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NEWS RELEASE

Sept. 9, 2008

Contact: Keri McWilliams, executive director, Missoula AIDS Council, 406-543-4770.

AIDS MEMORIAL QUILT ON DISPLAY IN MISSOULA, SEPT. 18-21

MISSOULA -

The size of next week's NAMES Project AIDS Memorial Quilt exhibit at The University of Montana has expanded and now will include 101 sections commemorating some 800 individuals who have died of AIDS-related illnesses.

The quilt, which will be on display at UM's Adams Center during Homecoming week Sept. 18-21, was increased in size once the planning committee realized 26 sections could be added to what Griz fans know as North B in the Adams Center.

UM and the Missoula AIDS Council are excited to capitalize on this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to bring an even bigger display to Western Montana, said Rita Munzenrider, director of University Relations.

The state's largest-ever display of the AIDS Quilt will be its first showing in Montana in more than 12 years. Panels honoring those from Montana who have died of AIDS, as well as others from around the nation, will be on view.

Opening ceremonies will kick off the event at 5 p.m. Thursday, Sept. 18. The public display will continue through the weekend, and will be open from 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. Friday; 9 a.m. to 9 p.m., Saturday; and 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Sunday. New quilt panels will be inducted

from 1 to 2 p.m. on Sunday in the Adams Center Sky Club. Closing ceremonies will begin at 3 p.m. Sunday.

“For the state of Montana it is truly such a gift to be able to see the quilt on such a large scale, especially living in a rural area where oftentimes we fail to grasp the effect or impact HIV or AIDS has on our community,” says Keri McWilliams, Missoula AIDS Council executive director and co-chair of the AIDS Quilt Committee with Munzenrider. “It’s not until you’re able to see a display of this size and see all the lives that were lost that you begin to realize how large this epidemic is.”

UM has teamed with the Missoula AIDS Council to raise money to help people living with HIV and AIDS, as well as support prevention and educational efforts in the community.

“A quilt is a nonthreatening, effective way to educate and raise awareness about HIV and AIDS,” Munzenrider said.

“Not only do we have the opportunity to honor those lives that were lost, but we have the chance to educate the community on how far we have come in making progress,” McWililams said. “The epidemic is very different than it was in the early ’80s when many lives were lost. It’s still a devastating disease, but we’ve made so much progress in the treatment that people are living longer. I think it’s important for the community to understand how far we’ve come but to also realize that it’s still an issue. There are 56,000 new infections every year in the United States.”

She continues, "We've been receiving phone calls from around the state from those in small communities and on reservations who are so excited to come and honor the memory and see the panel they made for those who have been lost. It means so much to us that the University is able to support us in this project."

There still is a need for many volunteers to contribute to the event by helping to unfold the quilt panels, read names and serve as quilt monitors. "Truly we need a community response to make this event," McWilliams said. "It won't be possible without the support of the community because there is such a need for volunteers."

Individuals can sign up to volunteer at the event by e-mailing quilt.volunteers@yahoo.com.

A special panel discussion, "Perspectives on life, love and loss: The HIV/AIDS Epidemic" will be held from 6 to 7:30 p.m. Tuesday, Sept. 16, in the University Center Theater. Featured speakers will include HIV-positive individuals, medical providers and family members who have lost loved ones.

The NAMES Project AIDS Memorial Quilt was established in 1987. Today it is the largest community art project in the world.

The Missoula AIDS Council is the leading community-based organization addressing the challenges associated with HIV/AIDS in Montana. The mission of the organization is to prevent new infections and to provide support for individuals living with HIV/AIDS.

For more information call Keri McWilliams, Missoula AIDS Council executive director, at 406-543-4770 or Rita Munzenrider, director of University Relations, at 406-243-4824.

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