

# A COVID-19 memorial will help Chicago remember



Elizabeth Sugg waits for a bus in the rain on North Michigan Avenue in Chicago during the pandemic on April 23, 2020.

The COVID-19 pandemic was a horrible period in history, not least for the United States, which suffered more than a million dead and at least 6.5 million hospitalizations — and counting.

In terms of lives disrupted, businesses ruined and urban downtowns deserted, the U.S. fared especially badly. Just imagine how much worse the pandemic could have been without the selfless determination of medical professionals who cared for the isolated, sick and dying, as well as other essential workers.

No one should ever forget the sacrifices of those who rose to the occasion, from firefighters to retail sales clerks. Nor should we forget the ongoing effects among those who suffered during lockdown, lost loved ones, continue to contract new cases of the virus or struggle with lingering symptoms.

A group composed mostly of Chicagoans who also believe no one should ever forget has come up with a smart plan to make sure no one ever does. We admire what they are doing.

The self-titled COVID-19 Monument Commission is leading a grassroots fundraising campaign via private and corporate donations for a sculpture and outdoor park area that will provide a physical location to reflect on the pandemic and help people to heal.

The all-volunteer group recently announced the winner of a global design competition, choosing a Georgia-based artist whose sculpture concept features a dandelion. The common flower is intended to reflect the global ubiquity of the disease, the starburst-like shape of the virus itself and the promise of resilience. (Those who have tried to get rid of dandelions in lawns can testify to their resilience.)

The Illinois Medical District, a special-use urban zoning area with 560 acres west of the Loop, has donated land for the monument and park, in a spot open to the public, as a tribute to front-line workers and those who suffered from the illness. Fittingly, the district is anchored by four major hospitals: the Jesse Brown VA Medical Center, Rush University Medical Center, Stroger Hospital and University of Illinois Hospital.

Construction is expected to get underway next year, with a dedication set for spring 2025. A virtual, online presence also will ensure the monument is accessible for those far removed from its physical location, according to Sally Metzler, a longtime Chicago resident and art historian who chairs the commission.

She noted that the pandemic has affected everyone. "It was 100% inclusive," she said.

"Every citizen, nation, race and religion experienced the pandemic. Whether at best, lockdown, or at worst, loss of life or loss of a loved one, COVID-19 left no one unscathed."

She's right, of course. And it continues.

While it's true the latest strain of COVID-19 is much less lethal than its predecessors, it is still killing Americans at a shocking rate, accounting for 3%

of deaths from all causes. That translates into more than 1,000 deaths from COVID-19 every week.

Let's never forget the pandemic, and especially the heroes who helped us get through it. And let's honor them not only with a fitting monument, but also by doing everything possible to knock out this dreadful disease.