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# Front Page

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Serving the Carolinas For Over 25 Years!

## 25 Years of AIDS

**1981:** The Federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) report an alarming occurrence of a rare cancer (Kaposi's sarcoma) in otherwise healthy gay men. They first call the disease "gay cancer" but soon rename it GRID ("gay-related immune deficiency").

**1982:** First reported cases in hemophiliacs, infants and recipients of blood transfusions, evidence that the epidemic is not limited to gay men. The disease is renamed Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS).

**1983:** Researchers isolate a new virus linked to the disease.

**1985:** A blood test to detect the virus is approved.

Condoms are shown to be effective in preventing the transmission of AIDS.

Actor Rock Hudson is the first major public figure to die of AIDS. Ryan White, a hemophiliac teenager from Indiana, is denied entry to school because he has AIDS.

**1987:** The first drug to treat the virus, AZT, is approved; it was developed by Burroughs Wellcome Co. of Research Triangle Park.

And the Band Played On, Randy Shilts' book identifying "Patient Zero" and investigating the slow response of government agencies that allowed the virus to spread virtually unchecked in the early 1980s, is published.

On October 11, 1987, the Quilt was displayed for the first time on the National Mall in Washington, D.C., during the 2<sup>nd</sup> National March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights. It covered a space larger than a football field and included 1,920 panels. Half a million people visit the Quilt that weekend.

The AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP) is founded to

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# Crape Myrtle Festival Turns Twenty-five

By Mark Zumbach  
Guest Contributor

On Saturday, July 30th over 1,000 people will converge on downtown Raleigh to attend the annual fund raising celebration known as the Crape Myrtle festival. This year is special, as it is the 25th anniversary of the Festival.

### History in the making

By now, most people from the HIV/AIDS and LGBT communities in the Triangle know the often repeated story of the festival's roots and what it's become over the years. But as the evening of the silver anniversary approaches, some of that story bears retelling.

In the summer of 1981, Mike Boyd hosted a summer vacation for 6 of his friends at his home in Wilmington, NC. The 7 gay men were all very much at the beginnings of their careers and were living frugally - one of them recently told me, "none of us had more than two nickels to rub together." They decided to make the most of their modest vacation by throwing a party and gently spoofing Wilmington's famous Azalea Festival. They dubbed their party the Crape Myrtle Festival, and they crowned their host the Crape Myrtle Queen. The party was a huge success, and turned out to be the highlight of their summer.

The following year, Boyd moved to the Triangle area, and the friends decided to recreate the party as a garden party at Boyd's home in Chapel Hill,



Changing of the queens at last year's Crape Myrtle: Allison Edwards, Mark Zumbach, Ray Tillery, and Patrick Brennan.

NC. There were few places in the early 80s for gay men to gather together openly to socialize and the party proved a welcome distraction from the oppressive summer heat. The second party was possibly even more successful than the first, for the second year Boyd was crowned queen of the festival and an annual tradition was born.

In the mean time, stories were starting to come out of New York and California about a strange new illness that only appeared to be affecting gay men, in fact it was often called "gay cancer" or "gay related immune deficiency." For gay men living in the South, the

news about this illness seemed like something not connected to us at all. No one knew what was causing the illness, but it seemed to be only affecting people in large cities - and the national media was paying it so little attention, it seemed like something that would go away. But the illness spread, it was renamed Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS), and if grew into a national and then global epidemic.

As the AIDS epidemic spread, it began to touch the lives of gay men everywhere. In North Carolina, we started hearing stories of friends who'd moved away getting sick and dying. And some of our friends, who'd moved away, came home when they were no longer well enough to take care of themselves.

At the annual Crape Myrtle Festival, someone started passing a bucket to collect money for sick friends who were struggling with mounting medical bills and making rent.

The Crape Myrtle Festival continued to grow, and became a party people jockeyed to wrangle an invitation to. The organizers were also realizing the fundraising potential, as they saw how much was collected informally at the party.

In the late 80s, the party became an

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