Scholarship to honor AIDS victim

By JANICE MIN

The friends and classmates of a 1984 Columbia College graduate who died last summer of AIDS are working to help further the student’s commitment to need-blind admission by establishing a $25,000 scholarship in his name.

Stuart Garcia, CC ’84, who was a representative to the University Senate during his junior and senior years at Columbia, died last July 18 in his hometown of Austin, TX. Some of his former classmates initiated a memorial fund this fall in his honor, and this Sunday, approximately 15 current and former Columbia students solicited $3,500 in donations to the fund from alumni in the classes of CC ’83 and CC ’84 with the help of the Columbia College Telefund. The telefund donated its resources, including office space, phones, and phone lists, to the effort.

‘‘It is all really a labor of love from those who knew him,’’ said Elizabeth Schwartz, CC ’87, a friend of Garcia’s and a member of the Sachems senior secret society, of which Garcia was also a member.

Columbia College Dean of Students Roger Lehecka, who works with the Sachems group, added that the response from Columbia College alumni to the scholarship has been gratifying. ‘‘People from recent classes who really don’t have a lot
to give have given generously,” he said.

The goal of those involved is to raise the $25,000 Columbia College requires to establish a scholarship in an individual student’s name. Inspired by the positive response from alumni on Sunday, Schwartz said funds will continue to be solicited in Garcia’s name during the Columbia College telefund being held in the next two weeks. In addition, letters requesting donations will also continue to be sent.

According to Lehecka, the scholarship will be given to “someone who took the same approach to the college that Stuart had, while also needing financial aid.”

The scholarship will not differ greatly from other scholarships. Its main purpose, Lehecka said, is helping to maintain need-blind admissions, a policy which Garcia fought to maintain during his tenure in the Senate.

Steven Waldman, CC ’84, a friend and classmate of Garcia’s, said the scholarship is particularly appropriate because Garcia “was on financial aid and felt grateful for it.”

Thus far, the expected date of fulfillment of the necessary $25,000 remains unclear, yet the expectations are optimistic. Schwartz cited a $50 donation from an unemployed classmate of Garcia’s living with his parents as an ex-
ample of the evident heartfelt support of the Columbia faculty and alumni for the scholarship.

"Because of who he was and how he died, he will be remembered more," Waldman predicted last summer following Garcia's death.

"As fear and hysteria continue to color how many view AIDS patients, it is important that we be reminded of the genuinely good souls it takes. There is no shame in dying of AIDS," Waldman added.

In addition to his Senate fight to maintain need-blind admissions, Garcia traveled to Central America following his graduation with Witnesses for Peace, a group working to end hostilities there. He then moved to Washington D.C. where he began formation of a Political Action Committee on human rights. During his participation in the University Senate, Garcia traveled to Washington to lobby for financial aid programs and forcefully supported divestment. In his years at Columbia, Garcia also participated in attempts to better the condition of the community’s homeless.

Garcia was diagnosed as having contracted AIDS in March, 1985, and after enduring numerous AIDS-related complications, died this past summer.