

Matthew Shepard's Legacy Lives on 15 years later

Publisher's note: *A documentary film about the life of Matthew Shepard will be shown at Lake Tahoe Community College on Oct. 12 at 7:30pm in the Duke Theatre. Tickets are \$5 at the door. The LTCC Theater Arts Department will present the play "The Laramie Project: 10 Years Later" in November.*

By John M. Glionna, Los Angeles Times

LARAMIE, Wyo. – Every year, the day sneaks on up Judy Shepard to deliver its sucker punch from the past: The 12th of October. The day Matthew died.

"It hits you and you say to yourself: Oh, this is the day," she says. "This is why I feel so terrible."

Fifteen years ago this week, gay college student Matthew Shepard was pistol-whipped and left for dead: unconscious, barely alive, lashed to a jagged wooden fence outside this small prairie city by two men disgusted by his homosexuality. A passerby mistook the diminutive, 105-pound Shepard for a scarecrow – a forlorn and unthinkable image that still haunts a generation of Americans.

Judy Shepard refuses to associate her son with that image or with the date that he died, six days after the attack. Instead, she summons memories of her eldest boy on Dec. 1, his birthday, celebrating his love for politics, languages and the spectacle of the musical "The Phantom of the Opera."

On the anniversary of her son's death, Shepard thinks not of the past, but of the future. As co-founder of the Matthew Shepard Foundation and a tireless advocate for gay rights, she's hosting the annual mid-October fundraiser at the group's Denver headquarters to support its work promoting tolerance.

That's when she tries to gauge just how far Wyoming and the nation have come in their acceptance of others in the years since Matthew's murder.

Often the answer isn't comforting.

Read the whole story