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Original AIDS Quilt to Hang in Manhattan

By JENNY HOLLAND

Nobody wanted it to get so big.

In 1987, when the AIDS Memorial Quilt was first displayed at the Mall in Washington, it had 1,920 panels representing people who had died of the disease since it was identified in 1981.

By 1996, the last time the quilt was displayed in Washington, it had 40,000 panels and was big enough to cover 26 football fields.

Now there are more than 45,000 panels, and to commemorate World AIDS Day today and the 20th anniversary of the disease in America, the first section of the AIDS quilt will hang in Manhattan through Dec. 7 in the lobby of the Gay Men's Health Crisis office on West 24th Street.

"Gay Men's Health Crisis is the largest and the first AIDS organization in the United States," said Jeff Bosacki, the board president of the New York City branch of the Names Project Foundation, a nonprofit organization that maintains the quilt and uses it for educational purposes. "They have been involved in the fight against AIDS longer than we have. We felt that it was appropriate that panel 0001 should be there. And what better time than World AIDS Day?"

Other sections of the quilt are to hang in 100 locations across the city, including the lobby of the J. P. Morgan Chase building at 1 Chase Plaza, the Holy Trinity Lutheran Church on West 65th Street and the Brooklyn Public Library at Grand Army Plaza.

"The quilt is such a powerful thing — it honors individuals, but collectively it is an enormous canvas of all those who have died of AIDS," said Ana Oliveira, the executive director of the G.M.H.C. "Unfortunately, it represents the growth of the epidemic as well."

According to the latest statistics from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta, 448,060 people have died of the disease in the United States.

The organizers of the 1987 quilt display had not expected such growth. "They thought this was a one-time gig," Mr. Bosacki said, "that if the government saw how many people had died, they would take action and stop the disease.

"No one," he added, "thought AIDS would last this long."

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