NEWS RELEASE

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THE STORY WILL BE KNOWN BY FUTURE GENERATIONS
National AIDS Memorial Grove Observes World AIDS Day by Sharing Touching Stories Left at the Grove through the Years that Pay Tribute to Lost Friends and Loved Ones

• Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi, AIDS activist and actress Judith Light, among several guest speakers, honourees and young students being recognized for their work in the fight against AIDS

SAN FRANCISCO, CA (November 26, 2014) – Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi and AIDS and human rights activist and actress, Judith Light, will be among those in attendance who will share their own personal stories and be recognized for their longstanding leadership during the Light in the Grove and World AIDS Day ceremonies on Sunday, November 30 and Monday December 1.

“Through the years many personal tributes and items have been left here at the Grove by the thousands of visitors who have lost friends and loved ones to HIV/AIDS,” said executive director John Cunningham. “As we come together in this sacred space to grieve and heal, we felt it was important to share some of these touching stories as a way to ensure they will never be forgotten and known by future generations.”

The idea for the National AIDS Memorial was first conceived in 1988 by a small group of San Francisco residents representing a community devastated by the AIDS epidemic. They envisioned a beautiful grove where people could find solitude and hope while remembering loved ones; a place to provide positive focus for their grief and dedicated to all lives touched by AIDS.

More than twenty-five years later, thousands of personal tributes, photographs, artwork, keepsakes and personal notes have been left at the Grove by families, loved ones and friends. During two days of events marking World AIDS Day, the National AIDS Memorial Grove will display a collection of these items as more than a thousand people are expected to gather to remember the lives lost, honor leaders who have confronted this tragic pandemic, and help support the next generation of young people who will be on the forefront in helping find a cure.

Light In The Grove, November 30th: 6:00 – 9:00 p.m.

On the eve of World AIDS Day, Congresswoman Pelosi, who in 1996 sponsored and helped pass legislation that designated the Grove as a National Memorial, will be the featured speaker during the annual “Light in the Grove” evening event in support of the National AIDS Memorial Grove’s mission. Much of the Grove will be illuminated to honor those lost and celebrate the spirit of light and life. Guests will experience a candlelight reflection at the Circle of Friends and the evening will include special musical and choreographed artistic performances.

“The Grove is a special place to come, not just to remember the loved ones we have lost, but to be reminded of the countless stories of the treasured lives whose spirits are a part of this beautiful space and who can never be forgotten,” said Congresswoman Pelosi. “Each year that passes without a cure only strengthens our resolve to end this devastating disease and stop this senseless loss of life.”
The 2014 Light in the Grove ‘Lifetime of Commitment’ award will be presented to Ken Henderson, executive director, and Joe Seiler, board chair, of the Richmond/Ermet AIDS Foundation (REAF). Ken and Joe’s story with REAF began twenty years ago, when they began producing a fundraising entertainment event called “Help is on the Way: San Francisco Cares” which has become one of the Bay Area’s largest annual AIDS benefit concerts, distributing more than $3 million to over 30 Bay Area AIDS service agencies. REAF was founded in 1994 by two mothers, Barbara Richmond and Peggy Ermet, who each lost their only sons to AIDS as a way to both honor their sons’ memories and to raise funds for the kinds of agencies that provided services for them before they died. With the help of long-time friends Ken and Joe, these remarkable women inspired the mostly-volunteer organization that has helped so many AIDS organizations.

World AIDS Day, December 1st: 12:00 noon

On World AIDS Day, AIDS and human rights activist and actress, Judith Light will be honored with the National AIDS Memorial Grove National Leadership Recognition Award. Her story begins at a time when national leadership in the AIDS epidemic required a particular kind of courage. Judith stepped up to provide much-needed visibility, support, money, and compassion. A well-known and accomplished actor, multiple Tony and Emmy award winner, Judith involved herself in the AIDS epidemic starting in the 1980’s, including playing the role of Jeanne White in the Ryan White Story. She’s also been a generous donor of time, energy, ideas, and ‘light’. Without hesitation, Judith brought her considerable reputation and influence during a time of crisis and stigma. She identifies as an activist, and has ‘walked the walk’ for over 30 years. Since the early days, she has lent her name, support, and energy by participating in marches and parades, and serving on committees and boards. She’s been a prodigious fundraiser, organizer, speaker, sponsor, and host.

“I am deeply touched and humbled by this honor,” said Light. “Too many lives have been lost to HIV/AIDS and too many of our friends and loved ones have struggled, not just fighting for their lives, but enduring endless discrimination and homophobia, which still exists today. We must continue sharing our stories and our passion to not only find a cure, but raise the level of awareness so everyone, particularly our children, know they are loved, cherished and respected for who they are.”

Paul Boneberg, executive director of the GLBT Historical Society in San Francisco, will receive the Thom Weyand Unsung Hero Award. From a small group of concerned individuals working out of his apartment, Paul created one of the most amazing, comprehensive, and often overlooked responses to the HIV/AIDS pandemic. In 1984 Paul founded Mobilization Against AIDS (MAA), the nation’s first advocacy organization created to help improve the lives of people living with AIDS. He helped take over the AIDS Candlelight March, growing it to become the International AIDS Candlelight Memorial, the world’s largest grassroots AIDS activity. After Paul left MAA he founded the Global AIDS Action Network (GAAN) and has served as the director of the AIDS Coalition Silicon Valley.

The Grove will also award five scholarships to students this year as part of the Pedro Zamora Young Leaders Scholarship Award Program. Funded through a grant from UnitedHealthcare, the $2,500 – $5,000 scholarships support the academic efforts of emerging young people who share Pedro’s passionate commitment to ending the HIV/AIDS pandemic. The scholarship program was renamed earlier this year in honour of AIDS educator, activist and reality television pioneer Pedro Zamora, who passed away twenty years ago from an AIDS-related illness. Former “MTV Real World” cast members and roommates of Pedro, Judd Winick and Pam Ling, will help announce the scholarships.

Sponsored by Wells Fargo and Quest Diagnostics, along with the support of many community partners, the World AIDS Day observances will conclude with supporters gathering for the reading of the names of those engraved into the Circle of Friends. To learn more visit www.aidsmemorial.org or call (415) 765-0497.

Light in the Grove is a ticketed event and requires advance ticket purchase to attend. The World AIDS Day observance at the National AIDS Memorial Grove is open to the public, with ceremonies beginning at noon.