

Shattuck pair behind hospital's true heart



By Peter Gelzinis

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Photo by Bizuayehu Tesfaye



On Sunday, two extraordinary women will be honored for devoting a combined total of nearly 25 years to the care of a nearly invisible patient population at the state-run Lemuel Shattuck Hospital in Jamaica Plain.

Gail Clapp, a mother of two, was among the first group of nurses who volunteered to work on 7 South, the AIDS ward of the Shattuck, back in 1987, when the fear and hysteria about HIV was at its peak. "At that time, they used to say Shattuck was the place you went to die. In 1987, we were the only game in town as far as AIDS was concerned," Clapp, now 72 and retired, recalled.

"No, we didn't get bundled up in the hazmat suits, or look like we came from Mars. We practiced a kind of elemental nursing, because before AZT and the other drugs came along, all we could offer our patients was comfort. And that's what our patients found here, doctors and nurses who cared deeply for them."

Arielle Adrien came to Boston in 1979 after her mother had established herself here by working 16 hours a day as a maid in two hotels. Adrien went on to graduate English High in 1983, then to Northeastern and

eventually a residency in internal medicine at Brown University.

She came to work at the Shattuck as an internist eight years ago and has never wanted to be anywhere else.

"Working here keeps me in touch with my humanity," Dr. Adrien said. "I get the opportunity to care for patients who are viewed quite differently by society. They are the poor, the homeless, substance abusers, prison inmates ... those people most other hospitals do not want to deal with.

"In caring for them," she said, "I find out their stories; they speak to me about the abuse they've endured, physical or sexual abuse, issues of abandonment, mistakes they've made that have left them so lost and broken. These are my patients, and it is a humbling experience to be able to care for them."

On Sunday, both women will be honored for their work by a group of benefactors known as The Shattuck Partners. It's the Partners who have raised money to put air conditioners in the hospital's 50-year-old windows, paid to put a TV and basic cable in each patient's room and worked tirelessly for years to make Shattuck Hospital a less forgotten place.

Come Sunday, the Partners will thank two of the Shattuck's greatest assets, Gail Clapp and Dr. Arielle Adrien, with a harbor cruise doubling as a fundraiser.

They deserve far more recognition, but would gladly settle for a donation made to Shattuck Partners, 170 Morton St., Jamaica Plain, MA. 02130.

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