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FRENCH, FEISTY AND FERVENT

Outspoken AIDS activist to leave HIV Commission

By **Michelle Rester**
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At her kitchen table in Pasadena, Genevieve Clavreul pores over bundles of envelopes filled with decades of photographs that illustrate her life from the beginning of the AIDS movement.

The 62-year-old French immigrant — openly gay and HIV-free — poses in dozens of pictures with the two men who discovered the HIV virus. They are Drs. Luc Montag-

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Genevieve Clavreul

nier of France and Robert Gallo of the United States — who, she says, wouldn't talk to each other for eight years without Clavreul by their side. And she

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Staff photo by **BERNARDO ALPS**

LONGTIME AIDS and gay rights activist Genevieve Clavreul, seen in her Pasadena home Thursday, will leave the county's HIV Commission in June.

HIV

Activist says panel in need of reform

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said she convinced them to become co-directors of the first AIDS hospital in Houston.

Spanning more than 20 years, Clavreul is pictured with the two in France, Africa, and the United States. She's with scores of actors and politicians, and again with some of the first AIDS patients, all of whom she took care of as a registered nurse and researcher.

Most of Clavreul's experience, she says, has been behind the scenes.

For the past several years, however, she has been more overt, trying to focus on the AIDS epidemic in Los Angeles County. She has been trying to bring change within the county's Office of AIDS and its legislative body, the HIV Commission, by exposing alleged corruption and mismanagement.

Her outspokenness gained her a seat on the commission last year as county Supervisor Michael Antonovich's appointee. But she has resigned, effective June, citing constant berating, threats and harassment as some of the reasons.

"The work I do, I don't do it for the money, but because it is the right thing to do," says Clavreul in a heavy French accent. "They don't understand that."

Some of the other HIV Commission members have criticized Clavreul and her attempts to stop the group from breaking the open meetings law, known as the Brown Act. Unlike Clavreul, most of the commission members either have HIV or AIDS or represent agencies that receive funding from the county.

But fighting for gay rights — and subsequently treatment and a cure for AIDS — has been Clavreul's mantra since she moved to Los Angeles in the early 1970s. She vowed to be open about her homosexuality after a tangled divorce with her ex-husband left her on her own with 54 cents, four children and a mother to care for.

It also resulted in a successful six-year battle to disbar the

Georgia judge who outed her and her new lover to the local newspaper, which printed the entire story, as well as her children's names, ages and where they went to school.

"Most people are there (on the commission) to protect their own self-interest or agencies," said physician and former commissioner Terry Grand. "Genevieve is there — period. She's there and has this wealth of knowledge and has been carrying the flag ... and just because she cares. And I think that's the key to it."

Friend Robert Bonin, who met Clavreul in 1986 and has accompanied her twice to AIDS fund-raisers in Europe, says part of the problem may be that "she is very strong-willed, speaks her piece. In some cases she is completely uncompromising, but (it is) because she has her principles and her standards."

Audits and investigations called for by county officials on Clavreul's behalf have already exposed possible conflicts of interest within the HIV Commission, which sets policy on how to distribute the \$70 million-plus federal HIV/AIDS money the county receives each year.

Since last summer, county Supervisor Don Knabe has called for several changes to the commission — including removing county employees from serving as voting members of the commission and requiring representatives from agencies that receive money from the county Office of AIDS to abstain from voting on related funding matters.

Another in-depth investigation is continuing, as are reports and a management review expected within the next few weeks.

The HIV Commission should be completely disbanded and everyone, including Clavreul, should leave to make way for a fresh batch of concerned people, Clavreul says.

Her supporters say Clavreul's efforts are genuine and seem endless, although recent brushes with county AIDS officials are taking their toll.

"I've never known anybody who so completely and for so long dedicated themselves for a cause and frankly never received anything in return for it," Bonin said. "This woman is not rich, yet she has rubbed elbows with the greatest of

greats. I'll never forget the time we were walking into the Creole Hotel in Paris and former President Nixon stopped and said 'Genevieve, hello, what are you doing here?' Of course it impressed me."

Another trip was taken after the two began to hear rumblings about pharmaceutical companies bailing out of the AIDS research industry because it was getting too expensive and hurting their reputations.

"My God, she dragged me to New York and we met with a patent attorney. He was like the top patent attorney in the country and she was lobbying on behalf of AIDS patients and the importance of research," Bonin said. "That's Genevieve. People don't know what she's done behind the scenes."

The work and travel always have been done on her own dime and time. Clavreul's daughter says her mother often traveled to AIDS conferences overseas with little in her pocket and slept on park benches.

"We would scrimp and save to buy her (airplane) ticket," said Christina Edwards, of Pasadena. "Mom's resourceful — and she's Parisian, so when she's there she knows" where to buy the most inexpensive food and how to navigate through the city with little money.

Clavreul says her resignation from the HIV Commission will not cause her to abandon the cause, but will refocus her efforts to solve the county's nursing shortage — work more in line with her consulting business.

Still, she plans to attend commission meetings when she is in town and work on more national and international AIDS issues, rather than staying embroiled in a divisive relationship with the AIDS players in Los Angeles County.

"On those issues, I will not give up. But I am tired of being with a population that is me, me, me," Clavreul said. "I want to do something that makes a difference in humanity, and helping with the nursing shortage will help everyone, not just those with AIDS."

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