

## Annual AIDS walk to raise awareness, funds

**Ayana Jones**

Tribune Staff Writer

The upcoming 27th annual AIDS Walk Philly will serve to educate the community about being tested for HIV and raise funds for local organizations.

The walk, which will be held October 20 by the AIDS Fund, will bring together nearly 15,000 people to raise money for HIV prevention education, public awareness, and HIV care services here in the Greater Philadelphia region.

Robb Reichard, Executive Director of AIDS Fund, said part the walk's mission is to give Philadelphians a better understanding of the status of living with HIV/AIDS today. The event comes at a time when about 30,000 residents of Philadelphia are living with HIV.

"After 30 years of this epidemic, it is shocking that there are still misconceptions about the contracting of HIV and that those living with the disease are still facing discrimination. This means too many people don't get tested. Since one in five people don't know they are HIV positive, we want to educate our community about the urgency of getting tested," said Reichard.

The walk and run begins at the steps of the Philadelphia Museum of

Art. Run along the certified 5K route on Martin Luther King Drive at 8 am. The 12K walk steps off at 9 a.m. and walkers will return on Martin Luther King Drive.

To emphasize the long history of HIV/AIDS, AIDS Fund has created a large photographic and text timeline of over 30 years of the epidemic. The "1981-Until It's Over..." AIDS Timeline will be on display during the walk.

The event will feature a display of 25 panels from the AIDS Memorial Quilt. Regarded as a powerful tool for raising awareness about HIV/AIDS, the quilt is the largest ongoing community arts project in the world. Each of the more than 44,000 colorful panels that make up the quilt memorializes the life of a person lost to AIDS.

Walk participants can also receive rapid HIV testing on site.

Individuals can become involved by getting sponsors, making a donation and joining with thousands of other walkers on October 20. Each participant is requested to make a commitment to raise at least \$50, for which they will receive an AIDS Walk Philly t-shirt.

Proceeds from the walk support direct care services, prevention and education, counseling and testing, medical care, and public awareness efforts with 29 partner organizations

in the region.

The Greater Philadelphia Region's first AIDS walk was held in 1987, when volunteers from Philadelphia's lesbian and gay community center decided to organize a walk-a-thon to support area AIDS agencies and raise public awareness about the disease. The first walk had about 300 participants and raised \$33,000. Since then, thousands of walkers have gathered each year to participate in the region's largest annual HIV/AIDS public awareness and fundraising event. Nearly \$16 million has been raised for HIV/AIDS public awareness, prevention and care services for people living with HIV disease.

The AIDS Fund has released a new video titled "AIDS in Philly: Fighting Stigma." The video is the fifth in a series of AIDS in Philly videos created by AIDS Fund to illustrate Philadelphia-specific and public awareness issues related to HIV/AIDS.

For registration information visit [www.aidswalkphilly.org](http://www.aidswalkphilly.org) or call (215) 731-WALK.

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The AIDS Fund's text and photographic time line is pictured during AIDS Walk Philly.

— PATRICK HAGERTY FOR THE AIDS FUND