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We want to hear from you! Please contact us if you have ideas for *Weaving Lives Together* newsletter articles, photos or other information that would be helpful to donor families. Contact us by:

- Phone** (877) 612-4287
- E-mail** psymons@rtix.com
- Mail** Paula Symons, Newsletter Editor,  
6502 Odana Road, Madison, WI 53719
- Visit us** www.rtidonorservices.org

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...and support donation at the same time! Donor awareness bracelets are available **free** to interested family members, partners and other friends of donation. The green bracelets, made of silicon, are embossed with the words "Donate Life" on the outside, and "Done Vida"—Spanish for "Donate Life"—on the inside. You may order bracelets—with a **limit of five per donor family**—through the phone, e-mail, regular mail or Web site information provided above. Provide your name and address, in addition to the amount of bracelets you'd like. You'll receive your order within two weeks.



**RTI Donor Services**  
6502 Odana Road  
Madison, Wis. 53719  
(877) 612-4287  
[www.rtidonorservices.org](http://www.rtidonorservices.org)

*Weaving Lives Together* is produced three times a year by RTI Donor Services to provide information on its tissue banks and their activities.

RTI Donor Services is a network of tissue recovery agencies that offers families the option of tissue donation and supports their wishes, while serving as responsible stewards of human donated tissue gifts. The not-for-profit organization provides donation awareness education and support to local communities in Arizona, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Montana, New York and Wisconsin.

During 2004, RTI Donor Services tissue banks offered the tissue donation option to more than 10,000 families.

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# Weaving Lives together

A quarterly newsletter from RTI Donor Services

## Grateful Recipient Feels 'Like a New Person'

**By Gayle Lucas, tissue recipient**

**W**henever I hear of someone receiving a transplant, I'm touched that their quality of life will hopefully be improved, but I am also saddened that someone lost their life. Having that individual live on in someone else is miraculous and powerful.

I am a registered organ and tissue donor, but I have never thought about what it would be like to personally receive a part of someone else. That changed on May 1, 2003, when I was the recipient of donor bones during cervical spinal surgery.

I am an active person who enjoys the outdoors and lives for the water, whether for sea-kayaking, a picnic on the beach, or just taking in the beauty of a sunrise or sunset.

MRIs taken after a 1995 automobile accident showed a narrow spinal canal with bulging discs, as well as cervical nerve root damage. For many years I

suffered and everyday activities became increasingly difficult and frustrating.

After kayaking in September, 2002, I tripped on a rope that was tied across a dock, flew head-first into a hard-rubber boat, and landed in river muck. When a concussion was diagnosed several days later, I was told that I was extremely lucky not to be paralyzed.

Soon I had difficulty walking. A neurosurgeon who reviewed my MRIs said the disc spaces were very narrow and recommended surgery. After considerable research, I opted for surgery using donor bone instead of my own bone, feeling that this option would eliminate a second surgical site, which may cause extra pain and infection, and the operative and recovery times would be decreased.

During my spinal surgery, two discs were removed, bone spurs cleaned out, donor bone inserted, and a titanium plate implanted to stabilize my spine. I endured months of intense

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*Gayle Lucas is enjoying her active outdoor life—which includes kayaking—after spinal surgery using donated tissues from three generous donors.*

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physical therapy. At my nine-month post-op check-up, X-rays showed the bone grafts were 100 percent fused. This was awesome news and cause for celebration.

I started thinking about my surgery, healing process, and new bones. I felt overwhelming grief for the donor family who had to have strength and courage to make an incredibly hard decision. I am eternally grateful for their unselfish act and this wonderful gift of love. The life of their loved one will be carried on through me with dignity and I hope to repay them by living a full and meaningful life.

I had so many questions about my donor. I didn't know who he was, where he was from, the circumstances leading to his death, what his life was like, his favorite things, his likes and dislikes. Was he active, did he love animals, did he love the water?

I now wanted and needed to express my appreciation to the donor family. Through

Regeneration Technologies Inc., I learned that my search for one donor family would actually be for three donor families. One donor was a 68-year-old man from Rockford, Ill. The other two were also males, another 68-year-old and a 48-year-old.

My "all-male donor team" helped make my spinal surgery a success. There is not a day that goes by without me thinking about my donors. For me, this is still quite an emotional experience.

The quality of my life has dramatically improved and I feel like a new person. Five months post-op, I was able to resume kayaking. Today, I am pain-free and active. I still kayak, spend a lot of time at the fitness center, do volunteer work, and am fostering two military cats while their owner is deployed to Iraq. I am also a blood donor.

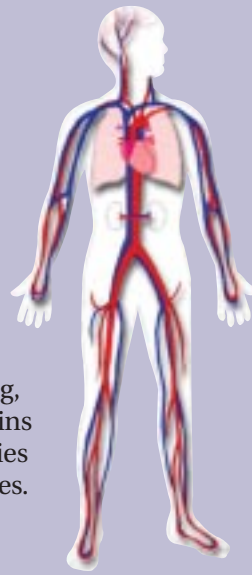
With love and prayers to my all-male donor team. ❤️

## Do you know? The Facts About Veins

- If all the body's blood vessels were stretched end to end—including the 40 billion microscopic capillary veins—the distance would amount to close to 100,000 miles.
- Seven million Americans suffer from coronary heart disease, caused by narrowing of the coronary arteries that feed the heart.
- Another 25,000 Americans suffer from venous insufficiency, a condition that inhibits the return of blood from the leg to the heart.
- Donated femoral veins, located in the upper leg, are used to replace defective blood vessels in patients suffering from chronic venous insufficiency. Dialysis patients also benefit from donated femoral veins, which

- improve access for the dialysis procedure, and reduce infection.
- Located in the lower leg, donated saphenous veins replace damaged arteries in heart bypass surgeries. They are also used in peripheral vascular disease procedures to help avoid the need for amputation.

Sources: Medical College of Wisconsin, The Mad Science Group, CryoLife, Inc.



## Arizona Woman to Ride Rose Parade Float in Honor of Daughter

No one had to ask Mary Ann Venturelli if she wanted to donate her 21-year-old daughter's tissue. "I asked the nurse first before she asked me," Mary Ann remembers. "There was no hesitation."

Mary Ann had discussed the subject of donation with her daughter Trina, an energetic young woman who loved animals—especially her horses Molly and Willie—and was well known in the community of Miami, Ariz., where the family had lived for 27 years.

It was a decision Mary Ann didn't think she and her husband Gary would ever have to make.

In October of 2004, Trina was busy in her role as Miss Gila County Championship Rodeo. Trina was carrying the American flag during opening ceremonies at the Gila County Fairgrounds, when she was suddenly thrown from her horse and died from her injuries.

Trina's family donated her bone, skin, connective tissues, heart valves and veins, in addition to tissues for research. Trina's donation resulted in 50 tissues to be used in procedures that repair fractures, improve circulation, correct bone abnormalities, and treat tendon injuries, as well as ease spinal pain through cervical and lumbar surgeries.

Mary Ann says Trina's donation is an extension of her daughter's love of helping others. "We're proud that she's still helping people. She always wanted to help people and she still is."

Mary Ann will have an opportunity to honor her daughter at the 2006 Rose Parade in Pasadena, Calif., where she will be one of 22 people from across the country—and the only one from Arizona—riding a special float highlighting the importance of organ and tissue donation. Her participation is being sponsored by Regeneration Technologies, Inc., which is among 50 national associations supporting the float project.

An Emergency Medical Technician, Trina volunteered with the Gila County Search and Rescue organization. Because she worked as an obstetrics technician at Cobre Valley Community Hospital in Globe, her death had an impact on the hospital's staff members.

"They took it hard," says Mary Ann. Trina had also volunteered with the March of Dimes and Habitat for Humanity.

The family's donation experience has affected Mary Ann's views and her involvement in donation. She has committed to being a donor and has discussed her decision with her husband, mother and 31-year-old son Gary, who works as a paramedic for the City of Chicago.

In addition, last July Mary Ann attended the National Donor Recognition Ceremony and Workshop, a biennial event held in odd numbered years in Washington D.C. to honor Americans who have donated organs, tissues, or bone marrow to improve the lives of others.

She's looking forward to the float rider experience. "I've always like to watch the parade," she says. "That was my thing—to get up early and turn on the television to watch it." ❤️



Mary Ann Venturelli

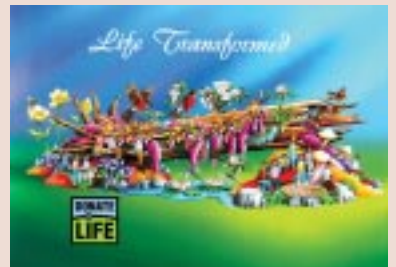


### Float Theme: 'Life Transformed'

The 2006 Donate Life Rose Parade float, themed "Life Transformed," will mark the third appearance of the float designed to raise awareness of the importance of organ and tissue donation.

The float augments the overall parade theme, "It's Magical." The 117th Rose Parade will take place on Monday, Jan. 2, 2006, at 8 a.m. Pacific Standard Time.

For more information about the Donate Life Rose Parade Float, visit the official float Web site at [www.onelegacy.org/prod/components/rose2006](http://www.onelegacy.org/prod/components/rose2006).



## Donation Provides Comfort to Wisconsin Family

**B**araboo, Wis. residents Emmett and Lorraine Brown were well aware of the importance of organ donation. “We had talked about it,” Lorraine remembers.

When 70-year-old Emmett died three years ago after suffering from heart problems and diabetes, Lorraine was surprised when a St. Clare Hospital staff member approached her about donating tissue.

Although it was the first she had ever heard of tissue donation, she readily agreed.

According to RTI Donor Services in Madison, Wis., tissue—bone, skin, heart valves, veins, ligaments and tendons—helps save and enhance lives through more than 1 million transplant procedures performed every year in the United States. As a result of Emmett Brown’s bone donation, 34 implants were created for use in fracture and spinal defect repair. Transplant recipients so far include 27 people between the ages of 33 and 75, residing in 15 states.

And Lorraine feels good about her husband’s gift. “It’s very comforting to know that even after death, we can help so many families.”

Well-known in the community, Emmett served as president of Baraboo Federal Savings



Emmett Brown

& Loan—now Amcore Bank—before he retired in 1988. Lorraine says he was a passionate outdoorsman, involved in hunting, fishing and golfing, and turned his attention to league bowling in the winter. Even after the loss of a leg, he was able with the aid of a prosthetic to continue those activities, but “one by one, he had to give them up,” she says.

The comfort Lorraine found in tissue donation expanded with the opportunity to honor her husband’s gift. She participated in RTI Donor Services’ Memorial Donor Family Quilt Program, crafting a quilt square in memory of Emmett that was placed in a colorful quilt with 21 other donors. “I’m a quilter, too, so I was interested in being part of it,” she notes, adding that she has since borrowed the quilt to display at her grandchild’s graduation party.

Lorraine also wants to become a donor, and has told her children—Nancy Berger of Wisconsin Dells and Gary Brown of Pewaukee—of her intentions. She has also shared tissue donation information with family and friends.

Those interested in making the commitment to donation, should indicate their wishes on driver’s licenses, state identification cards or Uniform Donor Cards and carry these documents at all times. They should also inform family members so donation decisions are understood and supported. 💖

### Give Your Loved One a Special Place on Tree of Honor

RTI Donor Services has created a wall mural—depicting a special Tree of Honor—to recognize the generous faces of tissue donation.

Donor families in Wisconsin, Illinois and Michigan are invited to submit photos of their loved ones to be placed in frames and positioned in the Tree of Honor’s branches. The mural is located at RTI Donor Services’ office in Madison, Wis.

Photos can be accepted at any time for this on-going memorial to those who donated bone, skin, heart valves, veins and connective tissues to save and enhance the lives of others. Photos sent in regular mail to RTI Donor Services, 6502 Odana Road, Madison, WI 53719, should be wallet-sized with the donor’s name on the back. Electronic images should be sent to: psymons@rtix.com. Photo authorization forms will be sent to all Tree of Honor participants giving RTI Donor Services permission to use donor photos in this project.

Photos cannot be returned. For further information, contact (877) 612-4287 to leave a message or call the Donor Services office at (608) 231-9050.



Madison, Wis. muralist Laurie Lundgren creates the RTI Donor Services “Tree of Honor,” commemorating tissue donors from Wisconsin, Illinois and Michigan.

## Sisters Remember Their Creative Brother—and Tissue Donor

**W**hen Brooklyn, N.Y. resident John Kern died in November of 2002, his sisters made a decision they knew he would have wanted—to donate his tissues to save and enhance the lives of others.

“He had mentioned it to me many years ago,” says Linda Neely who, along with her sister Beverly Bushart, consented to the donation. “We both feel very happy that some good could come out of John’s suffering and death.”

According to Linda, John suffered from a mysterious neurological disease that gradually ravaged his system until he was confined to a ventilator. “He couldn’t speak, his dominant hand was debilitated by a stroke so he couldn’t write, and yet his mind was working full tilt,” she remembers. “He had so many thoughts to share, which he did by pointing to letters in the alphabet with his good hand to slowly spell out words.”

John’s fragile state was in stark contrast to his former active life. An interior designer who loved New York City, he’s described by his sisters as an arts aficionado with a keen interest in classical music, fine art, dance and opera. He was also a gourmet cook who planned parties and gala events for family and friends.

Beverly, whose husband was a donor 10 years ago, says it was important to honor John’s life. So when she received information about RTI Donor Services’ Memorial Donor Family Quilt Program, she got together with Linda to create a square that would illustrate his creative bent.

“It was a very nice idea,” says Beverly. “It really appealed to us and it was fun to do.” Beverly appliquéd John’s initials—JDK—onto a fabric square using material with musical notes, food and wine patterns. Linda wrote a description of the square, noting how the design corresponded with John’s interests and talents.

“We wanted some of his loves and talents to be commemorated in a permanent form,” says Linda. “The quilt seemed just the ticket. We very much appreciated the opportunity to be able to commemorate our dear brother in this way.”

They also believe John’s tissue donation was the ultimate memorial. “It’s always good to help someone else out,” says Beverly. “It was what he would have wanted.” 💖



## Memorial Quilt Honors New York Donors

**T**he first quilt designed to honor New York tissue donors has been created in memory of eight special people.

Quilt squares were created by donor families and submitted to RTI Donor Services in Staten Island, N.Y. The quilt’s creator is Sue Vollbrecht, a Wisconsin quilt designer who used the New York skyline as the memorial’s focal point.

Donors with a special place of honor on the quilt are: David Alleyne, Vincent Badalamenti, John Douglas Kern, Chris Martinez, Michael Moore, Rosa Perez, Nancy Quick and Nat Zeman.

The quilt will be used to help raise awareness of the importance of tissue donation, and is available for display in hospitals and other facilities. Families of the eight donors depicted in the quilt may also borrow the quilt for family and community events.

Interested New York donor families may receive detailed information on the quilt project by calling the Donor Services office at (718) 273-6806 or toll-free (877) 612-4287. 💖



## Tissue Donor Lives On

**M**y husband, Dwayne Shepro, was a very hard-working man who loved working at Mercury Marine in Fond du Lac, Wis. as a carpenter. He was working overtime on Dec. 4, 2004, when he was killed on the job.

I was married to Wayne for just a little over four years, but how he stole my heart! When he first started to court me, my son told him that I loved fresh-cut flowers, especially roses. Every Friday night, I would get either a dozen roses or a big beautiful bouquet of some sort of flowers. I tended bar at a local supper club and people would come in on Friday nights just to see my beautiful flowers!

He was a rugged, clean-cut outdoors, sportsman-type of man. He would always wear his flannel shirts and still be as handsome as anyone could get.

He loved all outdoor sports. After we became a couple, we did everything together for sports of every season. He taught me sturgeon spearing, which I totally fell in love with. He built me my own ice shack, in which I speared a sturgeon. He was so proud of me and happy for me. That was how my "schweetie" was.



Wayne Shepro

He taught me how to walleye and perch fish out of our boat. This was really great because we did it together, the same for deer hunting. He loved to share his sports with me and I loved to be there with him and be a part of it.

His Packers—well, he never missed a game. No matter how bad the game got at times, he still was a loyal fan. He especially loved to go to the games with my brother and have a good time. Very seldom you ever saw him without a smile on his face. He was so well liked by everyone.

I pray that whoever received any donation from Wayne continues to enjoy life and love it as much as he did. I feel in my heart by Wayne being a donor, he is still living on with someone else. It was a choice that I know was the right one. I pray for all the people who lose loved ones without warning, that even through their sorrow they can still come to this same decision. I know Wayne's soul is in heaven and still somewhere out there, he has helped save someone.

I miss him dearly, but I look up at the moon and see his face. I look up at the stars shining and see him smiling down on me. I feel the wind blow and know these are my hugs and kisses. He is always with me, my family, grandchildren, daughters, sons, brothers, brothers-in-law, sister and sisters-in-law. He is someone who will live on forever in our hearts.

—LuAnn Shepro,  
Eldorado, Wis.

## 84-Year-Old Donor Remembered

**J**ohn Bregar was born on a farm in Colorado. He entered the Navy and served during World War II for four years in the South Pacific. We were married in 1944 during the war. We have three great children—a girl and two boys.

John was a tool and die maker. He had designed parts for the Apollo moon cars and the Voyager space probe. He was a great husband and father who was very proud of his family.

John was healthy most of his life. He lived to be 84 years old and we were married for 59 years. My children and I miss him and we have wonderful memories of him.

—Pauleen Bregar, wife  
Powder Springs, Ga.



John Bregar

## Give Thanks. Give Life. Program Brings Donation Home for Holidays

**G**ive Thanks. Give Life. is the name and theme of a national program intended to bring the life-saving issue of organ and tissue donation into the holiday season—the season of giving.

"More than any other day of the year, the final two months of the year is a time when we gather with our families to count our blessings, and it presents an ideal occasion for raising the importance of organ and tissue donation," said Beverly Bliss, Vice President of RTI Donor Services. "This campaign is designed to encourage Americans to talk to their loved ones about donation. Unfortunately, it is a discussion that all too often never takes place."

Despite the fact that there were more than 25,000 organ transplants and nearly 1 million cornea and tissue transplants last year, thousands of waiting patients die annually

because people do not take the necessary steps to ensure that their wishes to donate are carried out. And because each donor can save or enhance the lives of up to 50 people, the Give Thanks. Give Life program is hoping to increase the number of available organs and tissue.

People are encouraged to first visit [www.donatelife.net](http://www.donatelife.net), where they can find facts and figures about organ and tissue donation, including the steps necessary for committing to donation in each state.

"I hope Americans will literally take this invitation to heart," said Bliss. "On a day of national thanksgiving, what better way to celebrate life than by giving others a second chance to live? Just as your conversation could save someone else's life, someone else's conversation could someday save yours."



## Coalition Presents Annual 'Courage Award'

**T**he Coalition on Donation recently presented the 2005 James S. Wolf, MD Courage Award to Nancy and Katherine Heigl.

Honorary presenter comedian/actor—and kidney recipient—George Lopez and his wife Anne were on hand to give the award to Nancy Heigl, a donor mom who lost her son in a car accident in 1986, and her daughter Katherine, who stars in the ABC series, "Grey's Anatomy."

Both Nancy and Katherine have been tireless supporters and promoters of organ, tissue and eye donation for many years and have spent countless hours speaking with groups and doing interviews to support the cause.

The Heigls are the seventh recipients of the Courage Award. It is named and presented in honor of the Coalition on Donation founder, a retired transplant surgeon as well as heart recipient. The award is

presented annually to an individual from outside the donation and transplantation community who, through personal commitment and courage, has made a national impact in increasing donation.



Comedian and actor George Lopez, left, and his wife Anne, center, present the 2005 James S. Wolf, MD Courage Award to Katherine Heigl, "Grey's Anatomy" star and donor sister.