AIDS awareness events planned in Lafayette area

By ANGELA SIMONEAUX
Acadiana bureau

LAFAYETTE — On Dec. 1, when many people are shopping, decorating and cooking in preparation for a joyful season, many others will be remembering loved ones they have lost to AIDS.

Dec. 1 is World AIDS Day, 24 hours set aside to remember people who have died of acquired immune deficiency syndrome.

"It's the one day a year designated in remembrance of people who have died of AIDS all over the world," said Bunny Angers, coordinator of volunteer services for Acadiana CARES.

Acadiana CARES — Concern for AIDS Relief Education and Support — has several events planned to raise awareness of AIDS and the virus that causes it, human immunodeficiency virus, HIV.

"Throughout the day, we're encouraging everyone through local businesses and USL to wear a red ribbon," Angers said.

Panels from the AIDS Memorial Quilt will be on display from 2 p.m. until 9 p.m. in the Fitzsimmons Auditorium of Our Lady of Lourdes Regional Medical Center.

The display is free and open to the public. The quilt is an international project. Each panel is made to memorialize a loved one who died of AIDS.

A multidenominational memorial service will be held at 6:30 p.m. at First Presbyterian Church, 1130 Johnston St., Lafayette. The service will remember people who have died, and support people who have lost loved ones, Angers said. The service also will remember people who live with HIV and AIDS, she said.

During the service, some panels made by local people for the AIDS Quilt will be dedicated, Angers said.

The service is open to anyone who wants to attend, she said.

A fund-raiser for Acadiana CARES will be held at 8 p.m. at A La Carte, 301 Heymann Blvd., Lafayette, in conjunction with the Oil Center Renaissance Festival of Light. There will be a cash bar, food and music. Tickets are $15 at the door or from any Oil Center business.

Anyone who wants more information on any of the World AIDS Day events, call Acadiana CARES at 233-2437.

The aim of all these events is to get people thinking about AIDS and HIV, Angers said.

"The majority of our services are provided by volunteers. That's one of the things we promote on World AIDS Day," Angers said.

"We want people to think about volunteering to help their neighbors."

Acadiana CARES provides nonmedical services to people living with AIDS and HIV, including support groups.

The group serves seven Acadiana parishes — Lafayette, Acadia, Iberia, Evangeline, St. Martin, St. Landry and Vermilion.

People who want to learn about AIDS or HIV also can get services from Acadiana CARES, Angers said. The group has pamphlets, booklets, videos and people trained to present educational programs on AIDS and HIV.

Currently, there are 7,449 reported cases of AIDS in Louisiana, according to the Centers for Disease Control.

CDC also estimates that one in every 250 Americans are infected with HIV.

The World Health Organization has classified AIDS as the second leading cause of death among men ages 25 to 44, and the leading cause of death of Americans ages 25 to 44. More than 441,500 Americans have been diagnosed with AIDS; 470 of those people live in Acadiana, Angers said.