Quilt offers Lafayette a powerful education about AIDS

By Jeffrey S. Miller

Three emotional days ended with the sounds of a lone piper playing "Amazing Grace," as a display of the NAMES Project AIDS Quilt finally folded up and left the Lafayette campus Tuesday, Apr. 26.

More than 3,600 members of the Lafayette and Easton communities came to see the 632 panels on display in Kirby Field House. An additional 20 panels, commemorating residents of the Lehigh Valley who have died of AIDS, were presented at the end of the exhibit for inclusion in the full Quilt.

Staked in 1989 for gay rights activist Cleve Jones as a memorial to San Franciscans who had died from AIDS, the Quilt now includes 15,000 individual three-by-six-foot panels, each commemorating an AIDS victim.

The full Quilt, now larger than 14 football fields, can only be shown on special occasions. Sections of the Quilt, however, travel around the country to educate people about AIDS as well as to raise money to fight the disease. It was one of those sections that came to Lafayette this spring.

"The display met my expectations and much more," said Deb Hoff, assistant director of student residence and co-chair of the committee responsible for bringing the Quilt to campus. "I think we were overwhelmed by the emotions I felt as I looked at it," said Carrie Davidson '93. "It just smacks you and says that everyone is affected. It was the best educational tool they could have ever had."

Hoff adds that students came to see the Quilt during its stay. Both she and Davidson tell of students who would skip classes and who would spend their entire days on their way to athletic events only to stay for well over an hour.

"A lot of people expected to see the Quilt because it was there," said Hoff. "But they didn't expect to be moved by it or changed by it. And many of them were."

Among those was Dave Unanue '92, co-chair of the Quilt committee. "This work has definitely been the highlight of my Lafayette career, and it has changed my life," Unanue said. "I think this is one thing I'll be able to leave Lafayette with and say I made an attempt to make a positive change on our campus and in the community in general."

Opening ceremonies for the Quilt Sunday, Apr. 24, set the tone for all three days, as the words of those who have felt the effects of AIDS firsthand were supplemented by the experience of seeing its victims memorialized.

Lafayette President Robert Rothberg began the proceedings by discussing the growing dimensions of the AIDS crisis in the public at large and among people of college age. "There is absolutely no doubt that AIDS is the issue of our time and of your age," Rothberg said. "We hope the Quilt makes all of us aware of AIDS as a disease, as a public problem and as a social policy matter."

Rothberg was followed by the podium by Easton Mayor Thomas Goldsmith '63, Riley Temple '71 and Easton Hospital administrator Philip Deitch.

Temple, chairman of the board of Washington DC's Whitman-Walker Clinic, one of the nation's foremost AIDS service institutions, spoke of his

Lisa LeMoult '92 leads the Lafayette organizing committee in signing the college's panel of the AIDS Quilt. From left to right: Debbie Kerridge, assistant director of student activities; Meredith Rend '92; Dave Unanue '92, committee co-chair; Gregg Belbell '92; LeMoult; Megan O'Connor '92; Deb Hoff, assistant director of student residence and committee co-chair; Kara McCarthy '92.

Riley Temple '71, speaking at the opening of the Quilt exhibit in Kirby Field House, said that the opening "was the most emotional thing I've ever been through. It was just wrenching," said Bobbi Kerridge, assistant director of student activities. "The highlight of the closing was the presentation of local quilts to the NAMES project on Dave Unanue's panel, the names of those being honored. One of those presenting a quilt was hospital administrator Philip Deitch. "He has a real authoritative, assured air about him," said Kerridge. "He started walking up very straight, very still, and about halfway there, he just slumped. He became a different person entirely." "The reading of names by college and community volunteers continued throughout the three days of the Quilt display. The only other sounds in the normally noisy Field House were the rustling of feet and occasional sobs and sniffles.

Those sobs, however, became overwhelming in the closing ceremonies.

"The closing was the most emotional thing I've ever been through. It was just wrenching," said Bobbi Kerridge, assistant director of student activities. "I think it was very nice they let me play here," she said. "Too many times it's somebody else. It's not."
Remembrances of lives passed: The AIDS Quilt visits Kirby Field House.

Chuck Zoko