

# Searching for an angel

By Andrea Shamgochian  
RECORD CORRESPONDENT

SHREWSBURY — Jill Bilodeau, 27, was a free-spirited, hard worker, with a passion for music and the ocean, who was studying to be a nurse at Worcester State College when she died in a motorcycle accident on Sept. 9, 2001.

Earlier this year, Clinton Allard, on whose motorcycle Jill was a passenger, was found guilty of motor vehicle homicide and driving negligently so as to endanger. Allard had attempted two wheelies and during the second, Jill fell off the motorcycle and suffered fatal injuries.

Jill's mother, Linda Bilodeau, of Shrewsbury, has made it her mission to make certain Jill's life is never forgotten and to be an advocate for other parents experiencing the same pain.

"My job is to keep her memory alive and reach out to other people in pain," Linda said. "The grief you have when you lose a child is insurmountable."

This desire to keep Jill's memory alive and give all families a place to grieve, remember, heal and find solitude, has led Bilodeau to spearhead a project called "Christmas Box Angel."

The angel statue was first introduced in the book and television movie, "The Christmas Box" by Richard Paul Evans.

The book, mostly fictional,



A Christmas Box Angel in Westerly, R.I.

depicts a woman mourning the loss of her child while at the base of an angel monument.

The original monument once existed in the Salt Lake City Cemetery, in Utah, but was destroyed in a flood. Reports that grieving parents were searching out the angel as a place to come and grieve, led to a new angel statue being commissioned by Evans and crafted by a sculptor and his son. Every year, thousands of grieving families visit the angel monument in Salt Lake City, Utah, that was dedicated on Dec. 6, 1994.

Nestled into the right wing of the angel is the word "hope" while the base of the monument is adorned with flowers and notes left by parents for their "little angels."

Bilodeau is hoping to raise enough funds to have an angel erected in this area.

"As a grieving parent, the only way you can survive is to reach out to people and try to help them," Bilodeau said.

Currently, there are angel monuments at more than 59 sites across the country, including three in New England. There are nearly 100 more in the works.

In December 2004, Bilodeau met Charlene Paradise, a Shrewsbury resident whose son died in August 2003. Paradise has organized a candlelight vigil for the last three years in Shrewsbury, on the second Sunday in December, known as National Children's Memorial Day. The two became close friends and Bilodeau joined Paradise in the Children's Remembrance Group.

According to Bilodeau, "the group is a support network of about 18 parents who help each other and are just always there when you need them."

The first year Paradise organized the vigil, about 50 people gathered on Shrewsbury common to light a candle in memory of a lost child. Last December, more than 150 people gathered at the common for the National Children's Memorial Day vigil. This year, the vigil will be held at the Hoagland-Pincus Center on Dec. 11. At that time, Bilodeau will introduce the Christmas Box Angel project.

■ Continued on page 2



## Searching for an angel

■ from page 1

Bilodeau first learned of the Angel Project from an online newsletter. She said she knew immediately that "this message was meant to be."

"This angel of hope is for all children who are gone too soon, a place where people can just reflect," Bilodeau said.

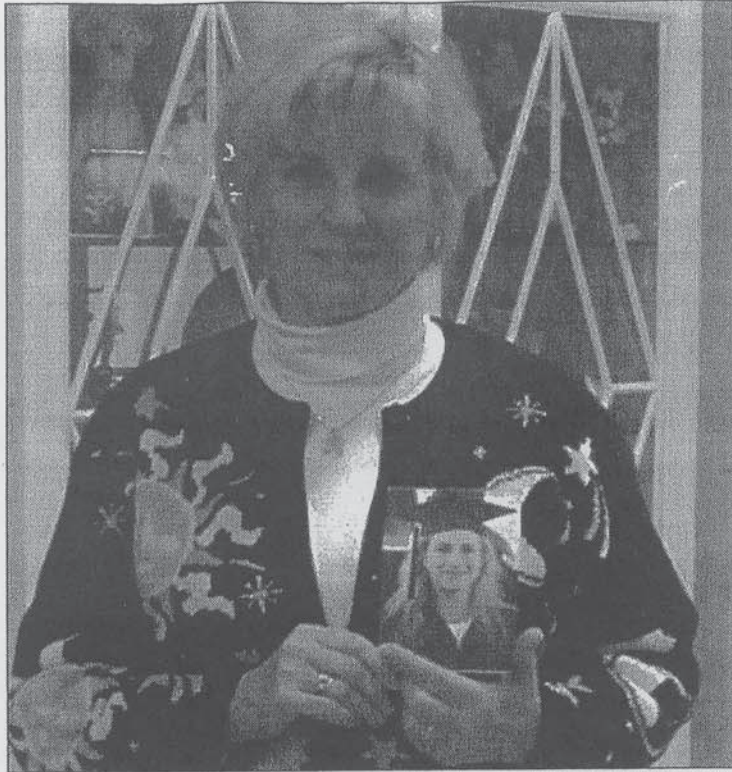
The angel statues cost \$12,500 each. Bilodeau is asking for financial support from both private and public donations. She is also hoping that someone will donate the land where the statue will be placed.

"The angel represents hope, her garden is a place to grieve and heal for all community members, but above all it represents all of our angels," Bilodeau said. "Nothing will ever replace the loss of a child, a piece of me is gone, but it is in reaching out to others who are consumed with this horrific pain and grief that our children's memory and spirit live on."

Contributions for the angel can be sent to, The Christmas Box Angel, c/o Westborough Bank, P.O. Box 670, Westboro, MA 01581.

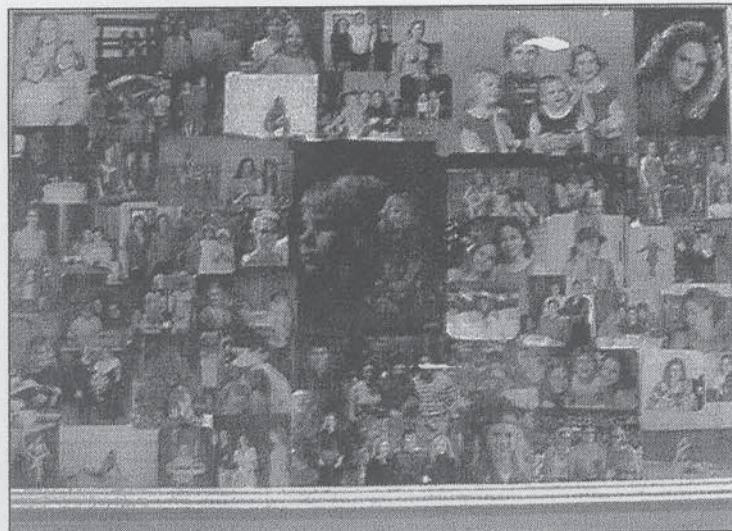
The Children's Remembrance Group is sponsoring a candlelight vigil, and other events including a dinner, 4 to 7 p.m., Sunday, Dec. 11 at the Hoagland-Pincus conference center - UMass Medical School, 22 Maple Ave. The event is open to the public.

For more information, or to make reservations, call Charlene Paradise at (508) 845-1831 or (508) 856-3433 or e-mail her at [cparadise@townisp.com](mailto:cparadise@townisp.com).



Record photos/ANDREA SHAMGOCHIAN

Linda Bilodeau has made it her mission to make certain her daughter's life is never forgotten and to be an advocate for other parents experiencing the same pain.



A collage of photos from Jill Bilodeau's life.