AIDS Quilt
Known and unknown remembered

By Bill Decker
Staff Writer

The quilt blocks, 300 of them, represent the known — Rock Hudson, for example — and the unknown, like the little girl wearing the calico dress and the hair ribbons.

But they all have something in common. AIDS killed them. And each is immortalized in a giant NAMES Project quilt panels on display at USL’s Union Ballroom this week.

The quilt will be there until Wednesday night. At 8:30 p.m., an interfaith service at Our Lady of Wisdom Catholic Church will be followed by a march around Cypress Lake and a candlelight vigil at the Union Porch.

“Our Common Threads,” a week of AIDS awareness activities, is a project of the Issues Committee of USL’s Union Program Council, said Jeff Gremillion, a USL student government representative.

The entire NAMES quilt has more than 20,000 panels, each representing an AIDS fatality. Gremillion said local organizers tried to bring to Lafayette as many panels representing Louisiana people as possible.

With the lights low, white-clad volunteers unfolded the quilt sections at Sunday’s opening ceremonies. Local people read poetry, and read the names of some of Acadiana’s AIDS victims.

Several people cried openly at the name of one of the local victims, who died six days ago.

Volunteers unfold the AIDS Quilt on Sunday at the USL Student Union while others read aloud the names of those who have died from the disease.

“It’s most moving,” said Scott Farris of Lafayette, pausing from the quiet walk through the quilt panels. “The disadvantage is that it can’t move enough.”
Each viewer has the chance to sign a white quilt panel.

“I signed it, ‘No man is an island,’” Farris said, hoping to make a point about fighting the spread of AIDS. “It’s not a matter of liking it or not liking it. It’s not a matter of approving or disapproving.

“It’s a matter of just doing it.” Among the 3-foot by 6-foot panels is the one registered by movie actress Doris Day after Hudson, her “Pillow Talk” co-star, died of AIDS in 1985.

The panel for Ryan White, the 18-year-old whose 1990 death focused attention on the AIDS battle, also appears here. The panel notes that he loved to travel and liked Michael Jackson’s music.

And Howard Ashman, who composed the music for the Disney films “The Little Mermaid” and “Beauty and the Beast,” is remembered on one of the panels here.

Many panels have personal messages: “You missed Dennis and I miss you,” one woman wrote on a panel.

“Meet me at the door,” says another panel.

A yellow “Cat Diesel Power” cap is sewn to one panel. Another depicts a black hand and arm trying to climb a ladder, stopped by a bloody knife bearing the name “R Reagan.”

Ticket stubs adorn one panel. Still another incorporates a T-shirt — “Life’s a beach,” it says.

The quilt panels remain on display from 10 a.m.-10 p.m. through Wednesday. A safe sex seminar is scheduled for 8 p.m. Tuesday at the Bayou Bijou Theatre. A panel discussion on AIDS begins at 7 p.m. Wednesday.

Admission to the quilt display is free, but donations may be made to the Lafayette CARES advocacy organization at the the ballroom.