For Immediate Release

The AIDS Memorial Quilt Moving to San Francisco under the Stewardship of the National AIDS Memorial; Library of Congress to Preserve Quilt’s Vast Archival Collections

WASHINGTON, D.C. (November 20, 2019) – The NAMES Project Foundation (NPF) today announced that the National AIDS Memorial will become the new caretaker of the AIDS Memorial Quilt and NAMES Project programs. As part of the transition, the NAMES Project and the National AIDS Memorial have agreed to jointly gift care and stewardship of The Quilt’s archival collections to the prestigious American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress, making this collection available through the world’s largest public library.

This historic decision will return The Quilt to the San Francisco Bay Area, where 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 – and with that seemingly simple act of love and defiance, the first panels of The Quilt were created.

“This is the culmination of decades of work that achieves a vision long held by The NAMES Project leadership who, armed with an unwavering commitment to The Quilt, were determined to see that the AIDS Memorial Quilt would stand the test of time,” said Julie Rhoad, President & CEO, The NAMES Project Foundation. “With this set of new caretakers, we are confident that the legacy of The Quilt and The NAMES Project is secure.”

Since 1987, The NAMES Project Foundation has cared for The Quilt and its associated archives. Headquartered in Atlanta since 2001, as the caretakers of this memorial and vast cultural archives, it has been dedicated to the mission of remembrance, education and conscience. Today’s announcement is the culmination of long-term planning and vision to seek new institutional partners to care for The Quilt, and in doing so, secure not only ensure the legacy of The Quilt, but its ability to teach for generations to come.

The Quilt and its programs, which include display activities, panel making, conservation, and public education efforts, will transition to the National AIDS Memorial in early 2020, becoming an integral part of its mission to provide, in perpetuity, a place of remembrance so that the lives of people who died from AIDS are not forgotten and that their stories are known and understood by future generations.

The Quilt will be an essential component of a “Center for Social Conscience” that the National AIDS Memorial plans to build in the coming years, which will be grounded in the story of the AIDS epidemic, social justice, action and change.

“The National AIDS Memorial and The Quilt, through their very existence, have had a tremendous impact in telling the story of the AIDS crisis and the AIDS movement, a story of social justice,” said John Cunningham, executive director of the National AIDS Memorial. “This announcement honors the stewardship by The NAMES Project Foundation over the past three decades in passionately caring for The Quilt and ensures its permanent home will continue to forever honor its history, the lives, struggles, despair, inequity and hope that it represents.”

The American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress will become the new home for the National AIDS Memorial Quilt Archive in 2020. This archival collection currently totals more than 200,000 items. It includes biographical records, correspondence, photographs, tributes, epitaphs, news clippings and artifacts submitted by panel makers that add context about the lives memorialized on The Quilt panels.
The archive also documents the creation, marketing and exhibition of The Quilt over the past 32 years. Digital assets include images of all the Quilt blocks and detailed information about the creators of quilt panels. The American Folklife Center will preserve the archival records, which will be made available to researchers and the public after archivists process and organize the materials.

“The Library of Congress is proud to serve as the home of the National AIDS Memorial Quilt Archive to preserve its legacy and give the memorial a home on both the East Coast and West Coast,” said Librarian of Congress Carla Hayden. “The Quilt and its archive – including letters, photographs and personal mementos – help to humanize and demonstrate the scale of the AIDS pandemic in a powerful way while honoring the lives lost.”

The announcement was made during a ceremony in the Great Hall at the Library of Congress with House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, Congressman John Lewis and Congresswoman Barbara Lee, speaking to the power of The Quilt. They were joined by the founders of The Quilt, families who lost loved ones to AIDS, quilt panel-makers, representatives from The NAMES Project Foundation, National AIDS Memorial, Library of Congress, AIDS organizations and quilt long-time supporters.

“On behalf of the people of San Francisco, it is a privilege to welcome the AIDS Memorial Quilt permanently back to the Bay Area,” said Speaker Nancy Pelosi. “For over 30 years, the AIDS Quilt has stood as a beautiful tribute to those lost to the devastation of HIV/AIDS and has reminded us all of our responsibility to tell the personal stories lovingly stitched into every panel. We are deeply grateful to the NAMES Project, National AIDS Memorial, and Library of Congress for joining together to ensure that this powerful memorial continues to be a source of comfort, education and engagement for generations to come.”

The Quilt is a powerful visual reminder of the AIDS pandemic and continues as the largest ongoing community folk art project in the world. More than 50,000 individual 3-by-6-foot memorial panels commemorating more than 105,000 individual lives of people who have died of AIDS - have been sewn together by friends, lovers and family members and has transformed into a national treasure.

Each year, thousands of panels of The Quilt are displayed throughout the United States and world, serving as both a memorial and a storyteller. Each panel, along with its archival collections, visually documents the evolution of one of the nation’s ongoing civil rights struggles.

Tragically, since 1981, close to 636,000 people have died from AIDS in the U.S., with more than 15,000 people having died from AIDS in 2016. Today, there are more than 1.1 million people living with HIV in the U.S., with the number of new cases having dropped by nearly 20% since 2008. To put that in perspective, there were 418,500 Americans killed during World War II.

The enormity of loss The Quilt represents has a profound and lasting impact on those who experience it. The Quilt has been a powerful symbol to fight prejudice, raise awareness, promote healing, foster hope through education and prevention, and in memory to those who have lost their lives to HIV and AIDS. The Quilt is also a reminder that much work remains to be done to finally end the pandemic.

More information about The AIDS Memorial Quilt and today’s announcement can be found at www.AIDSmemorial.org and www.LOC.gov.

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