MTS Donor Family Memorial Events

Cultivating new opportunities to remember

When honoring and remembering the loss of a loved one, there’s something hopeful about a gathering filled with inspiration, purpose and activity. Mid-America Transplant Services (MTS) is pleased to provide a new, annual opportunity for Donor Families to celebrate, honor and remember a loved one by walking or running in MTS’s inaugural Celebrate Life 5K Run/Walk to take place on April 30, 2016. The addition of this annual event provides MTS the opportunity to modify our St. Louis Candlelight Memorial Ceremony, making it even more intimate and meaningful for the Donor Families whose loved ones donated the Gift of Life during the previous year.

Through the years, the St. Louis Candlelight Memorial Ceremony evolved and grew to include the St. Louis transplant community, providing the opportunity to thank and express gratitude to the families whose loved one provided life-enhancing and lifesaving gifts. As our Donor Family community has expanded, we’ve identified the need to make changes. As such, MTS will host the St. Louis Candlelight Memorial Ceremony for family members of those who have been organ, tissue or eye donors during the previous year (July 2014 through the end of June 2015). Each family in the St. Louis area will be invited to attend the St. Louis Candlelight Memorial Ceremony one time with an open invitation for ongoing annual participation in the Celebrate Life 5K Run/Walk.

For families who have attended the St. Louis Candlelight Memorial Ceremony prior to 2015, MTS will host a Donor Family Night of Remembrance on Thursday, Sept. 10, 7 to 9 p.m. This special evening of inspiration and remembrance for all MTS Donor Families features a presentation from MTS Chief Medical Officer, Gary Marklin, MD; the opportunity to create a special craft to honor the memory of loved ones; and a memorial tribute at the MTS Donor Memorial Monument.

With these changes and additions, we hope to provide more personal and meaningful opportunities for all donor families to honor and remember their loved one and celebrate life.

Anyone whose life has been impacted by organ and tissue donation is welcomed to attend the Celebrate Life 5K Run/Walk. Look for more information to come.

The annual Springfield and Cape Girardeau Candlelight Memorial Ceremonies will remain unchanged.
Playing It Forward Through the Gift of Life

By Jane Palisch

Although the human mind can’t find sense in the tragedy of losing a loved one well before the opportunity for a full, productive life, the human heart sometimes can see beyond the tragedy to the opportunity to pay (and play) forward the Gift of Life.

Aaron and Rhonda Robert live each day with not only acute awareness of the precious gifts they received as parents of their two children, Kaden and Claire, but also with a commitment to raise them to develop gratitude for life’s gifts, be the best they can be and have a positive impact on the community in which they live. In their tight-knit Benton, Missouri community — where everyone knows and cares for one another — Rhonda was amazed and humbled by the support and love they received when in June 2014, an accidental shooting took the life of their 15-year-old son.

“There were 200 people at the hospital when they brought him in…. teachers, coaches, friends…and when he was leaving for the transplant center, people lined the hallways and out into the ambulance bay. They showed us so much love,” Rhonda says. Kaden was well-known, well-loved and a leader on his sports teams, in school, and in the many activities in which he excelled from a young age. Just a few months prior to the accident, Kaden had shared his decision to be an organ donor. “Kaden was a game-changer. He made a difference everywhere — in a game, at a party — and he’s still out there living through others and the way he inspires people,” Rhonda explains. “God knew he was a young man that could make a difference.”

Kaden was, indeed, a game-changer for the two children and three adults whose lives he saved through organ donation. Rhonda finds comfort and pride in Kaden’s generosity and feels that donor families benefit greatly by embracing the gifts their loved one was able to give. “I believe that’s what God wants people to do. It’s how we save each other,” she says.

In gratitude to her community, to honor their son’s life and to let others know the goodness that can come from even a tragic loss through the Gift of Life, the Robert Family has been on a year-long journey. With guidance from MTS, the family has honored Kaden and increased organ donation awareness and registry through a whirlwind of endeavors in southeast Missouri where they are preserving Kaden’s spirit and memory by raising funds, building awareness and emphasizing the importance of “playing it forward.”

Rhonda began demonstrating their love and dedication to Kaden’s life and legacy by doing what Kaden would have done — continue fighting, give generously, find the positive outcome, and pursue goals with the heart and drive of a champion.

Although the pain of the tragedy persists, the Robert family finds comfort in the five lives Kaden saved with his gift and that, through that gift and the work the family is doing, they are continuing to help others. In less than a year’s time, three individuals in the community have become donors since Kaden brought a new level of awareness in the Benton area. “He was a young donor who has changed the mindset of this community,” Rhonda says.

“My son loved life, and he lives on in others. I’m amazed at the impact he had in just a year’s time. If I can help a family (in need of a transplant) and keep them from experiencing this pain, I will continue. I’m still not done….I have big plans,” Rhonda says.
**Team Transplant Saint Louis**

Feeling isolated and alone in your grief journey? Wishing you could meet those who have benefitted from the gift of donation? Becoming a member of Team Transplant Saint Louis might be the opportunity you are looking for. The Team was organized to create a place where donor families, living donors, and transplant recipients celebrate life, encourage organ donation, and become a resource for those affected by organ transplantation. MTS has partnered with Team Transplant Saint Louis to help make these important connections.

**The goals of Team Transplant Saint Louis include:**
- Educate and empower families and individuals affected by organ donation and transplantation.
- Educate society about the importance of registering with the National Donor Registry.
- Raise public awareness that there is life after organ transplantation and the number of lives that can be saved or improved by becoming an organ and tissue donor.
- Encourage individuals after receiving an organ transplant to live their life to its full potential.
- Support recipients, living donors, and donor families.
- Honor those who have given the Gift of Life.
- Encourage Team Transplant Saint Louis members to participate in the Transplant Games of America.

**Team Transplant Saint Louis participates in many events:**
- Team Transplant Saint Louis Team Meetings
- Annual Celebrate Life 5K Run/Walk and Trail Run
- Team Transplant Saint Louis Annual Trivia Night
- Social events such as bowling parties and team barbecues
- Donor Awareness Events
- Participation in the Transplant Games of America (June 2016, Cleveland, Ohio)

For more information or to join Team Transplant Saint Louis, please contact Julie Walton, Team Manager, at 314-735-8450. Pictures and information may also be found at mts-stl.org/get-involved/team-transplant-st-louis, or on the Team Transplant Saint Louis Facebook Page.

**MTS Partners with Lost & Found Grief Center**

MTS is pleased to have a new partnership with Lost & Found Grief Center in Springfield, MO to provide grief support to families who live in Southwest Missouri. “Lost & Found Grief Center works with the bereaved to provide education and support as they travel their journey of grief to find peace, hope, and a new normal as they face life without their deceased loved one.”

Since 2001, Lost & Found Grief Center has offered services free of charge for children, young adults, and their families, helping to mend their grieving hearts. More recently, Lost & Found has expanded their services to include support groups for grieving adults, including one specifically designed for adult members of organ and tissue donor families whose loved one died in the past 2 years. This group, led by a Coordinator with a Master’s Degree in Counseling, is designed to allow family members of organ and tissue donors to share their unique grief experiences.

Lost & Found also offers several groups and events throughout the year open to all organ and tissue donor families, including the Annual Tree Trimming, Facing the Holidays in Grief workshop, Children & Teen Groups for ages 4-18, Young Adult Group for ages 19-30 and Adult Groups.

For more information on Lost & Found Grief Center and how you can become involved in one of many support programs, please contact Lost & Found directly at 417-865-9998, by visiting their website at lostandfoundozarks.com, or liking their Facebook page at Lost & Found.
Memorial contributions received by the Mid-America Transplant Services (MTS) charitable foundation in honor of organ, tissue, and eye donors help to save and improve more lives. The generosity of those listed below has provided the opportunity for the MTS foundation to support a variety of ongoing bereavement programs for Donor Families, the MTS Family House for organ transplant patients who must relocate to St. Louis, and the MTS Recipient Fund for those pre- and post-transplant patients who need emergent financial assistance with housing or medical bills. Our sincere gratitude is extended to those who made contributions from January 1, 2015 – April 31, 2015.
Strengthening Families by Promoting Holistic Health 9th Annual Health Fair
Saturday, JULY 25, 10:00AM – 2:00PM
Presented by the St. Louis Metropolitan Chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc.
Northwest Academy of Law
5140 Riverview Blvd., St. Louis, MO 63120
This community based health and resources fair is free and open to the public. It will include health screenings, mental health vendors, economic security workshops, scholarship/college prep workshops, backpack giveaways and more.
Contact Ebony Hutchinson at ehutchinson82@charter.net for more information.

10th Annual Christopher Gage Memorial Golf Tournament
Saturday, AUGUST 15
Lunch & Registration at 12:00 Noon
Shot Gun Start at 1:00PM
Eagle Springs Golf Course
2575 Redman Rd., St. Louis, MO 63136
$80/player OR $320/team includes cart and green fees, lunch, dinner, drinks on the course, and a raffle ticket.
This event is in honor of Christopher Gage McCauley, who was a tissue donor after he passed away due to choking.
For more information, contact Dan Wendt at (314) 324-5050 or drwendt5050@yahoo.com.

Donor Family Night of Remembrance
Thursday, SEPTEMBER 10, 7:00PM – 9:00PM
Mid-America Transplant Services
1110 Highlands Plaza Drive East, Suite 100
St. Louis, MO 63110
An evening of inspiration and remembrance for all MTS Donor Families featuring a presentation from MTS Chief Medical Officer Dr. Gary Marklin, a special craft to honor the memory of loved ones, and a memorial tribute at the Donor Family Memorial Monument.
Light refreshments will be served.
Please RSVP to 314-735-8218 by Thursday, September 3.

The Greater St. Louis Hispanic Festival
Friday & Saturday, SEPTEMBER 26 & 27, 10:00AM – 10:00PM
Sunday, SEPTEMBER 28, 11:00AM – 9:00PM
Soulad Park (next to Soulard Market)
7th Street and Lafayette Ave., St. Louis, MO 63104
The entire St. Louis community, both Hispanic and non-Hispanic, are invited to come and share in this festive weekend celebration of fun and fiesta for the whole family. Admission is free.
This three day event is the largest and most celebrated Hispanic event in St. Louis, and will feature live music, dance performances and lessons, over 50 booths, and the Los Ninos Kids Corner. A Cultural Village will be host to a wide variety of foods and beverages from Latin & South America.
Visit hispanicfestivalstl.com, email HispanicFest@aol.com or call (314) 837-6100 for more information.

6th Annual Sista Strut
Saturday, OCTOBER 3
Awareness Rally at 8:00AM; Strut begins at 10:00AM.
Soldier’s Memorial
1315 Chestnut St, St. Louis, MO 63103
Sista Strut is the largest walk of its kind in the nation to heighten awareness about the issues of breast cancer in women of color.
Register online at sistastrut.racesonline.com.
For more information about this event, visit 1003thebeat.com/features/sista-strut-309

How to Make it Through the Holidays: A Donor Family Workshop
Tuesday, NOVEMBER 10, 6:00PM – 9:30PM
Mid-America Transplant Services
1110 Highlands Plaza Drive East, Suite 100
St. Louis, MO 63110
The holidays are often one of the most difficult times of the year for those who have lost a loved one. Practical and helpful ideas will be shared on how to manage the holiday season, along with time to create a holiday memory craft for each participant.
A light meal and craft supplies will be provided for those who RSVP by Tuesday, November 3 at 314-735-8218.
Solace

Do you have questions about the donation process?

There is a wonderful explanation on the MTS website called “How Donation Works.” There are other great resources about donation on there as well, such as “What can be donated.” Visit mts-stl.org/learn to learn more!

The MTS Donor Families Facebook Group is a private closed group; application for membership can be found at mts-stl.org/support/donor-family-facebook/.