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COMMUNITIES ▶ On the move after 25 years

On the move after 25 years

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AIDS Walk celebrates a milestone and moves to Hillcrest

With a new date, a new route, a new 5K "fun run" and a new Friday night vigil, this year's AIDS Walk San Diego could be the biggest yet.

More than 8,000 walkers, runners, volunteers and supporters turned out for last year's event in Balboa Park, raising

nearly \$400,000 for 18 San Diego-area HIV/AIDS service organizations, according to event director Ian Johnson.

This year, on Sept. 27, the routes begin and end on Normal Street in Hillcrest. Both the 5K and 10K travel along University Avenue, Park Boulevard, El Prado, over the Cabrillo Bridge and up Sixth Avenue back to University.

"We're hoping to get a lot more community support by moving it up into Hillcrest and having it on a Saturday instead of Sunday," Johnson said. "Hopefully it will bring out our neighbors that will want to get involved and see what's happening."

While a certified 10K race and 5K walk have long been part of the event, organizers this year added a new casual 5K fun run with a "Heroes and Villains" theme. Costumes are encouraged, and strollers, walkers, in-line skates, skateboards and scooters are welcome.

Also new this year is a Friday night candlelight vigil to commemorate friends and family lost to AIDS. The vigil will be held on Normal Street at University Avenue under the Pride Flag and monument at 7 p.m. on Sept. 26.

The money generated by AIDS Walk is a vital revenue source for non-profit organizations such as Christie's Place, which provides support to more than 1,200 women, children and families impacted by HIV/AIDS.

"It helps to literally keep our lights on and our doors open here at Christie's Place," said Liz Brosnan, the organization's executive director. "AIDS Walk is really sort of woven into the fabric of who we are."

Shannon Hansen, Christie's Place program manager and leader of the Christie's Place AIDS Walk team, said the fundraising aspect of the event is just one part of what makes it important.

"It's a great opportunity for people who are affected by HIV/AIDS to see that San Diego cares about them and that people want to help them," Hansen said. "I think that's a really powerful message."

Other beneficiaries last year were Being Alive, Community HousingWorks, Family Health Centers, Fraternity House, Mama's Kitchen, [North County Health Services](#), North County LGBTQ Resource Center, Operation Samahan, San Diego Volunteer Lawyer Program, San Diego Youth Services, San Ysidro Health Center, Stepping Stone, Strength for the Journey, the archIve Project, Townspeople, UC San Diego and the Vista Community Clinic.



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No other one-day event raises more money for HIV/AIDS organizations in San Diego County, but it's not just about the money. As treatments and prognoses have improved, the sense of urgency over HIV/AIDS has faded. It's important for people to remember that the problem has not disappeared, Johnson said.

Approximately 15,368 people have been diagnosed with AIDS in San Diego County since 1981, according to public health data as of June 30. About half of those — 7,515 people — are alive now. Another 5,466 in the county are living with HIV that has not progressed to AIDS.

In 2010, health officials estimated that an additional 3,171 individuals in the county were HIV-positive and unaware of their status.

"We have come a long way, but don't be fooled. People are still passing away," Johnson said.

Though AIDS Walk celebrates its 25th anniversary this year, its history goes back further to the mid-1980s, when a group of activists — including Susan Jester, Nicole Murray Ramirez, David Coppini, Ken Martin and Chris Shaw — began organizing the first walk. From 1986 through 1988, the event was known as "Walk for Life," because the word AIDS was too highly charged. In 1989, it became AIDS Walk.

The event is supported by a number of sponsors, including the San Diego Human Dignity Foundation, which provided a \$25,000 sponsorship. Sempra Energy and the Gay & Lesbian Fund for San Diego each provided a \$10,000 sponsorship. The following sponsors provided \$5,000: AHF Pharmacy, CareFusion, Flagship Cruises, Geico, Jimbo's, Revivals, Rich's, Verizon and Wet personal lubricant.

After the races on Sept. 27, several Hillcrest restaurants — including Harvey Milk's American Diner, Martinis Above Fourth, Uptown Tavern and East Coast Pizza — will donate at least 25 percent of their proceeds to the event.

Registration is still open for individuals and teams, and organizers are still looking for volunteers. For more information, visit aidswalksd.org or contact Ian Johnson at aidswalk@thecentersd.org.

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