



- News from the Lions' State Sight Project -

# Missouri Lions Eye Research Foundation

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www.mlnerf.org

573/443-1471

## DONOR FAMILIES: Saying Yes to Donation

**It's easy to imagine the delight of a corneal transplant recipient who has received the "Gift of Sight". But what about the donor family who gives consent, making the donation possible? Why do donor families say yes when they have just experienced a great personal loss?**

Two families share their answers to that question. After her 19-year-old son, Lee, was killed in a motor vehicle accident, Diedra Thompson said yes to donation. Thompson explained that she was actually carrying out the final wishes of her son. Only a few weeks earlier, her son inquired about the information listed on the back of his new driver's license. They sat down to discuss what it meant to 'make an anatomical gift' by signing the back of the driver's license. Upon completion of the conversation, Lee told his mother that this was something he wanted to do, and then signed the card. Thompson looks back today, and is thankful that they had this conversation.

After the accident, Thompson felt that her life was spinning out of control. By giving consent to donation, she felt as if she were gaining some of that control back. She then began to focus on the positive aspects of her tragic loss.

When I lost my son, I also lost watching him graduate from college, he was engaged so I lost planning for his wedding and the possibilities of a grandchild that I hoped to have some day," explained Thompson. "But through the donation process, I finally realized my hopes and dreams were fulfilled through the recipients. One of my son's corneas went to a young man, who because he could now see, was able to finish college; and a grandmother received the other cornea, and now she can see her grandchildren."

Giving consent to donation can be a healing process for the donor family. It not only allows the family the opportunity to fulfill the wishes of their loved one, but also gives the family something positive to focus on during the tragic situation. "We cheated death a little," Thompson said. "My son wasn't just

buried, part of him is living on and helping other people."

Ron and Carol Hess also said yes to donation after the death of their 11-year-old daughter, Crystin. While donation was not something their family had openly discussed, the Hess family knew it was something that Crystin would have wanted and they wanted to do. The Hess' had seen the other side of donation, which made their decision easier.

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***"Your life is not just your life; it belongs to everyone who loves you, your spouse, children, and parents...Have you discussed your decision to be a donor with them?"***

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***Diedra Thompson,  
Donor Mother & HLEB Educator***

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At the age of four, Crystin lost her sight in one eye. She suffered with severe scarring and no vision until she was able to receive a cornea transplant, which restored her sight. Crystin knew where her cornea came from and understood that another child had died in order for her to see again.



Crystin Hess

The Hess' remembered how hard it was for Crystin suffering with her blindness before receiving a cornea transplant. "I hurt and felt grief for the family of my daughter's donor that gave her, her sight back," explained Carol, "she was the recipient of an eye and due to the accident, the only thing she could give back at her death was her eyes. If I knew that someone had benefitted from our loss then it was worth making the decision to donate."

Since there are so many decisions to be made during that difficult time of loss, both families agreed that knowing the wishes of their loved ones made the decision much easier.

"A death of a loved one is hard, a death of a child is even harder. Now part of her lives on, someplace else - that makes it easier," stated Carol.

The Thompson and Hess families lost a loved one too soon, but were able to turn tragedy into hope. As donor families, they understand that even in grief, we have the capacity to give - and it is in the giving that we regain some portion of that which was lost.



Lee Dawson Cates

**National Organ, Tissue and Eye Donor Awareness Week  
April 18-24, 1999**

## Providing the 'Gift of Hope'

Research is an essential part of the Missouri Lions Eye Research Foundation's commitment to the restoration of sight. Corneal transplantation achieves miraculous results, but it is a remedy for only 10% of blinding eye diseases.

When it isn't possible to give the 'Gift of Sight' through corneal transplantation, the eye bank offers the 'Gift of Hope' by supporting research into the causes and cures of blinding eye diseases.

Each year, MLERF incurs more than \$225,000 in expenses to provide donor eye tissue for research. In addition, MLERF has donated \$40,000 to the Department of

Ophthalmology at the University of Missouri-Columbia for eye research and recently donated \$5,000 worth of used research equipment to the University.

MLERF's contributions help sustain the development of promising ideas that can have a direct and positive impact on human health issues.

MLERF would like to recognize those Lions who have volunteered their time and transportation to help deliver the 'gift of sight' and the 'gift of hope' to those in need.

Lions transporting eye tissue during from November through February are: Allen Hunter, Arthur Grey, Ben Ritter,

Bernard Becker, Bill Huntley, Bill Sims, Bob May, Bruce Chinn, Charles Findley, Charles Winfield, Charlie Teeter, Chester Godsey, Chuck Dunn, Cork Finley, Dale Bagler, David Menefee, David Reffler, David Roberts, Dennis Hemsath, Denver Lionberger, Dick Rector, Don Bench, Don Clark, Don Hahne, Don Hartman, Don Hasch, Don Kepple, Donald Mitchell, Dorsey Van Meter, E. Allen Kohler, Forrest Troyer, Gail Oehrke, Garnet

Payne, Gaylor Hill, Glen Godsey, Herb Papenbrok, Herb Stratton, Herb Trimble, Howard Dampier, J. Dettmer, Jr., J.B. Schlobohm, Jack Martin,

James Reiger, Jerry and Cheryl Luper, Jerry Brauer, Jerry Colvin, Jerry Fick, Jim Castleberry, Jim Griffin, Jo Schlobohm, John DeBolt, John Heese, John Taylor, Ken Everling, Kenny Rehm, Leroy Potter, Lowell Fischer, Marcia Peterson, Mel Propst, Norman Rieger, Pat Sullivan, Paul Ingold, R.Wayne Cunningham, Randy Doerhoff, Richard Howell, Richard Link, RJ Nichols, Robert Baskin, Robert Teacutter, Ron Walkenbach, Sam Orr, Stan Schaffer, Steve Keehn, Tom Johnston, Tom Ray, Wally Dressel, Wayne Martin, William Huber.

### HLEB Statistics

	July - February '97-'98	'98-'99
<b>TOTAL EYES RETRIEVED</b>	2,174	2,332
<b>TOTAL CORNEA TRANSPLANTS</b>	892	1,169

## Race For Sight

### Wilson's Total Fitness Triathlon Challenge

The Missouri Lions Eye Research Foundation and Wilson's Total Fitness will be holding their first 'Race for Sight' Triathlon on Sunday, May 2nd, beginning at 8:00 a.m.

The triathlon will consist of a 300 yard indoor swim, twelve mile bike and three mile run. Proceeds from this event will go to support the Foundation's Amblyopia Screening program.

The Amblyopia Screening program screens children between the ages of six months and five years old, throughout Missouri, for symptoms of amblyopia. Also known as 'lazy eye', amblyopia can lead to blindness if not corrected in its early stages.

Through early detection, the program has saved the sight of many children.

You can help support the Amblyopia program by being a part of the 'Race for Sight'. Race applications can be picked up at Wilson's Total Fitness, 1400 Forum Blvd., Columbia, the Missouri Lions Eye Research Foundation, or download from the Foundation's website at [www.mlerf.org/triathlon/](http://www.mlerf.org/triathlon/).

If you are interested in entering, volunteering at the race or being a sponsor, call the Foundation's Development Office at 573/443-1471.

## SIGHT-SAVER

Do you know how to help someone who needs help paying for their eye care needs? The Eye Care Assistance program of the Missouri Lions Eye Research Foundation is one solution.

The Eye Care Assistance program covers the expenses of diagnostic testing, office visits, minor procedures, surgery and gratis cornea tissue for those who qualify for the program. The Foundation works with participating ophthalmology facilities throughout Missouri, to pay a reduced fee for treatments for Eye Care Assistance patients.

The program is aimed at helping people who need treatment for an eye disease or eye injury, like Eye Care patient D.B., from Dixon. D.B. suffers from serious health problems including diabetic retinopathy. Her health limits her to part-time employment, which barely covers her living expenses. As someone for whom health insurance is just a dream, D.B. is particularly grateful to the Lions for the help with her eye care needs.

"It's really been a matter of seeing and not seeing. I could not have afforded to go to the doctor without your help and I wouldn't be able to work otherwise," D.B. explained. "The program has really kept me going."

There are many others throughout Missouri like D.B., in need of the Lions' Eye Care Assistance services. If you know of someone in your community who may benefit from the Eye Care Assistance program, contact the Foundation.

The first step is to see if the individual qualifies for any state and federal assistance, by contacting the local Division of Family Services Office (DFS) and the Prevention of Blindness Bureau. An Eye Care Assistance application must also be completed and returned to the Foundation, with a copy of the denial or acceptance letter from the DFS office. Once qualified for the Eye Care program, the applicant will be instructed on where to go for treatment. Every effort is made to find treatment for the individual near his hometown.

The Eye Care Assistance program is one of the many ways the Lions' donations work locally. Each district has residents participating in the Eye Care Assistance program. The continued interest and support of the Missouri Lions helps to ensure the Eye Care Assistance program remains a success. In a time of rising health insurance costs and government aid cutbacks, the Eye Care Assistance program is a great opportunity for the Lions to make a difference in someone's sight.