I Joined! The Eye-Bank gears up to make a big difference in state Donor Registry participation

Illinois Eye-Bank supplies eye tissue for humanitarian mission to Sudan

Golf Outings benefit the Illinois Eye-Bank and the Michigan Eye-Bank

Faith communities engage in Donor Sabbath

Cornea transplant recipient’s passion for biking raises funds for the Michigan Eye-Bank

A Night for Sight and other upcoming events

CARRIE’S LEGACY
When Carrie Jane Smith became an eye and tissue donor, her family turned tragedy into hope.
Successful executives have always known that golf means business. A day on the golf course is often as crucial as a day at the office. Competition can be fierce, but subtle; the winners keep their cool as they keep score.

In the case of the Illinois Eye-Bank’s annual Golf Outing, golf means fundraising… and the winners are the vision-impaired people who will ultimately get the help they need because of the funds raised by this charitable event.

“The money we raise supports our research and education programs,” says Chuck Pivoney, Midwest Eye-Banks’ Chief Operating Officer, and head of the Eye-Bank’s Illinois operations. “We also use this funding to help people who couldn’t otherwise afford a transplant when the need arises.”

The course at the prestigious Inverness Golf Club, which hosted the outing, was designed in the ’20s, although both the course and the clubhouse have been substantially updated and renovated in recent years. The outing also featured dinner and a silent auction.
The Michigan Eye-Bank was both benefactor and beneficiary of the Ann Arbor (Host) Lions' 20th Annual Golf Benefit, held in July at the prestigious and private University of Michigan Golf Course in Ann Arbor.

This year's benefit was special for many reasons, according to Dan Reynolds, the Eye-Bank's Communications Manager and active member of the Ann Arbor (Host) Lions.

“The 2008 outing was an expression of the long-standing partnership between the Lions and the Michigan Eye-Bank,” he says. “A number of dedicated Eye-Bank staff members pitched in to help organize the event, and to volunteer at the golf course. And, in turn, the Lions Club agreed that proceeds should be used to support the Eye-Bank's mission.” The Ann Arbor (Host) Lions Club was directly responsible for originating the Michigan Eye-Bank in 1957.

In addition to signifying clarity of vision and restored sight, the golf benefit's “20/20” theme was meaningful for other reasons. "It was the 20th anniversary of the event, and our goal was to raise twenty thousand dollars," Reynolds explains. "Although we were unable to reach that goal, we were able to keep the event alive for the Lions Club and for the many charities it supports, including the Eye-Bank."

Reynolds cites a difficult Michigan economy and holiday scheduling conflicts as likely reasons for the modest participation level, but he says the outlook is bright for next year. The 2009 Golf Outing will take place earlier in the season – Monday, June 22 – to avoid conflicts with the Fourth of July holiday. "We are also giving serious consideration to restructuring the event... to encourage participation by lowering golfer fees," Reynolds adds. "The Lions have to stay competitive with other charities and less costly outings, but we do want to continue offering people the opportunity to golf at this great course."

To learn more about the Ann Arbor (Host) Lions Club and its annual Golf Benefit, or for information about joining your local Lions Club, contact the Eye-Bank's Community Engagement Manager at (800) 247-7250, ext. 135.

Longtime Michigan Eye-Bank volunteer and cornea transplant recipient Patrick Pruitt tells his own story, reminding golfers that their participation supports the sight-restoring mission of the Lions and the Eye-Bank.

Precious cargo
Illinois Eye-Bank supplies eye tissue for humanitarian mission to Sudan

Chicago-based ophthalmologist Dr. Richard Gieser has traveled all over the world to perform vision-saving surgeries and offer training to local doctors. However, he also has another role that may sound less prestigious, but is just as important: courier.

Gieser, who specializes in retinal-vitreous disease, has transported corneas donated by the Illinois Eye-Bank and several others to Sudan for transplantation on six separate occasions. His most recent trip was in May of this year. On that trip, he brought 20 corneas donated by the Illinois Eye-Bank.

“The trip was uneventful in that security did not ask to open the box,” Gieser wrote in a thank you note to Midwest Eye-Banks President and CEO Kevin Ross. “I always get unusual glances when walking through the airport carrying a box that says ‘Human Eye Tissue’.”

In Sudan, Gieser was greeted by Dr. Nabila, an ophthalmologist in Khartoum, who distributed the eye tissue to four local corneal specialists. Within 36 hours, the corneas Gieser had carried with him from Chicago were transplanted, offering the hope of restored vision to 20 Sudanese people.

According to Gieser, the need for corneas in the area is great because some local religious leaders tell their followers that if they donate their deceased family members’ eyes for transplant, they won’t have eyes in heaven. Hundreds of people are on the waiting list for corneas. The Eye-Bank’s single gift of 20 corneas matched the total number of eyes tissue the country had received in all of 2007. "I cannot thank the Eye-Bank enough," says Gieser.

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He hopes to return to Sudan, one of more than a dozen countries he has visited to share his medical expertise, in January. Gieser has spent between two and six weeks abroad every year since 1975. He chooses his locations based on where he thinks his skills can do the most good, and he only goes to places where he has been invited.

“‘In America, we have so much,’” he says. “‘I think we’re all supposed to give, and the most precious thing we have to give is time.’”
What is the New Jersey Hero Act?

The New Jersey Hero Act was signed into law on July 22, 2008 by Senate President and acting Gov. Richard Codey, making New Jersey the first state in the union to advocate that its residents have the fundamental responsibility to choose whether to help save another person's life through organ donation.

The legislation changes the state’s previous policy toward organ donation from one of general support to one of advocacy, encouraging positive donation decisions as vital to saving more lives.

The Hero Act creates a more dynamic and comprehensive public policy in regards to organ and tissue donation and includes mandated decisional and educational components. Under the Hero Act, New Jersey residents have the right to register as eye, organ and tissue donors when receiving and renewing their driver’s licenses or state identification cards.

The Motor Vehicle Commission (MVC) must also provide an online portal for residents to register as donors by April, 2009. Paper donor cards must be available at MVC offices by July, 2009. Once received, both online and paper submissions must be immediately incorporated into the Donate Life NJ Registry. Additionally, starting in five years, all New Jersey drivers will review basic facts about the organ donation decision and its impact prior to deciding whether to join the registry, as a condition of receiving or renewing their driver’s licenses.

As an educational component of the Hero Act, each public high school in New Jersey will be required to ensure that information about organ and tissue donation is included in the Core Curriculum Content Standards for Comprehensive Health and Physical Education, for grades 9-12, starting with the 2009-2010 academic year.

Starting that same school year, public colleges and universities will also be required to provide similar information to students, either through health services or as part of the curriculum. New Jersey medical schools and professional nursing programs’ curricula will include required instruction on eye, organ and tissue donation and recovery. Similar training will be offered for continuing education credit to doctors and nurses.

Physicians licensed prior to the Hero Act will be encouraged to complete an online, credit-based course within three years. Nurses will be required to complete an online, one credit hour course within three years in order to be relicensed.

The campaign, launched by Midwest Eye-Banks this summer, is a grass-roots initiative to get the word out about the importance of signing up on your state’s organ donor registry. By putting your name on the Illinois, Michigan or New Jersey Donor Registry, you give first-person consent to donate your organs upon your death, instead of leaving the decision to relatives.

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**Eye-Bank volunteers take Donor Registry message to the streets**

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Lions Eye Bank of New Jersey Executive Director Margaret Chaplin is expecting the number of first-person consent donors to increase as a result of the Hero Act. “I think that down the road, it will help to make organ donation part of the norm rather than the exception, since everyone who goes to renew his or her license will be asked about their donation decision,” Chaplin says.

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Michigan Eye-Bank

The Michigan Eye-Bank trained its first group of presenters – Eye-Bank staff members and Lions Club members – in August. The Michigan Eye-Bank’s goal is to present I Joined! to all 562 Lions, Lionsness and Leo clubs throughout the state by the end of 2009.

Michigan Lions Clubs who have 100 percent of their members document their organ donation wishes will receive a special “100% Club” patch for the club to display. Documentation can either be made by joining the Michigan Organ Donor Registry, or by creating a valid document of gift, stating individual gifts or restrictions, which could include the desire not to be a donor.

Lions Eye Bank of New Jersey

The Lions Eye Bank of New Jersey faces a unique challenge in that residents are not yet able to join the New Jersey registry online. (The Hero Act will change this, see preceding page for more information.)

“We have to tell (people) to go to the Motor Vehicle Commission office,” explains Margaret Chaplin, Executive Director of the Lions Eye Bank of New Jersey. In lieu of an online Donor Registry portal, people can also sign up online for notification about when an online registry will become available.

Twenty-four percent of New Jersey drivers have joined the Donor Registry when renewing their driver’s license at a state MVC office. Unfortunately, if a person is not renewing his or her driver’s license when he or she goes to join the Registry, there’s an $11 fee to make a change to the license. The Lions Eye Bank of New Jersey has made it a goal to reach all Lions Clubs in the state by end of 2010, to ask for their help in increasing Donor Registry participation. The recently-passed New Jersey Hero Act will help with this goal.

Under the Hero Act, in five years, all New Jersey residents applying for or renewing a driver’s license will review basic facts about organ donation prior to deciding whether to join the Registry. The Hero Act also dictates that the state must provide online registration for donors that will be immediately incorporated into the Donate Life New Jersey Registry by July, 2009.

Another important component of the Hero Act is its mandate that public high schools must educate their students about organ donation, starting with the 2009-2010 school year. Chaplin believes this will help I Joined! in the future.

“By the time I Joined! reaches (current high school students), they’ll already know about organ donation,” she explains.

Illinois Eye-Bank and Illinois Eye-Bank, Watson Gailey

In Illinois, which has the fastest growing donor registry in the country, the Illinois Eye-Bank and the Illinois Eye-Bank, Watson Gailey have set a goal to reach 36 Lions Clubs, as well as other community organizations, by the end of 2009.

According to Midwest Eye-Banks Chief Operating Officer Chuck Pivoney, because the relationship between the Illinois Eye-Bank and the local Lions Clubs is not yet as strong as in Michigan and New Jersey, the goal is more modest. Pivoney expects that I Joined! will help build the relationship.

“This project is an opportunity to engage Illinois Lions with Eye-Bank efforts,” he explains.

Although Lions are among the first to carry the I Joined! program into their own communities, the program can be given by anyone, to any community group. For more information on becoming an I Joined! presenter, contact Lisa Langley, the Eye-Bank’s Community Engagement Manager, at (800) 247-7250, ext. 135, or lisa@midwesteyebanks.org.

National Donor Sabbath

Eye-Bank offers guidelines for religious leaders

Every major religion in the United States accepts eye, organ and tissue donation as a good and charitable thing, but not everybody knows that.

“Some people are uninformed; they’re not sure how their faith feels about eye, organ and tissue donation,” says Lisa Langley, Community Engagement Manager for Midwest Eye-Banks.

To help people better understand where their religion stands on the issue of donation, the transplant community teams up with the religious community every year for National Donor Sabbath. This year, National Donor Sabbath will be recognized November 14-16.

For the past several years, the Michigan Eye-Bank has created a resource guide for clergy to use during National Donor Sabbath to address eye, organ and tissue donation. The guide includes sample sermons, scriptures, texts, inspirations, different theological viewpoints on donation, frequently asked questions and facts about donation.

The guide is part of a joint effort between the Michigan Eye-Bank, Gift of Life Michigan and the Donate Life Coalition of Michigan to raise awareness about National Donor Sabbath.

The Lions Eye Bank of New Jersey (LEBNJ) also has plans for National Donor Sabbath.

“We will be sending out a joint letter with the New Jersey Organ and Tissue Sharing Network to approximately 400 faith leaders, as well as to the New Jersey Council of Churches, New Jersey Catholic Conference and other religious affiliations, encouraging them to participate in discussions on donation with their congregants,” says Margaret Chaplin, Executive Director of the Lions Eye Bank of New Jersey.

Additionally, LEBNJ is planning to have a presence at local places of worship to get the word out about organ donation.

To request a copy of An Organ, Tissue and Eye Donor Resource Guide for Faith Leaders for your faith leader, contact Lisa Langley at (800) 247-7250, ext. 135, or lisa@midwesteyebanks.org.
RED SHOE LEGACY
Parents keep donor’s memory alive

Carrie Jane Smith was only 28 when she committed suicide in May, 2002. She had been diagnosed with depression that she experienced on and off for years. Still, she managed to get a bachelor's degree in kinesiology – an off-shoot of physical therapy that involves muscle motion and athletic training – from the University of Wisconsin. She went on to receive a Masters of Science Degree from the University of Illinois, Chicago. At the time of her death, she was working for the University of Illinois’ neurology department, researching Parkinsonism, the symptoms of Parkinson’s disease. She was also employed by the Arthritis Foundation.

“It takes a lot of courage for people to accomplish what she accomplished, while still, at times, struggling against depression,” says Carrie’s father, Charles Smith.

Carrie had told her parents that she wanted to be an organ donor. She had also signed her driver’s license to indicate her wishes. Before Carrie’s death, Charles and his wife, Bobbi, notified the hospital personnel of Carrie’s choice. Carrie’s corneas and certain tissues were determined to be suitable for transplantation, even though her other organs were not. When the Smiths left the hospital, they were hopeful that their daughter would be a cornea and tissue donor.

“Donating has softened our grief at times,” says Charles. “Knowing how much Carrie had emphasized her desire to contribute that way, donating is a continuation of Carrie’s legacy – her nature. It’s comforting.”

Two people received Carrie’s corneas, and as many as 22 others received her tissues. One of the people who received a cornea from Carrie was Helen Shusler who, at age 76, still drove herself between Glen Ellyn, Illinois and her winter home in Arizona each year. Helen knew she needed to do something about her vision when she couldn’t pass her driver’s test.

Helen is an avid runner. her passion for running, and her trademark red shoes, were the inspiration for the Red Shoe Run, a successful annual fundraiser in Rockford, Illinois.

After two months of exchanging letters, Helen and her daughter did meet the Smiths. They were invited to the Smith family’s annual picnic, an event held every summer at a state park near Rockford. It had been stormy, but when they met, the rain stopped. The family learned that Helen had received Carrie’s cornea on the day of Carrie’s funeral.

Charles looked into Helen’s eyes, “…hoping to see some reflection of Carrie,” he remembers. “It’s a comforting imagination for the moment. You don’t see Carrie, but your imagination runs wild.”

Helen told the Smiths that she thinks of them as her additional family. “I think it’s a valuable experience to communicate with the donor family and the recipient family,” Charles says. “They both benefit from that kind of connection. Anything that connects us back to Carrie is comforting and useful. And right at that time, the grief was still very intense.”

To help deal with their grief, the Smiths also organized a memorial non-profit 5K race in honor of Carrie, an avid runner and triathlete. They named the race the Red Shoe Run for Donor Awareness because of the red shoes Carrie always wore.

The Smiths met Jan Eschen of Donate Life Illinois and she put them in touch with her friend, Barb Berman, a long-time run organizer who had experience organizing fundraising events for the Arthritis Foundation. Fundraising was a new experience for the Smiths – Charles is a retired physician, and Bobbi is a nurse manager.

With guidance from Berman, they joined forces with the local running club and found sponsors, including the Illinois Eye-Bank, the Gift of Hope Organ and Tissue Donor Network, the Rock River Valley Blood Center and the National Marrow Donor Program.

In the years since it began, the race has grown to 400 runners and walkers who pay entry fees and gather donations. This year, the Red Shoe Run raised $32,000. Helen, her husband, Floyd, and her daughter Linda attended the first Red Shoe Run event. At the inaugural event, which had 252 participants between the ages of six and 70, Helen shared her story with the crowd. Even runners who had finished the race stayed after to hear Helen’s tale.

The money raised through the Red Shoe Run for Donor Awareness is used to pay the cost of tissue-typing for those individuals that want to donate their bone marrow to save someone’s life – a process that is managed by the Rock River Valley Blood Center’s Marrow Donor Program. Since the race began, the number of willing donors in the Rock River Valley area has increased by more than 6,000.

But the Smiths’ philanthropic outreach doesn’t end there. They also started Group Hope, a registered non-profit, volunteer-led support group for depression and bi-polar illness. The group is open to anyone in the Rockford area. Before her death, Carrie had tried to find a similar support group without success.

For her part, Helen has been traveling the world. Since her transplant, she has been to Australia, New Zealand, Hawaii, Singapore, Laos and Vietnam. “I could see birds and mountains, all the beautiful scenery I couldn’t see before – and the colors!” she exclaims. “Before, it was all a blue.”

Even though her travels take her all over the world, Helen still keeps in contact with the Smiths, mainly through E-mail. “I know they need me as much as I need them,” she says.

For more information:
The next Red Shoe Run for Donor Awareness will be held on April 11, 2009. To learn about the Red Shoe Run or to participate, visit www.redshoerun.org.

For information about Group Hope, contact Charles Smith at (815) 398-9628.
Gary Abud, Jr. was only 10 years old when he was diagnosed with Keratoconus, a degenerative disease of the cornea. For years, he relied on glasses and hard contact lenses to help him see, but eventually his vision deteriorated to the point where a cornea transplant was his only treatment option.

So, in May, 2007, Gary underwent surgery at the University of Michigan Kellogg Eye Center in Ann Arbor to have his first cornea transplant. A year later, he had a transplant in the other.

“I’m doing great,” Gary told the Grosse Pointe News a week after his second transplant. “My vision in that eye has already improved to 20/60, and I’ve had no problems at all. The vision in the eye that was done last year is now 20/30. I couldn’t have asked for more.”

He was so happy with the results of his transplants that he wanted to find a way to give something back to the Michigan Eye-Bank.

“Gary joined our Ambassador Program,” explains Lisa Langley, Community Engagement Manager. “Ambassadors are usually donor family members or transplant recipients who volunteer to support the Eye-Bank’s mission because it has touched their lives.

“Gary was driven to do something more.”

Giving back is nothing new for Gary, who graduated from Wayne State University in 2006 with the intention of going to medical school as a way to help people just as he had been helped.

But a friend pointed out that teaching seemed to be a recurring theme in Gary’s life. It was true: Gary was an indoor cycling (also known as “spinning”) instructor, taught piano lessons and tutored schoolchildren. Gary realized that teaching was his true passion.

He enrolled in the accelerated graduate program in education at Saginaw Valley State University and student taught in the L’Anse Creuse school district. He is now certified to teach science in grades six through 12. He’s also working on a Master’s degree in education, which he will complete in May, 2009.

Gary decided that the best way to give back to the Michigan Eye-Bank would be to raise funds by drawing upon one of his own passions – spinning. Ironically, he had first become passionate about indoor cycling, or ‘spinning’, when vision problems made it nearly impossible for him to bicycle outdoors.

Gary envisioned a benefit event that quickly took shape as the Ride-A-Thon, held in June at Next Level Health & Fitness in St. Clair Shores, Michigan. More than 50 spinners paid $25 each to bike in one of five sessions scheduled throughout the day. Coincidentally, one of the spinners, a doctor and friend of Gary’s, was called away during his session to perform a cornea transplant.

Local restaurants donated food for participants, and Michigan Eye-Bank staff members were on hand to provide information about the Eye-Bank and accept charitable contributions.

In all, Gary raised more than $5,000, including a $500 donation from St. Clair Specialty Physicians, P.C., and a $1,000 donation from the Grosse Pointe Lions Club. He presented a check to Eye-Bank CEO Kevin Ross on June 30.

“Gary has taken our mission and made it his own,” Ross said. “I can’t thank him enough for giving back to the Eye-Bank in such a personal, meaningful way.”

Both Gary and the Michigan Eye-Bank hope to make the Ride-A-Thon an annual event. For more information about becoming an Eye-Bank Ambassador, or to participate in upcoming events, contact Lisa Langley at (800) 247-7250, ext. 135, or lisa@michiganeyebank.org.
Calendar of Events

**October**
19  Gift of Life Michigan 16th Annual Betty Buckley Donor Family Ceremony, Lansing, MI
23  Michigan Eye-Bank Night for Sight, Lansing, MI

**November**
14-16  National Donor Sabbath Weekend

**December**
7  Lions Eye Bank of New Jersey Open House, Springfield, NJ
8-13  Lions Eye Bank Week

**March**
National Eye Donor Month
26  Michigan Eye-Bank Blood Drive, Ann Arbor, MI
TBD  Illinois Eye-Bank Gift of Sight Gala