NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

National AIDS Memorial Welcomes First Panels of the AIDS Quilt Home to San Francisco During World AIDS Day Observances; Honors Leaders in the HIV-AIDS Movement

SAN FRANCISCO, CA (November 30 and December 1, 2019) – This World AIDS Day, more than 1,500 people are expected to gather in the heart of the National AIDS Memorial to welcome home the first group of panels of the AIDS Memorial Quilt (the Quilt) back to San Francisco and honor leaders who have helped bring together the vast voices of the epidemic with profound courage, unrelenting hope and unity of humankind.

The two days of ceremonies and events are focused on ‘Common Threads-Common Ground’, weaving together inspiring and personal stories which have made a difference in the HIV/AIDS movement. World AIDS Day and Light in the Grove ceremonies are made possible through the generous support from Quest Diagnostics as this year’s “Presenting Angel Partner” and Chevron, Gilead Sciences and Wells Fargo, as “Legacy Partners.”

Rick Welts, president & COO of the Golden State Warriors, will be honored with the National Leadership Recognition Award. As the first prominent male executive in professional sports to announce his sexual orientation so publicly, Rick has had a profound impact on how the nation views the LGBT community and AIDS. His story of losing his longtime partner, Arnie Chinn, to AIDS, while mourning in silence is one that touches hearts and opens minds, regardless of sexual orientation. His courageous decision to come out publicly delivered a significant blow to the stigma and discrimination that continues to fuel the spread of HIV and diminish the self-esteem of LGBT youth, in particular.

“It is an honor to receive this award from the National AIDS Memorial, which is such an important place for so many of us to heal, remember and share the stories of those who have died from AIDS,” said Welts. “These national treasures – this memorial and our beloved quilt -- help to keep their memories alive and are reminders to those struggling with who they are, or living with HIV or AIDS, that they are loved, that they are important, that there is hope, and that they share a common bond with so many.”

The Thom Weyand Unsung Hero Award will be presented to Leslie Ewing, who has dedicated much of her life to LGBTQ civil rights. Leslie has been at the heart of some of the most pressing moments in the LGBTQ movement, including co-founding the ACT-UP affinity group Queer and Present Danger; she was an early volunteer coordinator for the Quilt, joining other activists in the marches in Washington DC; she helped lead the AIDS Emergency Fund; raised over $2 million for local AIDS organizations with Under One Roof; and served as executive director of the Pacific Center in Berkeley, where she recently retired.

Two important programs of the National AIDS Memorial are being featured during World AIDS Day. The Surviving Voices Storytelling Project, funded primarily through a grant from Chevron, will unveil a special video tribute honoring the transgender community. Additionally, $50,000 in scholarships will be awarded to ten inspiring students through the Pedro Zamora Young Leadership Scholarship. Gilead Sciences and Wells Fargo are major funders of the scholarship program.

Cleve Jones and Mike Smith will share the story of the AIDS Memorial Quilt, when 32 years ago during the height of the AIDS epidemic, a group of strangers gathered at a San Francisco storefront to remember the names and lives of their loved ones they feared history would forget. It was that seemingly simple act of love and defiance, where the first panels of the Quilt were created, which sparked a national movement, that continues today. Today, the Quilt is a powerful social justice teaching tool, having grown to more than 50,000 3-by 6-foot memorial panels, individually sewn together to tell the personal stories of more than 105,000 lives lost to AIDS.
Earlier this month at a ceremony in Washington, DC, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, along with Representatives John Lewis and Barbara Lee, announced that the Quilt would move from the NAMES Project Foundation in Atlanta where it has been cared for since 2001, back to the San Francisco Bay Area, under the stewardship of the National AIDS Memorial. The Quilt archival collection will transfer under the care of the American Folk Life Center at the Library of Congress, making it available to the public through the world’s largest public library.

“The enormity of loss our beloved quilt represents is so profound, and what has kept so many of us moving forward when, at so many times during this painful journey, we thought it was over,” said Cleve Jones. “I cannot express how meaningful it is to have the Quilt return to San Francisco, where it will live forever so that every story, every life, every friend and lover, will never, ever be forgotten.”

The first Quilt panels to arrive back in San Francisco will be on display during World AIDS Day, hung upon the walls of the large tent, visually telling the stories of lives lost to AIDS. All of the Quilt panels will return to the Bay Area in early 2020, where the Quilt’s programs, which include displays in communities across the nation, panel making, conservation, and public education efforts, will transition to the National AIDS Memorial.

Gilead Sciences, a long-time supporter, will formally announce a $2.4 million grant to the National AIDS Memorial—the largest single grant the organization has ever received—which will be used to fund the Quilt programs, support its move back to San Francisco, and launch a new public education initiative in 2020 to bring the Quilt displays into communities across the country, particularly in regions adversely impacted by HIV.

“As we mark this World AIDS Day, Gilead is honored to continue our support for the National AIDS Memorial with a donation that will help to conserve the Quilt,” said Gilead Sciences Chairman and CEO Daniel O’Day. “The Quilt has played an important role in inspiring activism, fostering hope and educating the nation about the story of HIV/AIDS. Through this partnership, we are proud to help keep this story alive for future generations.”

On the eve of World AIDS Day, the National AIDS Memorial will be artistically-illuminated with brilliant light displays as part of the annual Light in the Grove gala. This year guests will experience a candlelight reflection at the Circle of Friends and walked through the illuminated Redwood Grove with musical choreographed performances.

During Light in the Grove, Mario P. Diaz, a former National AIDS Memorial Board member and longtime community relations leader with Wells Fargo, will receive the Lifetime of Commitment Award. Mario, who retired this year, held various positions within the Wells Fargo Foundation, managed the charitable philanthropic program and volunteerism for the greater San Francisco region. His unwavering commitment, compassion, and generosity have resulted in myriad philanthropic partnerships with organizations and communities.

The National AIDS Memorial relies solely on funding from personal donors and corporate partners to support its mission and programs, which now includes the Quilt, and ensure that the story of AIDS and the AIDS movement is known in perpetuity so that never again will our national conscience allow a community to be devastated by an epidemic because of fear, silence, discrimination or stigma. Created 28 years ago in San Francisco’s Golden Gate Park at the height of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, it is a place where those impacted by AIDS can grieve and heal. In 1996, legislation by U.S. Representative Nancy Pelosi was signed into law by President Bill Clinton, elevating “the Grove” as this nation’s sole federally-designated National AIDS Memorial.

“The National AIDS Memorial is honored to recognize so many leaders on this World AIDS Day. They have all been an inspiration, forging common ground by sharing their personal stories, through their activism and by changing hearts and minds in this long struggle against HIV and AIDS,” said John Cunningham, Executive Director of the National AIDS Memorial. “Their collective voices have made a difference, through their loss, their love, and in helping us always remember the lives we’ve lost through this disease.”

World AIDS Day is a reminder that nearly four 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, today 36 million people are currently living with the virus. New advancements in diagnostics, treatments and medicine are helping nearly 20 million people live healthy with the disease. In the United States, 1.1 million people are currently living with HIV.

To learn more about the National AIDS Memorial, please visit www.aidsmemorial.org. #AIDSMemorial

Online Media Kit: https://hpastrategiccommunications.box.com/s/0uacyy4peprrbetbcnf5chrzpe1yras3

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