HIV STORY PROJECT MERGES WITH NATIONAL AIDS MEMORIAL TO BOLSTER MISSION TO TELL THE STORY OF HIV/AIDS

SAN FRANCISCO, CA (December 1, 2018) – During World AIDS Day, the HIV Story Project, a non-profit organization focused on bridging HIV/AIDS with film, media and storytelling to fight the pandemic and the global stigma associated with it, announced it will merge with the National AIDS Memorial.

Bringing storytelling resources and programs to the National AIDS Memorial aligns the mission of both organizations to never forget the millions of lives lost to HIV/AIDS, to tell the story of AIDS and help inspire future generations to always remember and be voices of hope.

“The HIV Story Project has been a powerful force over the past decade in bringing to the forefront the personal stories of HIV/AIDS in an honest, compassionate way that has really made a difference in educating people about the pandemic and helping to change stigma,” said John Cunningham, executive director of the National AIDS Memorial. “This merger is a natural evolution and will help ensure that the dedication, passion and mission of the HIV Story Project continues to flourish.”

Founded in 2009 by two award-winning leaders in the HIV/AIDS community, director, producer and executive producer Marc Smolowitz and filmmaker and TV producer Jörg Fockele, the HIV Story Project is a San Francisco based non-profit that uses multi-platform media and personal stories to advance HIV/AIDS education and awareness, support HIV/AIDS nonprofit organizations, fight the stigma associated with HIV/AIDS, and give a voice to the HIV positive community. The organization supports underserved communities and those disproportionately affected by the pandemic, including LGBT people, communities of color, women, and youth.

The National AIDS Memorial has partnered with the HIV Story Project through the years, collaborating on major initiatives including Surviving Voices, a multi-year interview project focusing on underserved communities and Generations HIV, an interactive video storytelling booth that has captured over 1,200 AIDS testimonials by people from all walks of life.

“We couldn’t be more delighted to be passing the all-powerful baton of storytelling to the team at the National AIDS Memorial,” said Smolowitz. “We have brought award winning storytelling and filmmaking expertise to the table, and the Grove has brought over 25 years of history, institutional legs and all kinds of support to the things we hope to do together in the coming few years.”

“This merger aligns our passionate belief that storytelling is a critical part of empowering all of us to take ownership of what is now almost a 40-year narrative of AIDS,” said Fockele. “When AIDS is in our rearview mirror, and it someday it will be, there needs to be a place that helps ensure the story of AIDS is recorded and captured for future generations.”

The National AIDS Memorial observed World AIDS Day with two ceremonies and more than 1,500 survivors, leaders in the fight against AIDS and long-time supporters gathered to pay tribute to lost loved ones and
honor extraordinary people whose personal stories and voices have inspired compassion, love and hope for the future. The two days of tributes focused on ‘Voices of Hope’ with the National AIDS Memorial honoring people who have helped capture and curate the vast and diverse voices of the epidemic by telling the personal stories by survivors aimed at inspiring future generations with messages of profound courage, unrelenting hope, and unity of humankind.

“The HIV Story Project has been a leader in the fight against HIV/AIDS and their extraordinary work has made a significant impact,” said Cunningham. “This merger of our two organizations will provide a stronger voice and hope as we continue to share the many personal stories associated with this pandemic that has included heartbreak, loss, love, a will to survive and build hope for the future.”

The National AIDS Memorial relies solely on funding from longtime personal donors and corporate partners to support its mission as a dedicated space in the national landscape where millions of Americans touched directly or indirectly by AIDS can gather to heal, hope, and remember. The National AIDS Memorial, known as “the Grove”, was created more than twenty-five years ago in San Francisco’s Golden Gate Park at the height of the HIV/AIDS epidemic as a place where those impacted by AIDS could both grieve and begin the process of healing. In 1996, legislation sponsored by U.S. Representative Nancy Pelosi was signed into law by President Clinton that elevated “the Grove” as this nation’s sole federally-designated National AIDS Memorial.

*World AIDS Day* is a reminder that more than three decades into the epidemic, more than 70 million people around the world have been infected with the HIV virus, with 35 million people having died from HIV- and AIDS-related causes. While much progress has been made in preventing and treating HIV, nearly 37 million people are currently living with the virus. New advancements in diagnostics, treatments and medicine are helping 21.7 million people live with the disease. In the United States, 1.1 million people are currently living with HIV with the number of new cases having dropped by nearly 20% since 2008.

*To learn more about World AIDS Day at the National AIDS Memorial and the HIV Story Project,* please visit www.aidsmemorial.org, www.TheHIVStoryProject.org, and www.GenerationsHIV.org. Follow on Facebook @NationalAIDSMemorial and @TheHIVStoryProject. Follow on Twitter @AIDS_Memorial and @hivstoryproject. An electronic media kit with photos, video and other materials can be downloaded at: https://hpastrategiccommunications.box.com/s/52k6n0ui9d004c8x9hbsry40x8v05k8m.

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