



GLBT
Historical
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museum & archives

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“AIDS Treatment Activism: A Bay Area Story” Online Exhibition Explores Groundbreaking Work of San Francisco AIDS Treatment Activists

San Francisco — A new online exhibition by the GLBT Historical Society uses documents, flyers, photographs, ephemera and audiovisual materials to explore how the Bay Area’s LGBTQ community responded to the AIDS crisis by elucidating a new treatment-activism model that gave patients a voice in research efforts and policymaking. “AIDS Treatment Activism: A Bay Area Story” opens on the society’s website at glbthistory.org/aids-treatment-activism on Wednesday, July 1.

In the early 1980s, frightening reports began to surface in San Francisco and New York City that gay men and injection-drug users were dying of a mysterious illness with no known cause or treatment. Fears mounted quickly as the evidence grew that this new disease was transmissible and moving at a fast pace through gay neighborhoods in urban centers. Yet even as the death tolls began to rise alarmingly, the medical community’s response to the AIDS epidemic was sluggish at best.

In the midst of chaos, fear, neglect, loss and grief, the Bay Area LGBTQ community organized to respond to the unmet needs of the crisis and develop treatment and social services. Beginning with a few individuals who took risks to bring experimental and untested treatments to their loved ones, the community developed a novel activist movement that democratized the scientific process and forever changed biomedical research. Sweeping across the country, this patient-empowerment movement redefined the roles of “patient” and “community” in medical care and research.

“AIDS Treatment Activism: A Bay Area Story” documents the rise and growth of the treatment-activism movement in the San Francisco Bay Area in the 1980s and 1990s. The first section of the exhibition, “Silence = Death,” contextualizes the early years of the epidemic and the political and medical establishment’s failure to respond, charting the rise of early buyers’ clubs that made underground experimental treatments available to people with AIDS.

The exhibition continues with “Knowledge = Life,” which highlights how

activists demanded participation in both government- and industry-sponsored HIV-research initiatives. Finally, the third section, “Action = Life,” documents the street activism and demonstrations, featuring powerful graphics, performances and attention-grabbing spectacles, that activists deployed in order to attract and leverage media attention.

“AIDS Treatment Activism: A Bay Area Story” opens Wednesday, July 1, on the GLBT Historical Society’s website at glbthistory.org/aids-treatment-activism.

For more information, visit the GLBT Historical Society website at www.glbthistory.org.

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About the Curator

Brenda Lein was a Shanti volunteer in the late 1980s and early 1990s, providing practical support for people with AIDS. She also served as a member of ACT UP San Francisco and was a founding member of ACT UP Golden Gate. She helped to form Women Organized to Respond to Life-Threatening Diseases (WORLD), an organization for, by and about HIV-positive women. Lein also held the dual positions of director of information and advocacy and director of Project Immune Restoration at Project Inform. Most recently, she served as the program director for the Delaney AIDS Research Enterprise to Cure AIDS, a large, government-funded, international, multicenter, bench-to-bedside research effort. She is currently the president of the Linda Grinberg Foundation for AIDS and Immune Research, which funds cutting edge immune and HIV/AIDS cure research.

About the GLBT Historical Society

The GLBT Historical Society is a public history center and archives that collects, preserves, exhibits and makes accessible to the public materials and knowledge to support and promote understanding of LGBTQ history, culture and arts in all their diversity. Founded in 1985, the society maintains one of the world’s largest collections of LGBTQ historical materials. The society’s operations are centered around two sites: the GLBT Historical Society Museum, located since 2011 in the heart of San Francisco’s Castro neighborhood; and the Dr. John P. De Cecco Archives and Research Center, open to researchers in the Mid-Market district. For more information, visit www.glbthistory.org.

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