

Quilt marks 10 years for MADD

By WAYNE PEAL
STAFF WRITER

It's about Phil Rader, running for one more touchdown.
It's about Michael Kaplan and his hoped-for medical career.

The Oakland County MADD quilt is about those killed by drunken drivers — and those they left behind.

Philip Rader was a 19-year-old Michigan State University freshman when he was killed in October 1988.

"He loved football," Eleanor Rader said, recalling her son's four years on the team at West Bloomfield High.

"For us, this is never over," she said softly, looking at the picture she embroidered into the quilt.

Rita Kaplan understands. The Farmington Hills resident recalled her own son as a "warm, compassionate" young man looking forward to continuing his medical research at the University of Michigan at the time of his March 1988 death.

"This is about understanding," she said. "You hear about it or read about it in the paper and you always think it could never happen to you."

Her quilt square, a broken heart, represents her son "and us," Kaplan said.

The MADD quilt is a major focus of the Oakland County chapter's 10th anniversary celebration.

The idea isn't new — the state chapter has a quilt of its own; both were preceded by the famous AIDS quilt. But the sentiments are heartfelt.

"For these people, this — and their memories — are all they have left," county executive director Therese McNeil said.

McNeil's mother, father, brother and grandmother were killed in a Christmas Day crash also in 1988. They are among the 15 people whose names are embroidered on squares of the quilt. Her mother-in-law, who has the same name, sewed the squares together.

Persons of various ages, races and lifestyles are among those honored. Perhaps the most poignant squares are those honoring young people.

MADD board member Donna Brookshire of Troy hasn't yet finished the patch dedicated to her late 17-year-old daughter, in part because the experience is so emotional.

"It's so hard when you bring someone's life down to just one thing," she said.

The quilt will have a place of honor in MADD's new Woodward Avenue offices in Bloomfield Town-



Threads of sadness: Therese M. McNeil, mother-in-law of the executive director of Oakland County MADD, sewed the squares together.

ship. It will also be displayed at various rallies and MADD-oriented events.

"People have seen the stories and read the statistics," Rader said.

"This brings it home in a different way."

Some of the quilt squares remain deliberately blank. "We're hoping those are never filled," McNeil said.



Survivors speak out: On the 10th anniversary of the county chapter's founding, Rita Kaplan, left, of Southfield, Donna Brookshire of Troy, Ron Eaton of Davisburg and Eleanor Rader of Farmington Hills believe MADD has made a difference but say much more needs to be done.

Hills. "Those statistics don't take into account the full impact of drinking and driving. It's not just about fatalities."

County chapter president Ron Eaton says he's living proof.

The Davisburg resident spent

more than a year in the hospital after being struck by a drunk driver on Dixie Highway in August 1989.

"People's attitudes still have to change," Eaton said. "So often, people tend to dismiss it as just being out having a good time."

Stats don't tell it all

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After 10 years, has MADD made any difference?

Statistics indicate it has, but even MADD members warn statistics can be misleading.

There were 139 fatal county accidents in 1982, the year before Oakland County MADD began fully operating. At that time, alcohol was a factor in 85 — or 61 percent of all fatalities.

By 1990, the most recent year for which comparable statistics are available, county traffic fatalities had dropped to 106 with alcohol a factor in 55, or about 52 percent.

"It seems encouraging but you have to consider there's more they can do to keep someone alive today than 10 years ago," said MADD member Rita Kaplan of Farmington

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