

# Creative Living

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(F)E

## Quilt helps bring AIDS into the open

By Corinne Abatt  
staff writer

**T**HE "NAMES PROJECT," which began in San Francisco as a grass roots memorial to AIDS victims, has become a national cause celebre. To express their love and feelings for those who had died of AIDS, friends and relatives turned to one of our country's earliest and most original art forms — quilting.

What started in San Francisco as a few banners with names of the victims and personal messages has spread across the United States. Quickly it has grown to a patchwork quilt of more than 4,500 3-by-6-foot rectangles (the size of a grave) that is traveling the country, with stops at 20 cities.

It will be at Cobo Hall in downtown Detroit from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. Wednesday and Thursday, July 6 and 7.

COVEY PAUSED a moment and

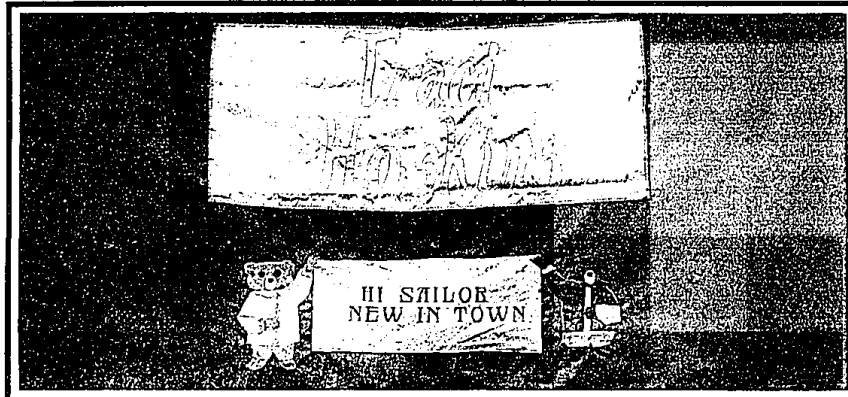
then said very quietly, "No matter what we say, we can't describe what it's like."

Among the many volunteers who will be working on the Cobo Hall project will be at least 36 emotional support counselors, he said.

"People break down." The impact of the thousands of panels, many with poignant messages, is overwhelming, he said. He recalled being greatly moved by one panel designed as an airmail envelope addressed to the AIDS sufferer with the line, "write back if you can," in the corner. Covey remembered another panel — navy blue representing the night sky with a galaxy of stars and an arrow pointing to one of them, "you are there."

ONE OF the country's leading quilt authorities, Merry Silber of Birmingham, said she had firmly resolved to leave community service projects to a younger generation. But, "I had to get involved in this when I was asked," Silber said. "This is priority — this and the environment are priorities. Nothing else will matter if we don't do something about these."

Staff photos by Dan Dean



Many panels, like this one, have personal messages. Only a portion of the quilt will fit in Cobo Hall. It will be arranged with

walkways between groups of panels. The entire quilt will be spread out in Washington, D.C., Oct. 8-9.

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— Craig Covey



She has not only made panels for Michigan victims, she is working actively to promote awareness of the project and what it represents. "This is a catastrophic epidemic," she said. "Although it was difficult to get the names of the victims at first, it is now possible and many names from Michigan are represented on this quilt. Everybody has found we must tell the world. Seeing the quilt is like being at The Wall (the Vietnam War Memorial). You are struck silent. The emotionality of the "NAMES" is overwhelming. . . . It is so human."

**HISTORICALLY, QUILTING** has been a way to bring people together, she said. Quilts covered the beds where people were born, where they made love and where they died. Quilting often was, and still is, a group effort that involves friendships and sharing.

"(The quilts themselves) are a graphic recording of history, like which there is no other," Silber said. While some families may be giving out names, a stigma is still associated with AIDS, Covey said.

"We who work in AIDS have got to promise anonymity," he said.

**AS OF** the middle of June, 679 cases were in Michigan and more than half of them have died, Covey said.

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A few dozen new cases are reported every few weeks, he said. Still, he said, the largest numbers are on the east and west coasts. Because it took longer to get established in the Midwest, there was time to get an educational program going.

"We believe this education is working. . . . We believe we have a handle on it."

The "NAMES Project" is now organized and underwritten by individuals, organizations and businesses. For information on making a panel, write the local office, "The NAMES Project," Detroit, P.O. Box 1282, Royal Oak 48068.

Many volunteers are still needed to help set up the quilt in Cobo Hall and to work during visiting hours. To contact the national office, write "The NAMES Project," P.O. Box 14573, San Francisco, Calif. 94114.

## Dollmaker wants everything authentic

By Anne Lehmann  
special writer

Children may think of dolls as playthings, but they are one of the world's most valued and collected items.

Porcelain, soft sculpture, wood, wax or clay: Whatever the medium, these human-like figures have found their way to specialty stores and posh boutiques.

Linda Kellert of Farmington Hills, a 34-year-old wife, mother of three boys and hand-knit entrepreneur, never had dolls growing up as a child. "I shared a room with my grandmother who didn't want stuffed animals or dolls in there."

But after her maiden voyage to Europe in 1982, she was smitten. "When I saw all these incredibly beautiful dolls, my husband said, 'You're so talented and artistic. Why don't you learn how to make dolls?'"

She began a collection which today includes more than 30 dolls. By word of mouth, she found several local artisans who taught classes in doll making. She spent three years learning, practicing and refining her art.

"The work, in putting together a doll, is painstakingly detailed and requires a great deal of study," she said.

IN 1984 KELLETT entered her first competition sponsored by the national Doll Artisans Guild, and took first place.

She favors creating reproduction pieces of antique European dolls, even though it can take more than a month to produce one piece. "And that's without the costuming, hair and ornamentation."

The majority of her dolls are made from hand-poured porcelain cast in vintage molds, which she sculpts, paints and costumes.



Linda Kellert

"Pouring the porcelain is an art form in itself," she said. If it's poured badly, the piece has bubbles and cracks.

Like many art forms, the fewer the pourings from the mold, the more valuable a piece tends to be, she said. Hence, whenever possible, she uses local people she can rely on to provide good molds that are not overused.

Working with a delicate medium such as porcelain is a change, she said.

"It's so paper thin, that if you hold it in your hand the wrong way, you can put stress cracks into it."

But handling the material is only part of the problem. Once the porcelain is cast, the piece has to be sanded so carefully, that some of the abrasives used have to be as delicate as nylon stockings and cotton silk.

After the porcelain is fired and the reproduction quality is satisfactory, Kellert paints each piece

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— Linda Kellert

in layers and sculpts openings for the neck and eyes. She handcrafts the teeth, ears and nostrils. After several firings, eyes are applied. Kellert buys hand-blown glass eyes from Germany for her dolls. "Like human eyes, the openings vary so I can go through a hundred pair of eyes until I find just the right ones," she said. She said she likes to use human hair and mohair and when time allows, she fashions the coiffures herself.

THE DETAILING does not end with the doll itself. Kellert designs all the clothes, handpicks antique fabrics, has them made by a professional seamstress and searches out antique accessories. For example, one doll carries a 100-year-old mother-of-pearl purse and another wears a pair of real gold and pearl earrings left to Kellert by her grandmother.

"It's hard to convince people that these dolls are works of art and they are expensive to produce," she said. The fabric for one outfit alone has cost nearly \$100. But, she pointed out, she isn't in the business of making dolls for money.

"I do it as a hobby and for artistic gratification," she said, "and I just try to recoup my cost."

How do Kellert's three boys react to a mom who spends hours with what are commonly thought of girls toys?

"They think it's great. They see how much time it takes to put a



Kellert designs the clothing and collects the materials which, for the doll at left had to be as rich and expensive looking to suit the regal demeanor. The doll at right not only wears an



authentic 19th century dress and hat, she carries a mother-of-pearl purse, which was a popular item of a century ago.

doll together and consider what I am doing artistic. It's funny," she said, "each time I travel to a doll show, they ask me to keep my eyes

open for an antique G.L. Joe." All told, these works of art can be costly, anywhere from \$200-\$1,200. Kellert's dolls are among

those currently available at Choccolatissimo of West Bloomfield, owned by Riki Schaffer of Birmingham.

Staff photos by Randy Borst