



CITY OF CHICAGO • OFFICE OF THE MAYOR



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

June 2, 2022

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**MAYOR LIGHTFOOT, GOVERNOR PRITZKER, & LT. GOVERNOR STRATTON,
AMONG OTHER CIVIC LEADERS, 'CUTTING THE RIBBON' TO OFFICIALLY
UNVEIL AIDS GARDEN CHICAGO**

*Much anticipated 'Park for All' on Chicago's lakefront now open for reflection,
remembrance, and relaxation; just in time to celebrate Pride Month*

CHICAGO — Mayor Lori E. Lightfoot joined State of Illinois Governor JB Pritzker, Lieutenant Governor Juliana Stratton, and civic leaders, including State Representatives Greg Harris and Margaret Croke, Alderman Tom Tunney, State Senator Sara Feigenholtz, Chicago Park District General Superintendent and CEO Rosa Escareño, and Chicago Parks Foundation Executive Director Willa Lang, along with members of the LGBTQ+ community at the ribbon-cutting ceremony of the much-anticipated AIDS Garden Chicago. Located at Lake Shore Drive and Belmont Avenue, AIDS Garden Chicago is the city's first public park to memorialize the early days of Chicago's HIV epidemic and honors those who continue to fight against the disease today.

"I'm honored to officially cut the ribbon on the AIDS Garden Chicago in a place that means so much to our LGBTQ+ community," said Chicago Mayor Lori E. Lightfoot. "As we memorialize those we've lost to the HIV epidemic and inspire those who continue to fight the disease, it has never been more important to immortalize Belmont Rocks' legacy as a safe space where people could gather, support one another, and be their full selves. I hope that residents and visitors alike will continue gathering here at our city's newest symbol of liberation, individuality, and hope."

Taking place in front of the Garden's signature piece, the bright green 30-foot Keith Haring sculpture, 'Self-Portrait,' guests will be treated to a performance by the Chicago Gay Men's Chorus, followed by a powerful spoken word performance by Chicago-bred Black Queer playwright, poet, and activist Osiris Khepera.

"The AIDS Garden Chicago allows visitors to walk and reflect on both the progress we've made and how much further we have yet to go," said Governor JB Pritzker. "At



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a time when states across this nation are moving backward and criminalizing our LGBTQ+ neighbors' right to live freely, we are here to uplift the queer community and ensure that this city and this state is a sanctuary for LGBTQ+ rights and freedoms, no matter what."

"I am so proud to join community leaders and activists as we dedicate the AIDS Garden Chicago to the memory of all those who've lost their lives to HIV and AIDS," said Lt. Governor Juliana Stratton. "While other states seek to take their residents back in time — we will never stop fighting for the LGBTQ+ community and ensuring that Illinois remains a state that recognizes the dignity of every person's existence. May this space serve as a daily reminder of the work we still have yet to do in uplifting the legacy and selfless example of those we've lost."

Alderman Tom Tunney said, "I thank everyone who attended the AIDS Garden Chicago ribbon cutting event; in the face of the AIDS epidemic, countless people took action and worked to provide health care, housing, food, or other services to meet basic needs of our friends and neighbors who became infected with HIV/AIDS. Many of these same people worked tirelessly to see this garden, the city's first public park to memorialize the early days of Chicago's HIV epidemic, come to fruition. AIDS Garden Chicago is a living garden and an educational tool that symbolizes the resiliency of the LGBTQ+ community. AIDS Garden Chicago is a safe space for all: those who are queer or straight, those with any gender identity, those from any race or ethnicity. The AIDS epidemic impacted people of all backgrounds from all communities and walks of life, and we recognize the human toll for all. Thank you to all who have helped make AIDS Garden Chicago possible."

"Parks have always served as welcoming spaces for all to enjoy," said Chicago Park District General Superintendent and CEO Rosa Escareño. "It's an honor to celebrate the opening of the AIDS Garden and the historical significance of the Belmont Rocks. I truly expect this beautiful garden will become one of our city's most treasured gems. But even more than that, this space will be beacon of hope, strength, compassion, and unity for residents across our great city."

Added Chicago Parks Foundation Executive Director Willa Lang, "It has been an honor and privilege for the Chicago Parks Foundation to lead this project with the community, Alderman Tunney, and the Chicago Park District. This is just the beginning of this park's potential. It is truly a garden for all and we look forward to connecting with more communities and ideas as this garden grows. Especially at this time, during the pandemic, when so many marginalized communities were



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impacted disproportionately, we remember, recognize, and honor those amazing, joyful lives lived and lost during the AIDS epidemic at this magnificent site along the lake front.”

The 2.5 acre AIDS Garden Chicago is situated on Lake Michigan at the original location of the historic Belmont Rocks, a beloved space where the local LGBTQ+ community gathered between the 1960s and 1990s. The Garden’s first phase was completed in late 2019 with the installation of its anchor piece, the stunning 30-foot Keith Haring sculpture, ‘Self-Portrait.’ The Garden includes unique areas designed for reflection, education, honor, and pride. Visitors will be guided through a variety of collective garden spaces all providing a sensory nature experience, most notably a Gingko Grove of Reflection and the Sunrise Garden of Healing. The Foundation also hosts the AIDS Garden Story Archive, a digital quilt of personal shared experiences that are accessed via QR codes on signage throughout the Garden.

The Chicago Parks Foundation thanks current AIDS Garden Chicago partners: Alderman Tom Tunney, Alphawood Foundation, TAWANI Foundation, Walgreens, Beaumier Donor Advised Family Fund, the Elizabeth Morse Trust, and the Chicago Park District in addition to tireless advocacy by the State of Illinois, Senator Sara Feigenholtz, Leader Greg Harris, Representative Mike Quigley, State Representative Margaret Croke, and former State Representative Yoni Pizer. Further thanks to AIDS Foundation of Chicago, Center on Halsted, Design Workshop, Friends of the Parks, Howard Brown Health, Keith Haring Foundation, Legacy Project, Mariano's, The Moth, and Rosenthal Fine Art, Inc.

The Chicago Parks Foundation is leading the Garden’s fundraising and community conversations. Established in 2013 as the nonprofit partner of Chicago's parks, the Chicago Parks Foundation operates in a public-private partnership with the Chicago Park District to provide fiscal partnership to foundations, organizations, and individuals who wish to support their parks. For more information, visit [Chicago Parks Foundation](#).

Celebrating more than 85 years of service, the Chicago Park District is a Gold Medal Award winner, recognized for excellence in park and recreation management across the nation. For more information about the Chicago Park District’s more than 8,800 acres of parkland, more than 600 parks, 26 miles of lakefront, 12 museums, two world-class conservatories, 16 historic lagoons, nearly 50 nature areas, thousands of special events, sports, and entertaining programs, please visit www.chicagoparkdistrict.com or call 312/742.PLAY or 312/747.2001 (TTY).



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