It’s hard to believe that fall is upon us once again. All over the country, kids are back in the classroom after a summer off, embarking on a new school year filled with so many exciting things to learn.

Education is the foundation of the future, but what if a child’s biggest obstacle to academic success is a vision problem? No child should struggle in school simply because he or she is vision impaired. At the Illinois Eye-Bank, we know that sight-restoring cornea transplants during childhood dramatically increase pediatric recipients’ chances for lifetime success, and we’re so honored to play a part in the process.

Our youngest recipients never cease to amaze me — each one has faced challenges, yet their grace and determination is something to be admired by people of any age. In this issue of Vision, I hope you enjoy reading about one such young person, 8-year-old Liliana, who was born legally blind, but has not let that stand in her way.

Thank you for supporting the Illinois Eye-Bank, and making it possible for us to bring you stories like Liliana’s.

I’m also excited to tell you about a few important initiatives we’re focusing on this fall, such as our recent rollout out of Descemet Membrane Endothelial Keratoplasty (DMEK)-prepared tissue to allow surgeons to offer this new, less invasive surgical procedure when appropriate for their patients. We are also embarking on substantial growth in the area of research, working with the research community to provide them the ocular tissue that is desperately needed for medical advances in blinding eye conditions like glaucoma, macular degeneration and diabetic retinopathy.

Lastly, I invite you to join us November 15-17 as we celebrate National Donor Sabbath, when the transplant community joins with faith-based organizations to stand up and support the need for eye, organ and tissue donors. More information is available in this issue of Vision.

Enjoy your fall!

Diane Hollingsworth
Executive Director
Eye Bank Association of America Annual Meeting

The Illinois Eye-Bank was proud to host the Eye Bank Association of America’s annual meeting in June, when eye bankers from around the world gathered in Chicago to discuss clinical and community initiatives.

Illinois Eye-Bank board member Gerry Bouey led the meeting’s general session, offering a dynamic presentation highlighting the importance of leadership and consulting. Meanwhile, board members Maureen Tuffy-Haga, Peter Wroblewski and Edward Hunter participated in a well-attended session about increasing customer satisfaction.

Midwest Eye-Banks Senior Vice President Brad Tennant was also honored at the meeting, when he received the prestigious Heise Award in recognition of his years of dedicated service and contributions to the field of eye banking.

Welcoming new recipients

In January, the Illinois Eye-Bank began reaching out to new cornea recipients through information packets provided to cornea surgeons in our service area. These packets offer new recipients an introduction to the Eye-Bank and provide answers to frequently asked questions. Additionally, the packets include lapel pins and window clings to generate discussion about eye, organ and tissue donation.

So far, the response has been positive. Both doctors and their patients have been grateful for the distinctive educational materials, and some recipients have already expressed an interest in becoming an Illinois Eye-Bank Ambassador.

A new face to Donate Life Illinois

We are pleased to introduce Nesha Logan, who will be splitting her time between roles as the Donate Life Illinois (DLI) Community Coordinator and the Illinois Eye-Bank Community Relations Liaison.

In her role at DLI, Nesha will be responsible for all community outreach initiatives. For information about DLI campaigns, contact Nesha at nlogan@illinoiseyebank.org.

DMEK: A medical breakthrough

The Illinois Eye-Bank was pleased to offer more than a dozen Chicago ophthalmologists the chance to get hands-on experience with Descemet Membrane Endothelial Keratoplasty (DMEK), a new cornea transplant procedure, at a recent collaborative training session with Dr. Charles Bouchard and Dr. Amy Lin at Loyola University Medical Center. Because DMEK is less invasive than other types of corneal transplantation, it reduces the healing time for recipients.

Each physician was provided several donated tissues through the Eye-Bank’s research and training program on which to practice the delicate technique.

Visit our new and improved DLI website at www.donatelifeillinois.org

The Illinois Eye-Bank began providing surgeons with DMEK tissue for transplant surgeries on July 1, 2013. Special thanks to our generous research and training tissue donors and their families, who make possible these important advances in transplantation.
Every pregnant woman wants to deliver a healthy baby. Mothers carefully monitor their own health to protect against preventable fetal diseases and disorders. Unfortunately, some children manifest unavoidable diseases while in the womb. Today, continuing advancements in medicine, therapies, and unique treatments help address many health issues facing those with developmental conditions. Peters Anomaly is no different.

Peters Anomaly is a disorder of the eye that results in blurred vision due to a thinning and clouding of the cornea, the piece of tissue at the front of the eye that normally allows images to pass through clearly. Often, this eye condition also involves the attachment of the cornea to the iris, the colored part of the eye, or the lens, the main focusing element of the eye. The most visible ocular feature of the disorder is the cloudiness of the eye.

Although rare, Peters Anomaly usually occurs in an autosomal recessive pattern, caused by a mutation in several genes. The eye disorder is a characteristic of Krause-Kivlin syndrome and the genetic condition Peters-plus syndrome.

If you suspect your child has Peters Anomaly, keep calm, there are possible treatment options. For children displaying features of Peters Anomaly, request a thorough physical examination by a pediatrician and schedule an appointment with an ophthalmologist to confirm a diagnosis. The timing of some treatment options is very important, so don’t delay if the condition is suspected by your pediatrician. If validated, children and parents often receive counseling from a genetics specialist, as the disorder may run in the family.

Peters Anomaly doesn’t have to define how one lives their life. As with any condition, there are ways to adapt and still enjoy everyday activities.

There is still much to learn about Peters Anomaly due to the broad spectrum of disease severity, the differences in clinical features, and the variability in surgical success. Nevertheless, children with this eye disorder can potentially receive a second chance at sight through corneal transplantation. Although complicated due to the young age of the child, replacement of the diseased cornea with a healthy cornea by an ophthalmologist can often mean a new lease on life for patients with Peters Anomaly, thanks to the generosity of an eye tissue donor.

**Children with Peters Anomaly sometimes experience additional impediments to vision which may include:**
- Retinal Detachment
- Glaucoma
- Cataract
- Microphthalmia (a small eye)
Family battles blinding eye condition

When Liliana Vujic’s parents were first able to gaze into their newborn daughter’s eyes, it should have been a joyful moment, something they had waited three long days to experience.

Born nearly a month early, Liliana’s arrival hadn’t exactly gone according to plan. She was whisked away to spend the first three days of her life in the hospital’s neonatal intensive care unit. It came as a shock to her already-overwhelmed parents when Liliana first opened her eyes, and they noticed that something was different.

Instead of clear, her eyes were cloudy. Liliana had been born with the blinding eye condition Peters Anomaly.

Immediately, the Vujics swung into action. They took Liliana to an ophthalmologist. Then got a second opinion, followed by a third and a fourth.

“Coming to terms with the unknown was a lot to handle,” recalls Liliana’s mother, Kimberly. “I remember crying on a park bench outside the hospital.”

She and her husband, Bobby, listened to what the doctors had to say and did research on their own, but the information they found was limited.

They selected Dr. Elmer Tu, from the University of Illinois-Chicago, as Liliana’s cornea specialist.

He performed surgeries to make the most of what little vision she had, and then, when she was four, performed a cornea transplant in her weaker eye.

“The Illinois Eye-Bank is thrilled to be able to work with surgeons such as Dr. Tu to provide tissue for pediatric patients,” says Diane Hollingsworth, the Eye-Bank’s Executive Director.

“Receiving a cornea transplant during childhood can dramatically increase a child’s chances for lifetime success.”

In addition to Liliana’s medical treatments, the Vujics sought early intervention services through the state of Illinois, starting when she was just six months old. Her overall health was good, but her blindness was taking a toll on her development. While other babies her age would happily lie on their bellies and swat at objects in front of them, Liliana’s limited vision prevented her from enjoying this type of activity.

“There was no motivation for her,” Bobby explains.

Bobby and Kimberly also found support from other parents — at a playgroup for children with disabilities and through The Chicago Lighthouse and the Illinois Association for Parents of Children with Visual Impairments.

Today, 8-year-old Liliana is a happy, well-adjusted, outgoing girl with a bright future ahead of her. With a special contact lens and glasses with a slight bifocal, her vision is 20/200 in her better eye, but she doesn’t let that slow her down.

At school, she’s on the honor roll and excels at spelling, thanks to her great memory. She also plays baseball and basketball, and takes singing lessons with her friends.

Liliana never lets anything hold her back from what she wants to accomplish.

"'Perseverance' is one of her favorite words,” says Kimberly.
The Illinois Eye-Bank recognized 2013 Woman of Vision, Splash! Editor Susanna Negovan, and 2013 Gift of Sight Honoree, ophthalmologist Robert Feder, M.D., at its 15th annual Gift of Sight Gala at the Peninsula Chicago on June 27. The fun-filled evening was themed "All Eyes on You!"

The event committee, led by Illinois Eye-Bank board secretary David Donnersberger, M.D., put together a fabulous party focused around the Eye-Bank's mission of preserving and restoring sight. Spex peacock-themed cosmos and an appearance by the Spexettes were an eye-opening start to the event. A unique "photo booth" captured guests' eyes, and the resulting images — including a twinkling contribution from Illinois Secretary of State Jesse White — were used to create an expressive collage, pinned up for all to admire. Later in the evening, the Eye-Bank premiered a poignant new four-minute video, "An Eye for an I," which highlights the importance of eye, organ and tissue donation in the lives of grateful transplant recipients and their donor families.

The Gala raised more than $100,000 in support of our mission and the more than 1,300 people throughout Illinois who received cornea transplants last year.

Special thanks to our main sponsors: Splash!, Spex, OMEGA, Cermak Fresh Market, Nina and Bob Mariano, BMO/Harris Bank, Hillshire Brands, Chicago Cornea Consultants, Charlie and Rochelle Trotter, Terlato Wines, and David Donnersberger, M.D. and Claire Kenneally, M.D. Matching grants provided by the Sun-Times Foundation and The Chicago Community Trust.
A Shared Mission

Through the years, the Illinois Eye-Bank has been proud to provide a second chance for sight to many thousands of people throughout Illinois and beyond, but we didn’t do it alone.

In the days before internet, cellular phones and courier services that we now rely on to ease the tissue distribution process, eye banks often relied on dedicated networks of volunteers to physically transport tissue to airport tarmacs and surgery centers.

Often, these volunteers came from Lions Clubs, who shared eye banks’ mission to treat and eliminate blindness.

Even today, the Illinois Eye-Bank relies on the support we receive from Illinois Lions Clubs, such as a generous matching funds grant from the Lions Clubs International Foundation and Illinois Lions District 1-J.

This grant allowed us to purchase an operating room microscope necessary to prepare tissue for an innovative new surgical technique for corneal transplantation called Descemet Membrane Endothelial Keratoplasty (DMEK). This revolutionary procedure is expected to increase the success rate of corneal transplantation and decrease the recovery time for transplant recipients.

Thank you, Lions Clubs of Illinois, for your continued support. You are important partners and advocates for eye health and sight restoration. As our organization continues to develop like-minded public service opportunities, we look forward to furthering our relationships with Lions Clubs.

Please contact Kara Kelly at kara@illinioseyebank.org if your Lions Club would like to get involved with the Illinois Eye-Bank.

By the Numbers  July 2012 – June 2013

1,334
Cornea transplant recipients in Illinois

65
Recipients were given the gift of sight thanks to our charitable tissue program for the uninsured.

15
Eye and Vision research grants awarded to help support research for cures of blinding eye diseases.

2,555
Eye tissue donors in Illinois
MARK YOUR CALENDARS!

Join us November 15-17 as we celebrate National Donor Sabbath.

National Donor Sabbath, observed annually two weekends before Thanksgiving, is a time when donation and transplantation communities focus on the important role faith plays in the lives of many, and how it influences someone’s decision to become an eye, organ and tissue donor.

Contact Nesha Logan at nlogan@illinoiseyebank.org for materials to support National Donor Sabbath in your faith community.

Join us in celebrating National Eye Donor Month with an Illinois Eye-Bank Open House!

Join Illinois Eye-Bank supporters, including donor families and recipients, in learning about the Eye-Bank through guided tours of our laboratory and informational presentations. Light refreshments will be served.

**Friday, March 21:** IEB Bloomington open house 2-7 p.m.  
**Friday, March 21:** IEB Chicago open house 3-7 p.m.  
**Saturday, March 22:** IEB Chicago open house 10 a.m.-2 p.m.