



ADAM J. BELLO
COUNTY EXECUTIVE



NEWS RELEASE

*** *For Immediate Release* ***

Monroe County and National AIDS Memorial Partner to Display Section of the AIDS Memorial Quilt for World AIDS Day Display

(Rochester, NY) – Monroe County Executive Adam Bello today announced the county and the National AIDS Memorial are partnering to display a section of the AIDS Memorial Quilt as part of World AIDS Day observances on December 1, 2021.

The Quilt panel is now on display in the lobby of the Monroe County Office Building, located at 39 W. Main Street, Rochester, from December 1-31, 2021.

“The section of the quilt on display contains the some of the names and stories of those who lost their lives to AIDS/HIV from our area — a reminder of the terrible loss we suffered at home to this global pandemic,” said Monroe County Executive Adam Bello. “The quilt is a symbol of hope, activism, healing and remembrance while also highlighting the current work to provide services, educate, and raise greater awareness about HIV today.”

This year marks 40 years since the first cases of AIDS were first reported in the United States. During that time, more than 700,000 lives have been lost in this country to HIV/AIDS, with still no cure. Today, HIV is on the rise, particularly among young people, communities of color and in southern states. Quilt displays are used to raise greater awareness about the story of AIDS, and prevention, treatments and resources available within the community.

“The issues our nation has faced in the past two years - a raging pandemic with hundreds of thousands of lives lost, social injustice, health inequity, stigma, bigotry and fear - are also the issues faced throughout four decades of the AIDS pandemic,” says John Cunningham, CEO of the National AIDS Memorial. “The Quilt is a powerful teaching tool that shares the story of HIV/AIDS, the lives lost, and the hope, healing, activism and remembrance that it inspires.”

Monroe County worked together with the National AIDS Memorial to curate the selection of Quilt panels for display, which feature panels from the region, made to honor and remember the names of friends and loved ones lost to AIDS.

“On this World AIDS Day observance, we remember those whom we have lost to HIV/AIDS and celebrate the steps we have made to conquer this epidemic. While we do not have a vaccination or a cure, yet, we have taken critical steps forward. Detection, prevention and expanding treatment are all keys to our success as is awareness and knowledge. I applaud County Executive Adam Bello for bringing sections of the AIDS Memorial Quilt to Monroe County,” said Assemblymember Harry Bronson. “By displaying the AIDS Memorial Quilt panels, it reminds us, especially now as we face the current COVID-19 pandemic, we must be ever vigilant to address social, racial, and economic injustice that manifests itself in health disparities, bigotry and fear.”

The Quilt was created nearly 35 years ago during the darkest days of the AIDS pandemic by gay rights activist Cleve Jones. While planning a march in 1985, he was devastated by the thousands of lives that had been lost to AIDS and asked each of his fellow marchers to write on placards the names of friends and loved ones who had died. Jones and others stood on ladders taping these placards to the walls of the San Francisco Federal Building. The wall of names looked like a patchwork quilt, and inspired by this sight, Jones and friends made plans for a larger memorial. In 1987, a group of strangers began gathering in a San Francisco storefront to document the lives they feared history would neglect. Their goal was to create a memorial for those who had died of AIDS, and to thereby help people understand the devastating impact of the disease. This served as the foundation of the NAMES Project AIDS Memorial Quilt and later that year, nearly 2,000 of its panels were displayed on the National Mall in Washington, DC.

Today, the Quilt has grown to more than 50,000 panels, with more than 110,000 names stitched within its fabric. It weighs 54 tons, stretches more than 50 miles in length, and is the largest community-arts project in the world. The Quilt is now part of the National AIDS Memorial, which oversees its preservation, care, storytelling programs, and community displays. The Quilt can be viewed in its entirety and people can search for names on the Quilt at www.aidsmemorial.org/quilt.

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Media Contacts:

Gary Walker, Director of Communications
Garywalker@MonroeCounty.gov
(585) 753-1064

Meaghan McDermott, Deputy Director of Communications
MeaghanMcDermott@monroecounty.gov
(585) 469-4365

National AIDS Memorial
Espe Greenwood
619-993-1673
egreenwood@aidsmemorial.org