

# City man takes up torch to raise AIDS awareness

*By Paige Hilton, Guelph Tribune News*

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Tom Hammond isn't an avid runner, but he's taken up the sport for a reason close to his heart: to run with the Olympic torch this December.

The executive director of the AIDS Committee of Guelph and Wellington County is using his run as a way to raise awareness of HIV and AIDS, and combat the stigma and discrimination that surrounds the disease.

"I thought that carrying the Olympic torch would be a great, once-in-a-lifetime experience for me," said Hammond. "As a person who has been living with HIV for 18 years, I wanted to make this contribution to my community and to the AIDS movement."

Hammond won the chance to run with the torch through a contest at the Royal Bank. Each entrant had to write about what they would do to make Canada a better place, said Hammond, and his pledge was to address the stigma of HIV/AIDS.

Hammond will carry the torch on Dec. 29 somewhere between Barrie and Owen Sound.

Until then, he plans to run 100 kilometres to raise \$1,000 toward the United Way of Guelph and Wellington's capital campaign. Most of the running will be done in five-kilometre spurts over his lunch hour.

"The money we receive from the United Way is the foundation of our support services program," said Hammond. "(The money) is used to purchase vitamins and supplements, assist with medication costs, food vouchers and drives to medical appointments."

Funding also goes toward an emergency financial assistance program to help clients do things such as attend skills building workshops or pay a utility bill they've fallen behind on.

Hammond said the torch run symbolizes peace and unity for him—a time when the whole world comes together for one major event. "It is a real honour to be participating," he said.

He said the stigma surrounding HIV/AIDS still exists in the community despite inroads made over the years by groups like the AIDS Committee.

"For example, there are still people living with HIV who will not access services from (us) because of the fear that somebody may see them entering the building or find out about their HIV status," he said.

"I want to inspire and encourage people living with HIV to imagine the possibilities in their lives and know that they can do anything they dream of in spite of their HIV status," said Hammond.

To donate to his United Way campaign visit [aidsguelph.org](http://aidsguelph.org), make a donation or mail a donation to the office at 409 Woolwich St., Guelph, N1H 3X2.



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Tom Hammond is using his upcoming Olympic torch run to raise awareness about the stigma surrounding HIV/AIDS.