

For immediate release

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Organ/tissue donation advocates honored for outstanding efforts

Elmhurst, Ill. (August 16, 2004) – In Illinois, more than 4,500 people are waiting for lifesaving organ transplants. More than 320 people in Illinois died last year while waiting for transplants.

Five Illinoisans have been honored for their volunteerism to encourage people to pay attention to these facts and do something about it.

Gift of Hope Organ & Tissue Donor Network recognized the five with its fourth annual “Echo of Life” awards Aug. 7 in Chicago. They were awarded for outstanding achievements in creating programs in their communities urging people to decide to become donors and tell their families about that decision. Those honored were:

- Jim and Luanna Fuchs of Metamora;
- John Lulewicz of Crete;
- Ernesto Pedroza of Oak Lawn, for his work on behalf of the Gift of Hope Hispanic Task Force, and
- Renee Tate of Calumet City, for her efforts with the Gift of Hope African-American Task Force.

“These volunteers have set exceptional leadership examples in their communities by developing programs, supporting other volunteers and families, and leading the way in speaking out for the critical need for donation,” said Gift of Hope President/CEO Jarold A. Anderson.

The five, along with more than 600 other Gift of Hope volunteers, have helped to significantly increase the number of donation education programs taking place in Illinois and northwest Indiana schools, businesses and communities. These programs, in turn, help educate the public about donation and increase donation rates.

Gift of Hope reports 2004 donation rates are on track to exceed those of 2003, a record year that saw the most donations and transplants ever in a single year in Illinois and northwest Indiana.

The Fuchs made the selfless decision to donate their 8-year-old son Robert's organs and tissues after he died in 1997. To honor Robert's memory and his love of dirt-track racing, James and Luanna built a race car that calls attention to organ and tissue donation while competing in local stock car races. The Fuchs and their #7 race team combined efforts with Gift of Hope and devoted a tremendous amount of hours to promoting donation awareness through races, parades and community events throughout Illinois.

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The Fuchs family travels across the state, attracting local media attention and reaching hundreds of local race car fans. By the end of this year, they will have promoted the race car's donation message at more than 60 events.

Lulewicz donated his wife Barbara's organs and tissues after she passed away in 1997, and he has since worked tirelessly to promote donation awareness. He speaks to high school students and business personnel through the Illinois Coalition on Donation's high school education program and the National Kidney Foundation of Illinois' Workplace Initiative program. Lulewicz is also a team leader for Gift of Hope's south suburban Chicago volunteer group and a member of Gift of Hope's Donor Family Advisory Council.

Lulewicz has been Team Illinois' Donor Family Liaison for the U.S. Transplant Games since 2000, and serves on the Games' planning committee. As Donor Family Liaison, he assisted Illinois donor families who wished to take part in Games workshops and special events for families. The Olympic-style athletic competition for transplant recipients celebrates life and illustrates that transplantation works.

After watching a friend save a family member's life through a living donation, Pedroza has taken on a grass-roots effort to enlighten his community about donation. He educates his friends and clients—as well as his peers at local boxing events—about donation by handing out brochures and asking them the most important question, “are you an organ and tissue donor?”

A member of Gift of Hope's Hispanic Task Force, Pedroza is also developing employee donation awareness programs for local businesses. Recently, he helped the “Ayudame a Vivir” campaign raise funds for a woman who needs a transplant, but does not have insurance.

As administrative assistant to the director at Renal Care Group in South Holland, Tate's daily interaction with kidney dialysis patients who desperately await transplants fuels her desire to educate others about the lack of available organs for transplant. She is a member of Gift of Hope's African-American Task Force (AATF), South Suburban Chapter, and assists the chapter leader with educational events and administrative tasks.

Tate coordinates numerous community outreach activities, such as church health fairs and South Suburban Library book fairs, and offers donation education programs for the dialysis patients and their families at her dialysis center. She also actively recruits volunteers for Gift of Hope and the AATF. Gift of Hope's Volunteer Bureau, African-American Task Force and Hispanic Task Force consist of more than 600 families of organ and tissue donors, transplant recipients, waiting list patients, healthcare professionals and others with a special interest in donation and transplantation advocacy.

Gift of Hope Organ & Tissue Network is the federally designated not-for-profit organ procurement organization (OPO) dedicated to coordinating organ and tissue donation in the northern three-quarters of Illinois and northwest Indiana. Since its inception in 1986, the OPO has coordinated donations that have saved the lives of more than 10,000 organ transplant recipients, and improved the lives of hundreds of thousands of tissue transplant recipients. Its main office is located in Elmhurst with satellite offices in Springfield, Rockford, Peoria, Champaign and Bloomington-Normal.

Everyone is urged to get the facts about donation, make the decision to become a donor and discuss the decision with family members. Organizations and employers are urged to provide donation awareness programs for employees, customers and community members. For more information, call 888/307-DON8