

Remembering Christmas past



TERRY MAYER/STAFF

A passerby looks at a display honoring Sandra Teichow, the first director of Sharon Main Street, during the Victorian Christmas Evening in Sharon on Dec. 3. Teichow was killed Oct. 14 in Racine. The annual event was dedicated to her memory.

Sharon humanitarian mourned at event she founded

By LISA M. SCHMELZ
FOR WALWORTH COUNTY SUNDAY

SHARON — On the first Friday night of December, citizens in this community of 1,500 were making last-minute preparations for their 15th annual Victorian Christmas Evening. Garland, wreaths and red bows lined the buildings along Baldwin Street. Even without carolers in Victorian-era garb strolling about, this looked like the sort of place where nothing bad ever happens.

But behind this Norman Rockwell façade is a village in mourning.

On Oct. 14, Sandra Teichow, 67, was assaulted and strangled in Racine, where she'd been for a hair styling appointment. Her plan after having her hair done was to distribute \$100 in quarters to people in need at a Racine Laundromat. Charged with Teichow's death is Wilbert L. Thomas, 65, a registered sex offender.

Teichow's death sent shockwaves throughout Walworth County, but they are especially great in Sharon. The first president of Sharon's Main Street Association, it was Teichow who helped start the Victorian Christmas Parade, a yesteryear event with horse-drawn carriages, costumed carolers, a handbell choir and fireworks. Even after she and her husband moved from Sharon to Lake Geneva, she continued to worship here and pitched in wherever need existed.

"That woman, you'll never be able to duplicate her," said Bob Carlson, the current president of the Sharon Main Street



TERRY MAYER/STAFF

The Sharon Christmas tree features ornaments with Sandra Teichow's picture.

Association, just before the village Christmas tree was lit in Teichow's honor. "But you can remember her, and that's what tonight is all about."

Whether she was painting downtown benches alongside youth from her church, Christ Lutheran, or delivering 35 pairs of new tennis shoes to the Sharon Community School for kids whose families couldn't afford them, her work was a large part of what makes Sharon look so warm and inviting, said those who knew her.

At Victorian Christmas, Teichow's friends recalled her life — not the circumstances of her death.

Kris Lynch is the organist at Christ Lutheran Church. She said Teichow usually sat behind her during worship services.

"She always had a smile on her face," said Lynch, in a flow-

ing Victorian gown. "She was full of humanity and God's love ... that's what I choose to remember."

Cindy Bangert was one of Teichow's closet friends. Wearing a period dress, Bangert spoke to the media gathered to report on a parade that has never before made headlines like this.

"We're all going through this sadness together because we all miss her, and we'll always miss her. Life is never going to be quite the same," said Bangert, not flinching in the light of a television news camera.

Standing a few feet away from Bangert, and off-camera, was Teichow's husband of 11 years, Dennis, and her daughter, Molly Jensen.

Understandably, they had no words for the press, no remarks for the crowds that watched a white riderless carriage go down Baldwin Street in Teichow's honor as church bells pealed in the darkness. How do you reduce grief into a soundbite?

As Bangert tried to explain life without her best friend to the media, Dennis Teichow took pictures of Teichow's grandson near a window featuring a large framed photograph of his wife and the Victorian dresses she'd worn to previous Christmas parades. Standing out was a dress created just two weeks ago.

"It's her angel dress," explained Bangert of the winter white gown made by the Rev. Peter Krause, Teichow's minister. "He felt inspired to make her last dress a white dress."