

## LIFESTYLES

### The gift of life

#### Ceremony honors organ donors

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By **KATE R. HOULIHAN** Staff Writer

Sabine Miller has two birthdays.

One is Jan. 25, the day she came into this world. The other is July 8, the day she received a small intestine organ transplant and felt like she had been given a second chance to live.

Transplant recipients such as Miller, along with organ donors and donor families, gathered in Naperville Sunday to honor organ donors and families by planting a tree on the grounds of Naper Settlement.

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**Tim Joos of St. Charles lays a pile of dirt on one of the donor trees in honor of his 17-year-old daughter, Samantha, who died in a 2003 car accident while on her way to St. Charles East High school. Each year a tree is planted at Naper Settlement in downtown Naperville to honor organ and tissue donors and their families.**

*Terence Guider-Shaw staff photographer*

The group first gathered in the cafeteria of Naperville Central High School to share stories and find comfort in the sacrifices of others.

Miller, a 33-year-old native of Vienna, Austria, met her husband, Dan, in Europe and moved to the U.S. eight years ago. They now live in Bolingbrook. Two years ago the couple's happy life was shattered when Miller's small bowel twisted around itself. The ensuing daily intravenous fluid feedings she endured left her liver severely weakened.

She was placed on a transplant list in March 2005 and received the call that would change her world yet again in July of that year.

"I will never forget that phone call, that moment," Miller said. "I had never felt so scared, but I felt so relieved that I was given a second chance at life."

Sunday's event was the 17th annual hosted by Organ Transplant Support, Inc. To date, 18 trees have been planted in Naper Settlement through the partnership.

"I want to thank every donor here today," said Margaret Pearson, the regional coordinator with the Organ and Tissue Donor program in the Secretary of State's office. "You face a hard decision at a critical time, but it means the world to someone on the transplant list."

Pearson said 2 million people have signed up on the state's new organ/tissue donor registry. The new registry makes certain a person's decision to donate organs and tissue following death will be done. Before a new law went into effect in 2006, the decision was not legally binding and remained with the deceased's family.

Pearson said the number includes a portion of the 6 million who were originally signed up in addition to newcomers who have signified their intent to donate since the new confidential computerized database went live.

According to the Secretary of State's Web site, approximately 4,500 people in the state are on waiting lists for an organ transplant.

### **A new friendship**

Family members, donors and recipients were able to throw a ceremonial bit of dirt around the base of the tree. Two small arches with names and messages from donors or recipients or donor families were placed next to the maple temporarily.

Anne Hector scooped three shovels full of dirt for her 60-year-old husband, Bill, who underwent three transplants. His first was for a kidney in 1987, followed by a first pancreatic transplant in 1988 and a second pancreatic transplant in 2001. The couple has come to almost all of the tree-planting ceremonies.

While Bill does not know who provided him with the organs in his first two transplants, he does know the story behind his third. Hector said in 2001 he met the family of Lisa Corsini, a young nursing student from Italy who was studying at the University of Illinois when she was killed in September 2001 while crossing the street.

Both Bill and his wife have gotten to know Lisa's parents, who live in Italy. They took the Corsinis to see the tree planted the year after Lisa's death provided Bill - and 32 others - with a new life.

"It was a very special moment for her family," he said. "We've gotten to see the human side of donation."

Now the Corsinis and Hectors are friends, bonded together by a tragedy that turned into something good. Smiling up at the sunny sky after his wife helped pour dirt around the tree, Bill couldn't help but be happy.

"This is about as good as it can get," he said.