

Remembering

Thousands turn out for AIDS Day ceremonies

By John Staed

Post-Herald Reporter

The names evoked the emotion. They connected the memories, the faces.

Names of AIDS victims were read at the Unitarian Church of Birmingham yesterday. They also were read at the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute.

A woman at the church clutched a crumpled tissue and cried softly as musicians played works to remember those who've died of the disease. At a gallery in the museum, a handful of people looked quietly at quilts adorned with pictures, poems, and names of victims.

Visitors to the church's AIDS service provided names to be read. There was Debbie, whose doctor said she will die of AIDS before Christmas. And Jeff, who is living with AIDS. And Robert, Billy, Jim, Joey, Mary, Steve, Leonard, and many more.

At the Civil Rights Institute, where part of the Names Project's AIDS quilt hung in a gallery, a woman quickly read through a book filled with names of AIDS victims nationwide. After four hours, she'd advanced only to the "Bs."

Yesterday was World AIDS Day and

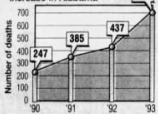


Stephen Gates/Post-Herald

Hundreds finish a candlelight march on World AIDS Day and enter Southside Baptist Church for a memorial service.

AIDS deaths in Alabama

AIDS deaths continue to increase in Alabama



Source: Alabama Dept. of Public Health

Tim Britton/Post-Herald

those who've been touched by the disease took time to remember. Balloons were released at the museum. Church bells rung at 1:40 p.m. to remember this is the 14th year of the epidemic. A walk and a memorial service were held last night.

Celeste Burnum of Birmingham came to the museum to see the quilt because she has friends in the theater in New York and in the creative community in Birmingham. The arts community has been especially hard hit by the disease.

She said she wanted to come "because of my friends and friends I don't want to lose."

More than 250,000 people in the United States have died of AIDS, and it is estimated that one in every 290 people has the disease. In Alabama, the epidemic has claimed more than 1,600 people, with a total of almost 7,000 people in Alabama who are infected.

Among men age 15 to 44 in Alabama, AIDS is the third leading cause of death. And in 1993, 30 percent of HIV infections occurred in women.

Tony Morris, head of Jefferson County AIDS in Minorities, said part of the memorial quilt was brought to the Civil Rights Institute because blacks in Alabama are especially hard-hit by the disease. He said blacks represent more than half of all Alabamians who have AIDS or are infected by HIV, the virus that causes it.

Some quilts simply had a name, date of birth and date of death. One had a man's blue ribbon from a steer riding contest. Many had poems written to the deceased.

One, which remembered a young woman, had two teddy bears sewn on. Another had a surprise. A patch with the name Carol Sue had a woman's jersey sewn on.

"One of the things that struck me when I

came in here is there is a lot of love and creativity involved in these quilts," Ms. Burnum said.

Teressa Caballero, a registered nurse who attended the Unitarian church service yesterday, said she has seen the effects of the disease on patients.

"When it comes to this disease and after watching somebody go through it, something's got to be done," Mrs. Caballero said.

Yesterday's Unitarian church service was the first developed locally to remember AIDS victims musically, said Barry Vaughn, an Episcopal priest and musician.

Despite millions of dollars of research, no cure has been found for the fatal disease. For more information about AIDS, call the Alabama AIDS hot line at 1-800-228-0468.