

**Do you have comments or suggestions?**

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

**If you would like to be removed from the RTI Donor Services mailing list, please contact us by phone, e-mail, regular mail, or through the Web site, and provide your name and address.**

**Put Your Donation Support on Display...**

...with a special frame magnet! This 3<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> x 3-inch frame includes an extra punch-out Donate Life magnet. You may order picture frame magnets—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 items 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, Michigan, New York and Wisconsin.

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# Weaving Lives together

A newsletter from RTI Donor Services

## During National Donate Life Month: Renew Life Through Donation

This is a season of renewal. In nature, we see songbirds returning and trees and flowers awakening from winter's slumber. Many of the world's great faiths are celebrating spiritual rebirth and rededication.



As Vice President of RTI Donor Services, I share in the renewal of life and hope. While renewal occurs in many ways, nowhere is it more dramatic than in organ and tissue transplantation. Behind every transplant is a human story that begins with suffering and anxiety and ends in hope and joy. Even more compelling is that the catalyst for this renewal is a gift from another human being. It is an unbroken connection from life to life.

Transplantation is a very successful form of treatment for many medical conditions. Survival rates continue to increase, along with the quality of life of transplant recipients. You may see stories

in the news about professional athletes who have returned to their sport, or elected officials who have continued their service, or entertainers who have remained in the spotlight thanks to transplantation. But for each one of these individuals, there are thousands more men, women and children who have returned to their family, their school, their career and their community. Thanks to the selfless act of organ or tissue donation, they are able to resume all of the joys and pleasures of life that we often take for granted.

In this season of renewal, please consider the difference you can make in the lives of others through organ and tissue donation. The month of April is recognized as National Donate Life Month. Each year, we use this federally designated month to honor those who have saved and enhanced lives through donation, and to call attention to the needs of

*continued on page 2*



**Rain Fails to Dampen Donation Spirit**

*Rain dampened the Tournament of Roses Parade for the first time in 50 years, but not the spirits of 23 riders on "Life Transformed", the 2006 Donate Life Rose Parade Float. Among the riders was Mary Ann Venturelli of Miami, Ariz., sponsored by RTI Donor Services. For more on the parade, see Page 3.*

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those who still await a new opportunity to live, and share, and hope.

Please make a commitment to be a donor, and share that decision with your loved ones. If you have questions or need additional information, RTI Donor Services would be happy to assist you. Call your nearest division office:

- Wisconsin, Illinois and Michigan—(608) 231-9050

- Arizona—(602) 393-0079
- Georgia—(678) 279-4002
- New York—(718) 273-6806

You may also access the RTI Donor Services Web site at [www.rtidonorservices.org](http://www.rtidonorservices.org).

Through donation, we can all share in the joy of renewal. ❤️

—**Beverly Bliss,**  
Vice President of RTI Donor Services

## You're Invited to Share Your Story!

**D**o you have a story you'd like to share about your tissue donation experience with your special loved one? If so, we'd like to include it in an upcoming issue of *Weaving Lives Together*.

You may submit a story of no more than 400 words by:

- Sending it via e-mail to [psymons@rtix.com](mailto:psymons@rtix.com);

- Sending it via regular mail to Paula Symons, RTI Donor Services, 6502 Odana Road, Madison, Wis. 53719. Electronic or regular photos to accompany your story are welcome.

If you have questions or would like assistance in submitting a story, please call Paula Symons at (608) 231-9050, Ext. 328, or leave a message at (877) 612-4287. ❤️

## Do you know? The Facts About Heart Valves



- Heart valves are life-saving tissues that may be used from hearts that are unsuitable for transplantation.
- More than half of donated heart valves are transplanted into children under the age of 15.
- More than 5,000 heart valves are transplanted each year in the United States.
- Donated valves are the best options for repair. They are more resistant to infection and avoid the need for anti-rejection and anti-coagulant drugs.

- Heart valves are used to repair congenital heart defects in children and to correct acquired and congenital heart valve disease in adults.
- Heart valve donors are males and females from newborn to 55 years old.
- Heart valves may be stored for as long as five years after donation.

Sources: *CryoLife Inc., LifeLink Foundation, Gift of Life Donor Program*

## Donor Mom Tells Story of Special Son

**M**y name is Kathy and I'd like to share a very special story about my only son Stephen.

Stephen has taken me on quite a journey over his 19 years of life. And that journey still goes on today. The new journey is the "gift of life", organ and tissue donation.

Stephen was the perfect baby boy with the most beautiful blue eyes and big dimples. He was a normal teenager who loved to have fun and make people laugh. Stephen always helped his fellow classmates at school by lending an ear so they would not feel so alone. He was friends with everyone. He was in every sport at one time or another. He was a member of his homecoming and junior prom court. When Stephen was 16, he joined the local fire department. His dream was to be a fireman on a city fire department someday. He loved going into a burning building and helping people.

On February 14, 2004, the phone rang. It was Stephen's boss with the call that all parents wish they would never receive. Stephen was unloading platforms, when the wind blew the remaining platforms on top of him, knocking him to the ground and into a bucket of metal brackets. One of the brackets went into his brain. Because of the accident, Stephen was pronounced brain dead three days later.

We learned about organ and tissue donation and how important it is to other families. I also learned that at that time, over 80,000 people were on the waiting list and die every day because not enough organs are available.

At first, I thought we would save two lives. But because Stephen was brain dead and in

great health, he would save five lives with his main organs. Then two different people would receive his eyes. There were also 48 bone grafts, eight ligaments, connective tissues and skin to help even more people. Stephen was able to help a total of 72 people.

I was overwhelmed. I had no idea we would impact so many peoples' lives. How can one person make such a big difference?

I was very surprised to learn how many people do not donate. Lives are so important, that we need to talk about organ and tissue donation. If I had not donated Stephen's organs, five people would have died, not to mention all the other people whose quality of life improved.

When I decided to donate Stephen's organs and tissues, I did not know if he would have wanted to be a donor. I made the decision based on the fact that I wanted to make Stephen's dream come true, which was to save people's lives and to make a difference in the world. It was my last gift to him, the last thing I could do for him. It was not until six days later, when I unpacked his work clothes, that I found his driver's license, which was signed and included the donor dot.

Stephen wanted to help people. He would not want to turn his back on them. That is why organ and tissue donation is the only course of action that made any sense. By donating his organs and tissues, something good came out of Stephen's death.

I would like to leave you with one thought. One person will make a difference. Stephen made a difference and you can, too. ❤️

—**Kathy Rutherford-Reynolds**  
Plainfield, Wis.



Stephen Rutherford-Reynolds

### Make the Donation Commitment

Here's how to ensure that your donation decision is carried out in the following states:

**Wisconsin**—Indicate your wishes on your driver's license, state identification card or Uniform Donor Card and carry it with you at all times.

**Illinois**—Sign up online in the Illinois Organ/Tissue Donor Registry at [www.ilsos.gov/organdonorregister/](http://www.ilsos.gov/organdonorregister/). You may also note your wishes on your driver's license or state identification card.

**Michigan**—Sign up online at [www.giftoflifemichigan.org](http://www.giftoflifemichigan.org) or sign up on the Gift of Life Organ, Tissue and Eye Donor Registry at a Secretary of State branch office when applying for or renewing a driver's license.

Remember, it's important to tell your family members that you have decided to become a donor so they will understand and support your decision.

## New York Donor Remembered as 'The Best'

**T**o his mother and other family members, Christopher Martinez was “the best.” A bus driver in Staten Island, N.Y., his life was cut short by a motor vehicle accident on Jan. 1, 2004.

His mother Carole Gordon says she wasn't aware Christopher's donation wishes were designated on his driver's license, but consented because “I'm sure that's what he would have wanted.”

The experience has shaken their family, but has put the importance of donation in the forefront. Carole and other family members have indicated their wishes on their driver's licenses and discussed their decisions with each other.

### Donor's Brother Shares Special Memories

Chris was a father, a brother, a son, and so much more to everyone in his family. He was a musician, a fisherman, and a cook. Knowing him and being a part of his life was special for friends and family alike.

His life was cut short at age 38 early on New Year's Day 2004 when he was in a car accident. He designated himself as a donor by specifying it on the back of his driver's license. I'm glad my brother was able to help someone else in need.

His life was centered around his kids, Jessica and Christopher. They made everything worthwhile for him. He was involved in every aspect of their lives. From his daughter's swimming lessons to his son's guitar lessons, he was there to provide all the enrichment he could. He always encouraged them to get involved in whatever interested them, and he was there to cheer them on. He was proud of his kids, and it showed.

He put his all into everything he did, from saving up his paper route money to buy his first drum set at 13, to staying on the bluefish boat to get the biggest catch of the day even though it made him sick; from making the best demo tape for the band, to shopping for months to find the best guitar he could get. He wasn't satisfied with second-best. Even on his softball team, only a home run with his favorite bat would do.

Busting chops was one of his favorite past-times. He always found a way to get to you, including throwing dirt on my newly waxed car, taking his sister-in-law's coupons out of her Sunday paper, and letting me take a motor bike full-speed down my uncle's driveway and wrecking my mother's nerves.

One of the reasons he took the coupons was to make sure he got the best prices in the supermarket. Going to the supermarket with him was not fun. He looked up and down every aisle, and took a lot of time. His daughter refused to go with him, but we all anxiously awaited the meals he cooked. Like I said before, he put his all into everything he did, and cooking was no different. He loved to complain about mom's traditional pasta and sauce Sunday dinners, but he was always there to eat them, and even make the best garlic and cheese bread the family will ever have to go along with it.

Chris created so many memories that will be a part of our every family member's life forever. This is especially true when it comes to his music. He's made several tapes with his band, and we can all remember going to one of his shows. He even found a way to get mom involved, and after some coaxing, she even went to see one of his shows featuring his band playing loud rock music. She wasn't exactly thrilled, but she was very proud, and I'm glad he got to know that. He wouldn't miss going to a show, either, and his face showed it in a picture one of his friends took. They got all the way to the show and forgot the tickets.

The entire family enjoyed his company, and although we have to learn to live without him now, we all know that we'll see him on the other side. Until then, we have so many happy, good, and funny memories to get us through all the times we miss him. 💖

**Anthony Gordon, brother**



Christopher Martinez

## Donation 'Might Be Some Way to Help Other People'

**W**hen Elaine Moore lost her 28-year-old son Clifton to suicide in July of last year, she was angry when she received a call so soon afterward with a request to donate his tissues. “My first impulse when they called was, ‘How dare you?’” she remembers. “I told them to call back.”

Elaine then discussed the option with her daughters and decided donation “might be some way to help other people so Cliff's death would not be in vain.”

It was a decision she felt complemented her son's personality.

Elaine describes Cliff as jovial. “He had that infectious laugh. You could be angry at him until he started laughing at you.” Helpful and considerate, he often served as chauffeur for his mother and other relatives. “Usually people that young wouldn't bother with people our age,” she says.

Elaine and her husband James are still trying to go through his belongings, but “it's very, very hard.”

Although Cliff never discussed donation with his family, Elaine says they had talked about his desire to be cremated, a wish that was fulfilled after his death. And she is comfortable that Cliff would have approved of donation. “If I had asked him if he wanted to be a donor, he would have said ‘Yes.’”

Elaine says she was aware of tissue donation—and how donation may not be fully supported by the African American community—but didn't realize how important it was until she made the decision. Her donation experience has increased her interest in sharing the benefits of donation with others.

“I would like to educate people in general, not just African-Americans,” she notes. “People need to know the importance of sitting down with family and talking about it.”

Retired after 30 years of teaching learning disabled children, Elaine draws support from her husband, four daughters, Cliff's two children and members of her faith community, St. Anthony's Catholic Church in Atlanta.

This support and the decision to donate, she says, have given her strength.

Donation “may not be right for everybody, but it was for us. We don't regret it one bit.” 💖



Clifton Howard Moore

### Making the Donation Decision in Georgia

Indicate your wishes when you apply for or renew your driver's license or state identification card. You may also become part of the Georgia Organ Donor Registry by signing and returning a donor card to the Georgia Coalition on Donation. In addition, share your wishes with your family members so they will understand and support your decision.

### Document Your Donation Decision

Sign up online in the New York State Organ and Tissue Donor Registry at [www.health.state.ny.us/nysdoh/donor/index.htm](http://www.health.state.ny.us/nysdoh/donor/index.htm) or add your name to the registry at the Department of Motor Vehicles when applying for or renewing a driver's license or non-driver identification. Also, make sure you tell your family about your decision.

## Arizona Donor Mom Treasures Rose Parade Experience

**M**ary Ann Venturelli didn't allow a record-shattering downpour to diminish a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to help tell the world about the importance of donation.

Wearing five layers of clothing, including a hooded rain slicker, Mary Ann was one of 23 riders on the 2006 Donate Life Rose Parade Float, themed "Life Transformed." Her participation was sponsored by RTI Donor Services.

Although hit by rain for the first time in 50 years, the Tournament of Roses Parade was watched by more than 200,000 people braving the elements along Colorado Boulevard in Pasadena. Another 40 million U.S. television viewers and millions more in 150 countries got a chance to see the float which depicted a fallen tree trunk with new life—birds, butterflies and flowers—springing from the tree's shelter.


The wet conditions didn't dampen Mary Ann's enthusiasm. "I don't think people realize the magnitude of this event," she says. "Being there was just unbelievable."

A Miami, Ariz. resident, Mary Ann was a faithful Rose Parade television viewer back home, and never thought much about all the work involved in preparing a float for the world's third most-watched entertainment event. Nothing prepared her for the first time she walked into the huge Pasadena warehouse where some of the floats were being decorated. "It was a beehive of activity," she remembers, with dozens of volunteers armed with float decorating materials that ranged from flowers to smashed rice and coffee grounds.

Mary Ann not only had an opportunity to help decorate the Donate Life Float and the Kodak-sponsored float, but also get to know the other riders and their families. "It was kind of healing to be with these other people and recipients to see how their lives were impacted."

It also brought back memories of Mary Ann's daughter, 21-year-old Trina, who died after being thrown from her horse during a rodeo event in Arizona. The family donated her bone, skin, heart valves and veins, in addition to tissues for research.

Mary Ann says Trina—an active volunteer with the March of Dimes and Habitat for Humanity—loved helping people and her tissue donation was a natural extension of her caring nature.

RTI Donor Services plans to help inspire the world to donate life by continuing its role in 2007 as one of the original Donate Life Float sponsors. 



*Holding a photo of her daughter Trina, Mary Ann Venturelli waves to the crowd during a rain-soaked Rose Parade ride on the Donate Life Float, sponsored to raise donation awareness.*

### Document Your Decision

Your donation decision can be documented by signing up online in the Arizona Donor Registry, [www.AZDonorRegistry.org](http://www.AZDonorRegistry.org). You should also discuss your decision with your family.

## Visit RTI Donor Services Web Site

**H**ave you recently checked out the RTI Donor Services Web site? A wealth of information is waiting for you on tissue donation and services for families, donation partners and communities. Just click on: [www.rtidonorservices.org](http://www.rtidonorservices.org)

Here are a few of the Web site's special features:

- **Screen saver** you may download from the home page to show your support for donation.
- **All RTI Donor Services' Memorial Donor Family Quilts.** You'll be able to click on specific quilt squares for close-up views and to read descriptions submitted by donor families. From the home page, click on *Family Services*, then *Memorial Donor Quilt*.
- **Electronic versions of the *Weaving Lives Together* newsletter.** From the home page, click on *About Us*, then *Agency Locations*, then the appropriate agency location. Electronic versions of the RTI Donor Services annual reports are also in this section.

- **Donor education information**, including:
  - Facts on tissue donation;
  - How tissue donation helps others;
  - Frequently asked questions on tissue donation;
  - Instructions on how individuals can share their donation decisions with their families;
  - Information on accessing other donation-related resources.



## In Memory of Your Loved One

**R**TI Donor Services is privileged to provide your family with tissue donation options, as well as information on the gift of life. While RTI Donor Services is honored that families are interested in making a monetary contribution to the organization, these donations cannot be accepted. Please consider the following list of donation-related organizations that are structured to receive monetary gifts:

**National Donor Family Council**  
(A division of the National Kidney Foundation)  
*Provides resources and programs for donor families*  
30 E. 33<sup>rd</sup> St.  
New York, NY 10016  
(800) 622-9010  
[www.kidney.org](http://www.kidney.org)

**National Coalition on Donation**  
*Alliance of donation-related organizations that inspire people to donate life*  
700 N. 4<sup>th</sup> St.

Richmond, VA 23219  
(804) 782-4920  
[www.shareyourlife.org](http://www.shareyourlife.org)

**James Redford Institute for Transplant Awareness**  
*Provides donation education and outreach through films and the World Wide Web*  
10573 W. Pico Blvd. #214  
Los Angeles, CA 90064-2348  
(310) 559-6325  
[www.jrifilms.org](http://www.jrifilms.org)

**Transplant Recipients International Organization (TRIO)**  
*Works to improve quality of life for transplant candidates, recipients, donors and families*  
2100 M St. NW #170-353  
Washington, D.C. 20037-1233  
(800) TRIO-386  
[www.trioweb.org](http://www.trioweb.org)