

In 2002, Nancy Leifheit tragically lost her son, Brett, in a motorcycle accident. Brett Leifheit was only 20-yearsold when he died and became an organ and tissue donor.

The pride Nancy feels for her son's selfless act, and her unwavering love for him, motivates her to coordinate Gift of Hope Organ & Tissue Donor Network's Donor Quilt project.

After Nancy became a volunteer for Gift of Hope, she approached Gift of Hope's Donor Family Advisory Council with the idea of her managing the quilt project. Now six years later, she continues the project in honor of her son.



Nancy Leifheit, Quilt Project Volunteer (left) and Diane Schmitz, Donor Family Services Coordinator (right)

The Donor Quilts are a collection of memorial squares created by families of organ, tissue and eye donors. The different quilts travel around Illinois and Northwest Indiana to be displayed at hospitals, tribute events, meetings and other special functions to help bring awareness to donation.

"Each one is very different," Nancy said. "Each memorial square has a real story to it."

"She has a gift to connect the beautifully crafted memorial squares and create a powerful tribute to those who gave the gift of hope," said Diane Schmitz, Donor Family Services Coordinator at Gift of Hope. "People feel a significant impact when they see the quilts because each square truly illustrates the donor's story."

"For me, it's a way of keeping Brett's memory alive," Nancy said. "The primary reasons I do this are to extend my hands to those who have to travel down 'this path' that we never imagined we would, to help those who are hurting as a result of loss, and also to pay tribute to those who courageously donated."

It has been more than six years since the project began, and nearly 200 memorial squares have been completed. Nancy is committed to the project and continues to move it forward. "My personal goal for this project is to honor the lives of our 'heroes' and their families who selflessly and bravely made the decisions to donate life."

"It is a very successful program," Schmitz said. "It is inspiring to see someone like Nancy, who experienced such a devastating tragedy, turn her grief into a positive energy that motivates her. All the families that contribute to the quilt are doing the same thing –creating a quilt to pay homage to their loved one."

For more information about creating memorial squares and to see examples, please visit www.giftofhope.org.