of the organization's commitment to meeting the health care needs of the greater Utica area's underserved and uninsured populations.

The Howard Berman Prize, which consists of a \$10,000 cash award and a statue handcrafted by Rochester-based sculptor Leonard Urso, is named for the former CEO of The Lifetime Healthcare Companies (the parent company of Excellus BlueCross BlueShield). Financed through a fund established with donations from more than 160 of Mr. Berman's colleagues and admirers, the prize was established to reward community-based, nonprofit organizations in upstate New York that pursue local initiatives to improve public access to health care. It honors Mr. Berman's leadership and vision of "assuring affordable access to needed, effective health care services regardless of health status or ability to pay."

HealthFriends, Inc. was founded in 1999 to provide prescription drug assistance for uninsured income eligible adults and children in the Utica community. HealthFriends is funded solely through monetary and in-kind donations from individuals, church congregations, local businesses, fundraisers and foundations.

On average, HealthFriends receives about 2,200 requests for assistance annually and provides people in need with emergency prescriptions, guidance in completing applications for free prescription programs offered by pharmaceutical companies, and assistance identifying and accessing other resources.

"HealthFriends truly embodies Howard Berman's lifelong passion to make a difference for those who are falling through the cracks of our health care system," said Sandra Parker, chairwoman of the Howard Berman Prize Selection Committee. "Because of this grassroots, volunteer program, thousands of Utica-area residents today have access to needed prescription drugs that they otherwise could not afford."

Bob Kloster, HealthFriends executive director said that, "it was a great honor for the organization to even be considered for this year's prize. We will accept it in the name of all those in our community whose financial support and volunteer efforts have made it possible to provide more than three and one half million dollars worth of prescription medication for the needy uninsured during our ten years of existence. The prize is recognition of the kind of impact that a non-profit run by only two staff people, fifteen volunteers and a very involved board of directors can make on a communities' health."

**The Howard Berman Prize is presented through a Committee chaired by Sandra Parker, president and CEO of the Rochester Business Alliance. Other Committee members include:**

William Clark, president and CEO of the Urban League of Rochester

Patricia Davis, director of community investment for United Way of Greater Rochester

Andrew Doniger, MD, director of the Monroe County Health Department

Joseph Kurnath, MD, former board chairman of The Lifetime Healthcare Companies

Michael Miller, an attorney with the Chamberlain, D'Amanda law firm

Robert Thompson, vice president, Safety Net Programs, Excellus BlueCross BlueShield

To date, about \$200,000 has been pledged to the Howard J. Berman Fund in multi-year commitments. Donations for the fund are still being accepted and may be made payable to the Howard J. Berman Fund, care of United Way of Greater Rochester, 75 College Avenue, Rochester, NY 14607.