

Contact: Kim McCullough, Public Relations  
630/758-2736 (direct)  
kmccullough@giftofhope.org

630/758-2600  
www.giftofhope.org

## **2006 sees record number of organs, tissues donated in Illinois and northwest Indiana**

ELMHURST, Ill. (April 24, 2007)—The number of organs and tissues donated in Illinois and northwest Indiana reached an all-time high in 2006, saving the lives of more than 900 people in need of organ transplants.

Gift of Hope Organ & Tissue Donor Network announced today that 973 lifesaving organs were provided for transplant through its network, upon the generous decisions of 305 donors and their families to consent to organ donation. In addition, 995 donors and their families consented to donating a loved one's bone, heart valves and other tissues for medical transplant.

"We are proud to have served so many families, and provide so many transplant recipients a second chance at life through organ donation," Gift of Hope President/CEO Jerry Anderson said. "Any hope that we can offer to patients on the transplant waiting list is through those who decide to donate, and through the many healthcare partners who are instrumental in working with us to serve donors' families, educate the public and increase donation rates."

The shortage of donated organs remains critical in Illinois, with more than 4,700 patients waiting for transplants at Illinois' eight transplant centers. However, Gift of Hope officials are optimistic that organ and tissue donations will rise, due to new initiatives aimed at increasing the number of registered organ/tissue donors.

In 2006, more than 1.5 million Illinoisans registered as donors in the state's new organ/tissue donor registry. Managed by the Illinois Secretary of State's office, the registry is a confidential computerized database that documents a person's consent to be a donor. Under a state law that went into effect Jan. 1, 2006, registration makes a person's decision to be a donor legally binding. Additional witnesses or family consent is no longer required, although donation agencies will keep family members informed at the time of the individual's death and provide information afterward.

"We're elated about the number of people who enrolled during the registry's first year," Anderson said, noting that the goal for 2006 was 1 million.

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Gift of Hope projects that honoring donor consent can result in an additional 100 organ transplants each year, once Illinoisans enroll in the new registry. Historically, Anderson said, nearly 20 percent of potential donors enrolled as a 'yes' in state's previous donor registry had their intent overruled by family members at the time of death. In 2006, Gift of Hope worked with 82 organ/tissue donors from the new registry, with their families' involvement throughout the process.

Launching the registry was only the beginning. A recent statewide poll shows that nearly 90% of Illinois adults say registering to be an organ/tissue donor is the right thing to do. Yet, 40% say they have not registered. In addition, of adults who identify themselves as registered donors, nearly half are unaware of a new Illinois donor registry. And nearly two-thirds are unaware of the need to re-register.

Acting on the poll results and the growing waiting list for organ transplants, Gift of Hope, with a coalition of agencies involved with organ, tissue and eye donation have launched "Donate Life Illinois." The initiative is an 18-month campaign to register 3.5 million people in the registry.

Donate Life Illinois is part of a national campaign through Donate Life America to increase the number of Americans who have taken action to be donors in their states to 100 million. Currently, an estimated 60 million Americans have done so, according to David Bosch, Donate Life America president and communications director for Gift of Hope Organ & Tissue Donor Network.

Gift of Hope Organ & Tissue Donor Network is proud to serve as the federally designated not-for-profit organ procurement organization that coordinates organ and tissue donation and services for families of donors in the northern three-quarters of Illinois and northwest Indiana. Its donation service area includes 11.7 million people and 183 hospitals, including all eight of Illinois' transplant centers—making it one of the nation's busiest for donation and transplantation.

Since its inception in 1986, Gift of Hope 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.

One donor can save or enhance the lives of more than 25 people. There is no cost to becoming an organ and tissue donor, nor is there cost to family members. The donation surgery does not disfigure the body, and all major religions support donation as an act of human compassion. Donors can be nearly any age.

Illinoisans can join the new donor registry by visiting the campaign site at [www.IAmAreYou.org](http://www.IAmAreYou.org); visiting any Illinois state driver's license facility; or by calling the Illinois Secretary of State Organ/Tissue Donor Program at 800/210-2106.

To learn more about organ, tissue, eye and blood donation, visit [www.IAmAreYou.org](http://www.IAmAreYou.org) and click on "Partners," or contact Donate Life Illinois at 888/307-DON8 (3668).

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