

AIDS WALK SAN FRANCISCO

Treatment's better but the throngs still walk for a cure

By Erin Allday

CHRONICLE STAFF WRITER

When Steven Sams attended his first AIDS Walk in San Francisco almost 20 years ago, he was young and vibrant, a little bit reckless — and lonely.

At 25, he'd already lost more than a dozen friends to AIDS.

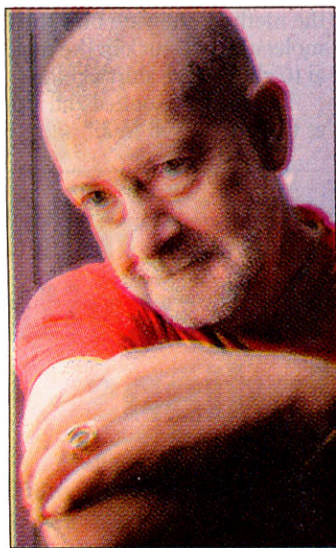
"It was gray and dark that morning, and foggy," said Sams, 54, recalling that first walk in 1987. "It wasn't really the kind of big party celebration you see now, all, 'Let's charge on and win this battle.' It really was a funeral service and memorial in more ways than anything else."

This year's annual AIDS Walk — San Francisco's 20th — starts at 10:30 a.m. Sunday in Golden Gate Park and promises to be lively and loud and much larger.

Twenty-five thousand people are expected to turn out and raise about \$3.5 million, but, as always, the event will be bitter-sweet. Walkers will laugh and sing, but they'll wear T-shirts printed with the names and faces of those who have died of AIDS.

The fight against AIDS has

► **AIDS WALK:** Page B6



KATY RADDATZ / *The Chronicle*

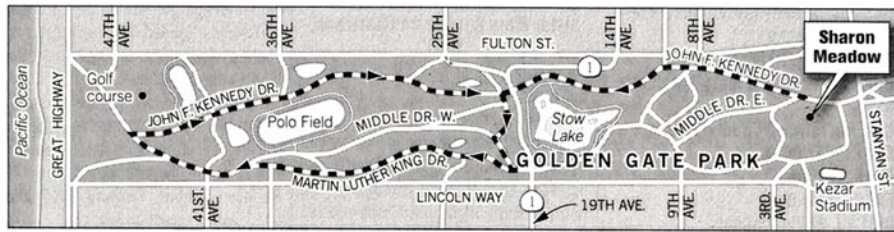
**"More than half of
my life has been in
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people's behalf."**

STEVEN SAMS

*Volunteer who has raised more
money for AIDS Walk than any
other individual*

AIDS Walk San Francisco

The 10-kilometer fundraising walkathon benefiting the San Francisco AIDS Foundation and others will start at 10:30 a.m. Sunday at Sharon Meadow in Golden Gate Park. Pre-walk events begin at 9 a.m.



Getting there

Public transportation is strongly recommended; parking is extremely limited.

The following Muni lines stop near the entrance to the park at Stanyan:

5-Fulton, 7-Haight, 21-Hayes, 33-Stanyan, 71-Noriega (at Lincoln) and N-Judah (aboveground before 8 a.m., underground after 8 a.m.). The 37-Corbett and 43-Masonic stop at Haight and Cole, about two blocks from the park entrance.

From Marin or Sonoma County:

Take any Golden Gate Transit Bus to Civic Center (McAllister and Van Ness). Then take the Muni's 5-Fulton, 71-Noriega or N-Judah (underground) to the park (above ground before 8 a.m., underground after 8 a.m.).

From the East Bay: Take BART to the Civic Center Station. On Sundays, the first BART trains from Fremont, Concord and Richmond leave around 8 a.m. At Civic Center Station, catch the Muni's N-Judah underground after 8 a.m., or 7, 21 or 71 buses aboveground at Seventh and Market.

From the South Bay:

Take Caltrain to the San Francisco terminal at Fourth and King. From the San Francisco station, take the Muni N-Judah to the intersection of Carl and Stanyan.

Events before the AIDS Walk

9:30 a.m.: Warm-up

9:45 a.m.: Opening ceremony, Bruce Vilanch, Camryn Manheim, cast of "A Chorus Line," Norm Lewis.

Events after the AIDS Walk

12:30 p.m.: Post-walk concert by Native Elements and Finding Mercury.

Source: www.aidswalk.net/sanfran

The Chronicle

25 years later, thousands still walk for an AIDS cure

► AIDS WALK

From Page B1

changed a lot since the first case was reported 25 years ago. It is no longer a gay man's disease, for starters; minority groups now see the highest rates of infection in the United States.

But there's hope for people with AIDS today, with drug regimens keeping people alive longer. Money raised through fundraising goes toward research, prevention and education, not hospice care programs and spreading basic awareness of the disease.

In 1987, AIDS was almost always deadly. There wasn't a lot of hope then, recalled Craig Miller, who created the first AIDS Walk in Los Angeles, which is still held, as are walks in New York, south Florida and San Francisco.

"AIDS Walk San Francisco was born in the dark ages of the epidemic," Miller said. "The AIDS crisis was so prevalent that you could feel it walking down the street. There was just such a desperation and despair on the part of so many."

That first walk, he said, "was not a frolic in the park."

"The day was just this bitter-sweet mix of seriousness, sadness, compassion and hope. It was a very, very serious event," he said. "People walked those 10 kilometers with a heavy weight on their shoulders."

Over the past two decades, as

people became more aware of the disease and as new medical breakthroughs made AIDS not quite as terrifying as before, donations for AIDS Walks around the nation started to slip. Several AIDS Walks around the country disappeared.

San Francisco never saw a significant drop in donations, but it wasn't growing, either. So AIDS Walk organizers focused on communities that hadn't traditionally been involved — clinics based in black and Latino neighborhoods, for example, and women's health groups.

"We're in a period of time where largely folks have moved on to other topics. This is once a year when a huge number of people are engaged and thinking about folks living with HIV and AIDS," said Steven Tierney, deputy executive director of the San Francisco AIDS Foundation, which organizes the annual AIDS Walk.

The event has raised more than \$55 million in the Bay Area since 1987. Donations go to the San Francisco AIDS Foundation, which then distributes the money among 40 community groups all over the Bay Area, organizations that provide care to those with HIV or AIDS, or have education and prevention programs.

Deloris McGee, a member of the National Council of Negro Women, said her organization started participating in the AIDS Walk four years ago when mem-

bers realized how hard AIDS was hitting the black community and black women in particular.

"We needed to be more visible because we hadn't been there in the past," McGee said. "AIDS affects African American women and older women. We have to be concerned. AIDS is a problem for everybody."

Sams, who has been at every AIDS Walk since the first one, said he's been thrilled at the increasingly diverse populations turning out for the event.

He's also got a pretty-good-size cheering section of his own, and for good reason. Sams has raised more money for AIDS Walk than any other individual — after Sunday's walk, more than \$600,000.

He has a database of 3,000 potential donors, including a "core group" of 250 to 300 people who donate every year. Sams works for AT&T, but raising money for AIDS Walk is practically a full-time job on its own.

It's well worth the effort, he said.

"More than half of my life has been in battle with this disease, on other people's behalf," he said. "I was never what I considered the 'safe and sane' person in the times when everybody else was getting AIDS. What I'm doing, it's not survivor's guilt, but it's a tribute to others who got ill when I didn't."

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