

**For Immediate Release**

Contacts: Bryan Stewart, (213) 229-5650 or bstewart@onelegacy.org
 Rivian Bell, (213) 612-4927, (888) 477-4319 (24/7) or rbell@jdipr.com

# 32 RIDERS TO INSPIRE WITH THEIR ‘*JOURNEYS OF THE HEART’* ABOARD THE 10TH ANNUAL DONATE LIFE ROSE PARADE® FLOAT

# Float Riders Include Organ and Tissue Recipients, Living Donor and Donor Family Members from 17 States and Canada

**LOS ANGELES, Calif.** – **Sept. 24, 2012** – For the 32 people honored to ride the 10th annual **Donate Life float in the 2013 Rose Parade**,their emotional journeys will mirror the highs, lows and all points in between shared by the national community of organ and tissue recipients, transplant candidates, living donors, and families of deceased donors they represent. Themed **“*Journeys of the Heart,”*** the 2013 Donate Life float will carry individuals aged 12 to 68 from 17 states and Canada who were selected by local organizations for their examples of courage, hope, generosity and advocacy for organ and tissue donation.

The 32 riders cover a broad spectrum of backgrounds, including major league sports, musicians, parents of donors, and adults transplanted as very young children. Among this year’s riders are 2006 World Series MVP **David Eckstein**, whose advocacy for donation is inspired by kidney disease and multiple transplants within his immediate family; his brother **Rick Eckstein**, hitting coach for the Washington Nationals who donated a kidney to his brother Ken; **Carolyn Henry Glaspy**, who made the decision to donate the organs of her son **Chris Henry** of the Cincinnati Bengals; **Vicky Nguyen**, who has lived 26 of her 28 years with a liver transplant; heart recipient **Larry Johnson**, a Grammy-award-winning bassist; and **Leilah Dowsari**, who in 1986 was the first female newborn to receive a heart transplant.

Inspired by the 2013 Rose Parade® theme *“****Oh, the Places You’ll Go*!***™,”* Donate Life’s looping, heart-laden float design evokes the emotional journeys undertaken by all people affected by donation and transplantation. “Our float participants have experienced the highest of highs, the lowest of lows, and all points between on their roads from heartbreak to hope,” said Bryan Stewart, chairman of the Donate Life float committee and vice president of communications at OneLegacy, the nonprofit organ and tissue organization serving the greater Los Angeles area. “We honor equally people who have saved lives as donors and those who have received organ and tissue transplants that allowed them to carry on full lives, for the benefit of their families and the communities in which they live. Throughout the upcoming holiday season, their stories will inspire millions to make registering as a donor part of their own life journey.”

The float’s collection of joyful hearts representing the new life made possible by transplantation is grounded by a reverent dedication garden filled with roses bearing personal messages honoring those who make the gift of life possible. The journey peaks with overlapping red and purple hearts representing the love and courage that define humanity at its best. The float’s 200-foot-long, heart-shaped pathway is lined with 72 memorial “floragraph” portraits of deceased donors that will be visible along the five-mile parade route.

- MORE -

2013 Donate Life Rose Parade Float Riders

Page 2-2-2

The youngest of this year’s riders are two 12-year-old boys**: Chase Caspersen** of Boelus, Neb. and **Ernesto Chavez** of Palm Springs, Calif. Chase, who was diagnosed with bone cancer a day after his ninth birthday, was able to keep his arm thanks to a bone transplant from a 56-year-old woman. With his second chance, he was inspired to create toys for service dogs that help many hospital-bound children. Today, those toys are produced and sold nationwide to support pediatric cancer research. As a five-year-old in 2005, Ernesto received a kidney from a veteran who saw tours of duty in Iraq and Afghanistan. “My donor, Gabriel Barajas, is a hero to me,” said Ernesto. “Besides being a soldier, he gave me a second chance to live.”

Donors and their families, like those who made such a difference in the boys’ lives, are represented by ten float riders, some of whom faced the heartbreak that comes with donating the organs and tissues of their children. It was only two years ago that attorney **Troy DeJoode** of Ankeny, Iowa, and his wife Heather lost five-year-old Carson and five-month-old Claire when a truck broadsided Heather’s car. Their organs saved many, including young Landen Bowers, nicknamed “Lion,” who carries Claire’s stuffed lamb with him. **Denien Vittorio Wilde** of Bryan, Ohio and her husband Patrick lost their nine-week-old son Quinn to a sudden seizure disorder. Their donation of Quinn’s heart valves saved the lives of two infant girls. **Michele Shanahan DeMoss** of Independence, Mo. rides in memory of her 11-year-old daughter Blair, who dreamed of providing socks to foster and homeless children. After Blair was senselessly shot by a Fourth of July reveler, she gave life to six people aged six to 60, and Blair’s compassionate heart inspired a foundation to see her vision through.

While many of Donate Life’s float riders have a heart for others, six of them have hearts donated by others. Composer **Kevin Reipl** of Winnetka, Calif. and his wife had recently welcomed twins when he suddenly suffered end-stage heart failure caused by a rare genetic tumor above his adrenal gland. After nine months on a portable heart pump, his life was saved by a deceased donor. **Charles Okoke** of Phoenix, Ariz. also benefited from an artificial heart prior to his transplant, but his journey lasted three years, including two in the hospital and one as the first U.S. patient to have a 13-pound portable device, allowing him to go home and resume life with his family.

Two other float riders received hearts at opposite points in their lives. Grammy-award-winning bassist **Larry Johnson** of Baytown, Tex. lived with heart disease for 50 of his 60 years before a transplant became essential. Nearly a quarter-century before, **Leilah Dowsari** of Loma Linda, Calif., then known only as "Baby Eve," made international headlines in January 1986 when she became the first female newborn to receive a heart transplant. The first newborn ever listed on the national waiting list, Leilah, now 26, received a heart from 10-day-old “Baby Eric” of Atlanta, Ga. on her 17th day of life. After two more heart transplants in her teens, Leilah has a one-year-old baby of her own.

Today, more than 115,000 candidates are on the national organ transplant waiting list. Largely due to the rarity of donation opportunities, only about 28,000 organs are transplanted each year. As a result, 18 candidates die each day for lack of a donor. A single organ donor can save the lives of eight people through organ donation, while a single tissue donor can save and heal 50 others through needed heart valves, corneas, skin, bone, and tendons that mend hearts, prevent or cure blindness, heal burns and save limbs.

- MORE -

2013 Donate Life Rose Parade Float Riders

Page 3-3-3

The 2013 Donate Life float is built by Phoenix Decorating Co., from a design by Dave Pittman and is coordinated by Donate Life America member **OneLegacy**. The Donate Life float campaign is supported by more than 120 official sponsors from coast to coast, including organ and tissue recovery organizations, tissue banks, state donor registries, transplant centers, hospitals, funeral homes and affiliated organizations. Joining OneLegacy as top-level benefactors are the **Dignity Memorial®** network, North America’s largest network of funeral, cremation and cemetery service providers; the **American Association of Tissue Banks (AATB)**; **Donate Life America**; the **Order of St. Lazarus**, an international order originally founded in the 11th century; **TBI/Tissue Banks International**; and the **United Network for Organ Sharing (UNOS)** and their **National Donor Memorial**.

All Donate Life float sponsors encourage parade viewers to join the nation’s 106 million registered donors so that everyone whose life depends on a transplant may receive one. Registrations can be made through state registries, links to which can be found at [www.DonateLifeAmerica.org](http://www.DonateLifeAmerica.org). Further information about the Donate Life float, decorating, and dedication garden can be found at [www.donatelifefloat.org](http://www.donatelifefloat.org).

The Pasadena Tournament of Roses is a volunteer organization that annually hosts the Rose Parade® presented by Honda, Rose Bowl Game® presented by VIZIO and various associated events. The 124th Rose Parade presented by Honda, themed **“*Oh, the Places You’ll Go!****™****,”*** will take place Tuesday, Jan. 1, 2013, at 8 a.m. (PST) featuring majestic floral floats, high-stepping equestrian units and spirited marching bands. Following the parade, the 99th Rose Bowl Game presented by VIZIO will kick off at 2:10 p.m. and feature an exciting match-up between two of the top collegiate football teams in the nation. For additional information on the Tournament of Roses please visit the official website at [www.tournamentofroses.com](http://www.tournamentofroses.com).

# # #

(Note to editors: Full list of riders and story capsules follows)

**Donate Life Rose Parade® Float**

**2013 Float Riders**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Name** | **Relationship to Donation** | **Age** | **Hometown** | **Occupation** | **Sponsored by** |
| **John Beers** | Kidney Recipient | 68 | Hemet, CA | Retired from Wall Street Journal | OneLegacy |
| ***His story:*** | John Beers was diagnosed with polycystic kidney disease at age 25. As an avid mountain climber and backpacker who still worked full time, failing kidneys and dialysis three times a week made life very difficult. That all changed in August 2005, when five years on the waiting list ended with a kidney transplant. Two years after his transplant, John joined his sons to climb Mt. Whitney, where he made it to 12,000 feet. Said the two-time Donate Life Ambassador of the Year for OneLegacy, "I received my second chance at a new life thanks to the generosity of my donor family." |
| **Neal Bira** | Heart Recipient | 60 | Coral Springs, FL | Founder, Organ Donor Awareness Foundation | Life Alliance Organ Recovery Agency |
| ***His story:*** | On May 12, 2006, Neal Bira suffered a heart attack, that damaged his heart so severely that he would need a transplant to survive. Because of his critical condition, Neal was placed at the top of the transplant waiting list and shortly after received a new heart. Upon meeting his donor family, Neal was inspired to create the Organ Donor Awareness Foundation, which seeks to increase organ donor awareness, raise money for education and life’s necessities, and provide professional support for the children and families of organ donors. “Someone gave me life,” said Neal. “In return I am compelled to give back.” |
| **Valerie Vandervort Boyer** | Double Lung Recipient | 40 | Claremore, OK | LifeShare of Oklahoma Volunteer | LifeShare Transplant Donor Services of Oklahoma |
| ***Her story:*** | Diagnosed with cystic fibrosis at six weeks of age, Valerie Vandervort was listed for transplant in 1999. She waited almost two years for a double lung transplant, receiving her gift of life from 15-year-old Colbey Oglesby just in time for her 30th birthday. Since her transplant, Valerie can breathe without oxygen, talk in complete sentences, sing, take showers and clean house. She has participated in the U.S. Transplant Games five times and won six medals. In 2010, Colbey's parents cheered for Valerie at the Games. "I thank God for all my blessings, and my donor, and her family," said Valerie. "I know I am truly blessed." |
| **Chase Caspersen** | Bone Recipient | 11 | Boelus, NE | Middle School Student | Musculoskeletal Transplant Foundation |
| ***His story:*** | Chase Caspersen was diagnosed with bone cancer one day after his ninth birthday. There was only one cure: removal of the bone and tumor. After chemotherapy and transplant of bone graft from a donor, Chase is now a very active sixth grader. Grateful for his second chance and inspired by the service dogs that visited him in the hospital, Chase had the idea to sell dog toys to benefit pediatric cancer research. PetSmart made the program national and Chase hopes his initiative will help children for years to come. As Chase's mom said, his donor "truly is the most honored person in his life." |
| **Ernesto Bravo Chavez** | Kidney Recipient | 12 | Palm Springs, CA | Student | Loma Linda University Medical Center Transplantation Institute |
| ***His story:*** | When Ernesto Bravo Chavez was three years old, he was frequently sick. One day he became very ill; his kidneys had failed. He had to start dialysis and was eventually listed for a kidney transplant. After 15 months of dialysis and complications due to severe asthma, Ernesto received a kidney transplant on October 5, 2005. “My donor, Gabriel Barajas, is a hero to me,” said Ernesto. “Besides being a soldier, he gave me a second chance to live.” Thanks to his donor, Ernesto is able to eat what he wants, take a shower or a dip in the pool. “Without my hero, I wouldn’t be a normal kid.” |

- MORE -

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Name** | **Relationship to Donation** | **Age** | **Hometown** | **Occupation** | **Sponsored by** |
| **Troy DeJoode** | Donor Father | 41 | Ankeny, IA | Attorney | Iowa Donor Network |
| ***His story:*** | On May 6, 2010, Troy DeJoode received devastating news: A pickup truck broadsided his wife Heather's minivan. Riding with her were their children, five-year-old Carson, three-year-old Chase and five-month-old Claire. Chase was hurt but would recover. Carson and Claire were both resuscitated, but would succumb to their injuries in the days that followed. "I realized that organ donation was Carson's chance to be the hero that he knew himself to be," said Troy. The following day, his wife still in a coma, Troy was faced with making the same decision for his daughter Claire. Since Carson's and Claire's donations, Troy is active in the transplant community, telling their stories to trauma teams, hospital executives, and state legislators. |
| **Michele Shanahan DeMoss** | Donor Mother | 45 | Independence, MO | Business Owner and Executive Director, Blair's Foster Socks Foundation | Cytonet, LLCin partnership withMidwest Transplant Network |
| ***Her story:*** | Michele Shanahan DeMoss knew her daughter Blair didn't have a problem with teddy bears. Blair’s problem was babies’ cold, bare feet. Each time a foster child came into her family's care, Blair asked, "Why do they always have stuffed animals, but no one can find them socks?" Determined to fix the problem, 11-year-old Blair envisioned Foster Socks, a program to provide socks to foster and homeless children. Blair’s dream was dashed when she was fatally shot by a nearby Fourth of July reveler, but Foster Socks did not die with Blair, who gave new life to at least six people as a donor. "She would have gotten this done, "said Michele. “Now it's up to us." |
| **Leilah Dowsari** | Heart Recipient | 26 | Loma Linda, CA | Aspiring Photographer | Order of St. Lazarus |
| ***Her story:*** | Then known only as “Baby Eve,” 26-year-old Leilah Dowsari made international headlines in January 1986 when she became the first female newborn to receive a heart transplant. The first newborn ever listed on the national waiting list, Leilah received a heart from 10-day-old “Baby Eric” of Atlanta, Ga. on her 17th day of life. Two more heart transplants in the quarter-century since her groundbreaking procedure made it possible for Leilah to have a baby of her own, Gabriel, in August 2011. |
| **David Eckstein** | Donation Advocate | 37 | Sanford, FL | Former MLB Player & Co-Founder of Her Universe | Donate Life Run/Walk Committee |
| ***His story:*** | 2006 World Series MVP David Eckstein is immersed in the world of kidney disease. “My father, two sisters and brother all have it,” said David. He has offered to be a living donor to his sister, like his mother and brother have been to other members of his family. “Throughout my life and career as a professional baseball player, knowing the daily struggles of my family has always been a driving force for me to never take a day for granted,” said David. “I felt it was my obligation to always do my best, and when the time comes, I will be proud to add kidney donor to my list of achievements.” |
| **Rick Eckstein** | Living Kidney Donor | 39 | Sanford, FL | Hitting Coach, Washington Nationals | Donate Life Run/Walk Committee |
| ***His story:*** | Rick Eckstein, hitting coach for the Washington Nationals, woke up one morning in September 2010 gripped by a thought he was unable and unwilling to shake. Rick knew at that moment that he was going to donate a kidney to his brother Ken, one of four immediate family members who had received kidney transplants. Two months later, Rick’s kidney was transplanted into Ken, who returned to the full life he had enjoyed since receiving his first kidney transplant in 1991. As for Rick, his life has not skipped a beat: last year he married wife Caroline and he continues to give his all to his coaching career. |
| **Jonathan Finger** | Kidney Recipient | 35 | Westminster, CO | Web Developer | Taylor's Gift Foundation |
| ***His story:*** | Diagnosed with a rare kidney disease, Jonathan Finger received a transplant from his mother in 2002, but the organ soon rejected completely. In 2009, after seven years of dialysis and open-heart surgery, Jonathan was re-activated on the transplant waiting list, but his doctor was not optimistic a match could be found, and Jonathan girded for long-term dialysis. Miraculously, two weeks later, Jonathan was preparing for transplant surgery. Jonathan later developed a wonderful relationship with the family of his donor, Taylor Storch. “Every aspect of my life has improved dramatically, and I'm so thankful,” said Jonathan. “Thank God for Taylor and her gift to me.” |

- MORE -

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Name** | **Relationship to Donation** | **Age** | **Hometown** | **Occupation** | **Sponsored by** |
| **Alfonso Garcia** | Liver Recipient | 18 | Pinole, CA | Student | California Transplant Donor Network |
| ***His story:*** | Alfonso Garcia was 15 when sudden fatigue revealed that a genetic disease was destroying his liver. Without a transplant, he would die. His prayers and those of his family were answered when a liver became available. Alfonso's transplant has given him renewed focus on what's important in life. "I was on the edge of dying, and through a miracle, I am alive today," said Alfonso. "It's because of a donor and his gift." Alfonso thanks his donor, 22-year-old George Becker, for making it possible to him to go to college and volunteer with the California Transplant Donor Network. "I think about George every day." |
| **Carolyn Henry Glaspy** | Donor Mother | 48 | Cincinnati, OH | Cashier | LifeCenter Organ Donor Network |
| ***Her story:*** | Carolyn Henry Glaspy’s life changed the morning of Dec. 17, 2009. Just when her son, Cincinnati Bengals wide receiver Chris Henry, was beginning to turn his troubled life around, he experienced a fatal fall. When Carolyn learned that Chris, 26, had suffered irreversible brain death, she made the decision to donate his organs. Eleven months after her son’s death, Carolyn’s tearful meeting with the four recipients of Chris’s gift of life brought her closure. Since then, Carolyn has been called to tell people about her journey and the importance of being an organ and tissue donor. |
| **Joe L. Gutierrez** | Bone Recipient | 64 | Littleton, CO | Retired | AlloSource |
| ***His story:*** | When Joe Gutierrez talks about salmon fishing, traveling and even skydiving, it’s hard to imagine that less than a year ago, he was at risk of losing his arm. Joe was diagnosed with a noncancerous progressive giant cell tumor on his shoulder. Six months after the tumor was removed, it returned with a vengeance. Joe’s doctor replaced a large portion of Joe’s shoulder and upper arm with bone from a deceased donor, saving his arm from amputation. Joe hopes to meet his donor family someday. “I would love to thank them,” said Joe. “I would really appreciate the chance to tell them my story and how much they have helped me." |
| **Emily Henwood** | Donor Sister | 28 | Ottawa, ON | Radio Accounts Manager | Lifesharing |
| ***Her story:*** | In August 2011, Emily Henwood’s brother Jeremy was killed in the line of duty, and she was heartbroken. Jeremy was registered to be an organ donor, and was able to donate after he died. Life after Jeremy was killed was difficult for Emily. “I had to seek counseling to understand why such a terrible thing had to happen to our family,” recalled Emily. Emily found strength, however, in Jeremy’s donation of organs to two women. “His choice to be an organ donor has given us all a sense of honor and pride,” said Emily. “The world is a better place because of my brother Jeremy and I am proud to be his sister.” |
| **Larry E. Johnson** | Heart Recipient | 60 | Baytown, TX | Musician | Donate 4 Life |
| ***His story:*** | A Grammy Award-winning bassist, Larry Johnson is also a 60-year-old survivor of heart disease. After living with heart problems for almost 50 years, Larry was told he needed a new heart in 2009. He received a heart later that year, and Larry's gratitude for his gift of life knows no bounds. "After healing from the heart transplant surgery, I began to feel like a new person," said Larry. I am now able to spend quality time with my family, continue to make music and do a little fishing, too. I am truly a blessed man and my wife and I will be forever grateful to my donor and his family." |
| **Maria Knowlton** | Double Lung Recipient | 40 | Walkerton, IN | Stay At Home Mom and IOPO Volunteer | Indiana Organ Procurement Organization (IOPO) |
| ***Her story:*** | Maria Knowlton knew from an early age that her life was not normal. Maria was diagnosed with cystic fibrosis at birth and spent every day thereafter, along with her parents, caring for her lungs. She would eventually need a lung transplant, which she received in April 2000. "Life since my transplant has been so weird in that it's normal," shared Maria. She no longer has to spend all day taking care of her health. "I can spend that energy on our two beautiful children. I volunteer, teach Sunday school and serve as Cub Scout Master. My donor was a 42-year-old Ohioan and a hero." |

- MORE -

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Name** | **Relationship to Donation** | **Age** | **Hometown** | **Occupation** | **Sponsored by** |
| **Peter David Lang** | Donor Brother | 18 | Golden, CO | Student | Donor Alliance |
| ***His story:*** | Peter Lang was not quite 17 years old when his sister Perri lost her life. Perri was a strong-willed, spirited 20-year-old with beautiful blue eyes, an unforgettable smile and a lifelong love of softball. In the last few years of Perri’s life, the siblings became closer than ever. Tragically, Perri died after sustaining injuries during a single-car accident on the street where she lived. “With time, I have realized what a great impact this unspeakably tragic event has had,” said Peter. “With the gifts from my sister Perri, three lives were saved and many others have been changed. To me, there is nothing more special than the gift of life.” |
| **Vivian Lefferts** | Donor Mother | 54 | Normal, IL | Owner, fireworks company | Gift of Hope Organ & Tissue Donor Network |
| ***Her story:*** | Vivian and Larry Lefferts honor the legacy of their son John, who died in 2004 at the age of 22 from an aortic aneurysm, by volunteering with Gift of Hope. John had registered his decision to be an organ and tissue donor, and through his donation of tissue he touched the lives of 37 recipients, including an army sergeant. After John’s death, Vivian and Larry found a Gift of Hope bumper sticker among John’s belongings. Knowing that John was a supporter of Gift of Hope and donation has brought them great comfort, and the Lefferts have encouraged thousands of people to join the state donor registry in his memory. |
| **Kelly Luchini** | Donor Sister | 42 | Williston, VT | Client Services Manager | Center for Donation & Transplant |
| ***Her story:*** | Kelly Luchini was 39 when she and her family had to unexpectedly say goodbye to her brother Michael, her senior by four years. When first approached with the opportunity to donate his organs, knowing Michael's caring nature, the family quickly concluded that donation is something he would have wished for. The memory of Michael's passing is difficult for Kelly, but the donation brings some comfort. "Knowing that there is someone out there living today as a direct result of a gift they received from Michael makes the pain of losing someone who was loved so much a bit more bearable," said Kelly. |
| **Amanda Missildine** | Liver Recipient | 26 | Tempe, AZ | Registered Nurse | Donor Network of Arizona |
| ***Her story:*** | Having been diagnosed with Crohn's Disease on her 12th birthday, doctor visits, hospital stays, needles and pills were just a part of growing up for Amanda Missildine. However, nothing could have prepared her for the spring of 2005, when Amanda went into liver failure. On Mother's Day 2005, she received a liver transplant and a second chance at life. After her experience, Amanda decided to become a nurse in the ICU where she was once a patient. "Working alongside the physicians and nurses that took care of me was a tremendous gift to be blessed with," said Amanda. |
| **Amy Nash** | Kidney Recipient x2 | 50 | Clarence, NY | Former Director of Marketing | Unyts |
| ***Her story:*** | Amy Nash was diagnosed with end stage renal disease during her senior year in college. At age 23 she received her first kidney transplant in 1986. After 21 years, Amy's transplant failed and her friends were tested as potential donors. Amy's childhood friend was a match, and they had their surgeries in December 2008. Now, Amy volunteers as a way to express her gratitude to her two donors. As a little girl, Amy dreamt of being the Rose Queen. "On New Year's Day 2013, I will receive a far greater honor as one of the riders on the Donate Life Float in the Tournament of Roses Parade," said Amy. |
| **Patricia Marie Nelson** | Donor Mother | 52 | Philadelphia, PA | Compliance Monitor, School District of Philadelphia | Gift of Life Donor Program |
| ***Her story:*** | In 2006, David Nelson was rushed to the hospital with an aneurysm. When it was clear that David would not survive, his mother Patricia and other family members were approached about donation. Because David had registered as a donor, his family did not have to make the decision on his behalf. Inspired by David's gift of life, his family and friends created the David Nelson Jr. Memorial Fund, which awards scholarships to children of donors. "We are committed to sharing David's compassion and desire to help others," said Patricia. "We are grateful to have had him in our lives and proud to remember him." |

- MORE -

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Name** | **Relationship to Donation** | **Age** | **Hometown** | **Occupation** | **Sponsored by** |
| **Vicky Nguyen** | Liver Recipient | 28 | Los Angeles, CA | Sales Account Manager | OneLegacy |
| ***Her story:*** | Shortly after Vicky Nguyen was born, she was diagnosed with biliary atresia, a potentially fatal liver condition. Just before she turned two, Vicky received her first liver transplant at UCLA Medical Center. Vicky received a second liver transplant in July 2000 at age 16. The difficult experiences Vicky has overcome have shown her how strong she is. "Believe it or not, having two transplants was a huge blessing in my life," said Vicky. "I don't take for granted that I've been a liver transplant survivor for more than 26 years. I'm able to turn my challenges into greater opportunities." |
| **Charles C. Okoke** | Heart Recipient | 46 | Phoenix, AZ | Oracle Database Administrator | Mayo Clinic Transplant Center |
| ***His story:*** | After Charles Okoke’s first heart transplant went into failure, he thought he might never receive another. To buy time, Charles received an artificial heart powered by a 400-pound driver. Because of the cumbersome size of the device, Charles remained in the hospital more than two years until he became the first patient in the U.S. to have a 13-pound portable version, allowing him to go home and resume life with his family. Less than one year later, against great odds Charles received a new heart and kidney. “There are no words to express my appreciation and respect for the family that made the courageous and generous decision to donate their loved one’s organs – and my new heart,” said Charles. |
| **Sue A. Pasewald** | Donor Mother | 58 | Horicon, WI | Medical Receptionist | RTI Donor Services |
| ***Her story:*** | Sue and Dave Pasewald tragically lost their 23-year-old daughter Christina in 2007. When the family was first asked about donation, Sue, still in shock, said "No," but Dave told her that this was something Christina would want to do. The couple said yes to tissue donation, and later learned that they had honored the donation sticker on Christina's driver's license. Today, Sue is a passionate volunteer for RTI Donor Services, speaking about donation in her community and sharing her story with others. "I have become aware of how many people are waiting for organs and tissues," said Sue. "Don't waste what could help someone else." |
| **Caitlyn Persinger** | Donor Sister and Tissue Recipient | 18 | Mukwonago, WI | Student | Medtronic Spinal and Biologics in partnership with American Tissue Services Foundation |
| ***Her story:*** | Caitlyn Persinger was 13 years old when she lost her brother Chris in a car accident. Chris had signed up to be a donor, and his tissues were recovered to help others. After Chris died, Caitlyn turned toward the one passion that Chris and she had shared: sports. A standout high school athlete, during a soccer game she tore her ACL and meniscus. In a miracle of fate, one last remaining tissue from Chris's donation was used to reconstruct Caitlyn's ACL. "I always knew Chris was watching over me, but I never thought he could be a part of me like he is now," said Caitlyn. |
| **Mark E. Reagan** | Heart Recipient | 63 | Morristown, NJ | Chairman, Global Construction Practice, Marsh, Inc. | NJ Sharing Network Foundation |
| ***His story:*** | In August 1995, two weeks after returning from a business trip to Brazil, Mark Reagan learned that a virus had damaged his heart; eventually he would need a heart transplant. Mark was admitted to the hospital in the fall of 2002, and five months later he received the gift of life. Since receiving his life-saving transplant, Mark has met and become close with his donor's family. Life's challenges also take on new meaning for Mark, who feels blessed with a new heart, a new family and a new life. "The bumps in the road of life don't quite seem the same after you've received a new heart." |
| **Kevin Riepl** | Heart Recipient | 38 | Winnetka, CA | Composer | Cedars-Sinai Comprehensive Transplant Center |
| ***His story:*** | In the blink of an eye, Kevin Riepl mysteriously suffered end-stage heart failure. His only hope was a new heart, and nine months later his need for a life-saving transplant was met. It was only six weeks after the heart transplant that doctors discovered the reason for Kevin's heart failure: a rare genetic tumor above his adrenal gland. Kevin is extremely grateful for his new heart, his donor and the donor's family, "I am here today because of my donor family. Not only have they given me a second chance at life, but very well saved the lives of my children and family members at risk of this genetic tumor." |

- MORE -

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Name** | **Relationship to Donation** | **Age** | **Hometown** | **Occupation** | **Sponsored by** |
| **Claudia Sanchez** | Kidney & Pancreas Recipient | 37 | Canoga Park, CA | Dialysis Provider | OneLegacy |
| ***Her story:*** | Claudia Sanchez considers herself fortunate to have inherited diabetes from her parents. "Some people might think I'm crazy when I say this, but this condition has brought me the most amazing experiences," said Claudia. A kidney-pancreas transplant changed not only Claudia's health, but her outlook on life. "After her transplant, she decided to remain working in the dialysis field." I feel a deep and unique connection with my patients," said Claudia. One year after the transplant she ran her first marathon, which before would have been impossible. "When I crossed the finish line, the only thing on my mind was my donor and how thankful I am." |
| **Susan E. Sprague** | Kidney & Pancreas Recipient | 50 | Syracuse, NY | Preschool Teacher | Finger Lakes Donor Recovery Network |
| ***Her story:*** | At age four, Sue Sprague was diagnosed with juvenile diabetes, and by her mid-30s it had taken a toll on her kidneys. Told she would need a kidney transplant, she received her gift of life in 1997 after one year on the waiting list. Of that momentous event fifteen years ago, Sue said, "That is a day I will never forget. I got my life back." Sue appreciates life, is very thankful for her second chance, and calls her donor, 39-year-old soldier Terry Brown, "My donor, my savior, my angel." This year she celebrated her 50th birthday and her 15th transplant anniversary, "All thanks to my hero, Terry." |
| **Denien Vittorio Wilde** | Donor Mother | 45 | Bryan, OH | Adjunct Instructor, Northwest State Community College | American Association of Tissue Banks (AATB) in partnership with Community Tissue Services |
| ***Her story:*** | In June 2008, Denien Wilde’s husband Patrick discovered their two-month old son, Quinn, unresponsive and not breathing. Quinn had sustained severe brain damage, likely from a seizure that caused him to stop breathing. Once it was determined he would not recover, Denien and Patrick made the heartbreaking decision to remove their son from life support and let nature take its course. They also decided to donate his heart valves, helping to save the lives of two infant girls, one Quinn’s age and the other five months old. It is the Wildes’ great hope to continue to honor their son's memory and to provide strength and hope to others by sharing their story. |

# # #