

'THIS ONE IS FOR LIFE'

Cancer plaza built as way to offer hope

By **NORMA MARTIN**
Houston Chronicle

MICHAEL HAMMOND is a five-year survivor of pancreatic cancer.

He believes his mental attitude had a lot to do with his successful fight against the disease.

"You have to believe you can win," said Hammond.

A prominent Kansas City, Mo., couple have built a tribute here to such beliefs. The Richard and Annette Bloch Cancer Survivors Plaza opened Sunday in Hermann Park.

It's a serene spot, but it was built to offer hope.

"Many parks and plazas are built for the dead, but this one is for life," said Annette Bloch.

In 1978, her husband, founder of H&R Block, the tax preparation company, was diagnosed with lung cancer and given 90 days to live. But the couple came to M.D. Anderson Cancer Center, and he was cured.

"They (doctors at Anderson) gave Dick back his life, so it's time we gave something back," said Mrs. Bloch. "There is life after a diagnosis of cancer."

The couple donated the money for the plaza, located at Hermann Drive and Fannin, and established an endowment for its ongoing maintenance.

The Blochs are planning to build parks and plazas in every U.S. and Canadian city of 1 million or more people. They have built parks in Kansas City and Omaha, Neb.

"There is the idea of relating death and cancer," said Richard Bloch. "It's the most feared disease in America, and people give up (when they hear the diagnosis).

"We want people who drive by to see that death and cancer are not synonymous, and they can have a quality of life."

The plaza, designed by Austin architect Milosav Cekik, contains a classical stone gazebo with a wrought iron dome covering a pool and fountain. This structure is surrounded by a circular plaza with intricate paving patterns.

On the Fannin side, there is a bronze sculpture titled *Cancer... There is Hope*, which was created by the late Mexican artist Victor

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Salmones.

The piece depicts life-sized people, with expressions of fear and apprehension, approaching a maze, which represents cancer treatments.

On the other side of the maze, the people, smiling and happy, are leaving the maze behind.

A computer, built into the wall, contains the names of five-year survivors of cancer.

The computer generates a voice detailing a person's form of cancer, the year of diagnosis and how the survivor is doing now.

The plaza also has a "Positive Mental Attitude Walk." Fourteen plaques, written in English and Spanish, give specific suggestions and hope for fighting cancer.

One plaque reads: "Cancer is the most curable of all chronic diseases."

Betty Tichich / Chronicle

Houston parks director Don Olson, left, and tax preparation company founder Richard Bloch and wife, Annette, admire the new Richard and Annette Bloch Cancer Survivors Plaza that opened Sunday at Hermann Drive and Fannin. Richard Bloch was diagnosed with lung cancer in 1978.