AIDS quilt visits USL for awareness week

A four-day display of the NAMES Project AIDS Memorial Quilt, an international memorial to those who have died of AIDS, opens today at USL.

The display is in the Student Union Ballroom as part of an awareness week entitled, "Our Common Threads: Understanding AIDS" sponsored by the students Union Program Council.

Opening ceremonies for the quilt begin at 5 p.m. and the display will remain open until 10 p.m. at the ballroom.

The display will also be open Monday through Wednesday from 10 a.m. until 10 p.m.

Other activities for the awareness week include an art exhibit and film showings all week, a student theatrical presentation on Monday night, and a safer sex presentation called "Hot, Sexy and Safer" on Tuesday night and a panel discussion, healing service and candlelight vigil on Wednesday night.

Through the USL quilt display will feature 350 three-foot by six-foot panels, each commemorating the life of someone who has died of AIDS.

Panels are made by friends, family members and lovers, and include a wide variety of materials, ranging from letters to favorite T-shirts to photographs to teddy bears.

The panels are just a portion of the 20,000 panels that make up the entire AIDS Memorial Quilt.

The opening ceremony will feature team of volunteers, including groups from the USL Union Program Council and Lafayette CARES, who will unfold the quilt while residents read aloud the names of some those lost to AIDS.

The quilt began in San Francisco as people's protest to AIDS epidemic. Propelled by the death and tragedy that confronted so many around the world, especially in the gay and lesbian community, Cleve Jones searched for a way to make people understand the overwhelming loss and frustration of his friends.

In June of 1987, Jones spraysprayed his friend's name, Marvin Feldman, onto a piece of cloth about the size of a grave. Friends, acquaintances and strangers joined the effort by making panels of their own.

Soon, thousands of people across the United States and around the world were adding names and expressing their emotions by creating handmade memorials for the loved ones they had lost to AIDS.

Today the quilt continues as a powerful, visible symbol of the worldwide pandemic. It includes panels from all 50 United States and 26 foreign countries.

The NAMES Project Foundation displays portions of the quilt throughout the world to encourage visitors to better understand and respond to the AIDS pandemic, to provide a positive means of expression for those grieving the death of a loved one, and to raise funds for people living with HIV and AIDS.

Since 1987, more than two million people have visited the quilt, and more than $1 million has been raised for AIDS service organizations throughout North America.

AI donations collected at the USL quilt display will be given to Lafayette CARES, a local AIDS service provider, which provides necessary funds and assistance to people living with HIV and AIDS, and their loved ones.