

## Organ donation leaves families grateful

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### Organ donor month: A three-part series

TODAY: Organ donations let others live on.

MONDAY: Bradley resident Scott Evans needs a kidney and pancreas transplant to survive.

TUESDAY: Manteno boss provides former worker with the ultimate gift -- a kidney.

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## An eye for an eye

SPRINGFIELD -- Someone else is using Matt Tyrrell's eyes.

And his bones, his skin, his heart valves and his veins.

Twenty-two year old Tyrrell, of Moline, was one of 6.2 million Illinois residents who agreed to donate their organs at death.

But doctors didn't take Tyrrell's organs, they took his body tissue.

While organs were harvested from 268 Illinois residents last year, 1,000 were able to donate their tissues, according to David Bosch of Gift of Hope, the organization coordinating organ and tissue recovery and transplants.

"His eyes are still seeing, his veins are coursing blood," said Matt's father Andy Tyrrell, a Davenport, Iowa, business owner. "A part of him is living in someone."

Annette LaMore, 58, doesn't know where her brother's eyes are, but knows that two people were able to see again because of him.



**Photo: Michelle Gannon**

The Daily Journal/Michelle Gannon Annette LaMore and her brother Michael Cochran at her home in Manteno. Annette donated her kidney to Michael four years ago. (4-8-08)  
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**Photo: Michelle Gannon**

Michael Cochran sits with his sister Annette LaMore at her home in Manteno Tuesday night as they laugh about the game Operation that has Annette's picture over the face of the patient. Annette donated her kidney to Michael four years ago and the game was a gift she received after the surgery. (4-8-08)  
[More photos from this shoot](#)

Her brother, Dennis Cochran was 48 when he died from a blood clot in 1989. He had been taking medication for years to control his seizures. He had also cracked several bones in a car accident years before, so his body was a little worn, LaMore said.

She said doctors were able to put both of his corneas and skin to use, which helped her and her family cope with his death.

"He just wanted to help people. It was never a question," said LaMore, a rural mail carrier from Manteno.

Four years ago, she followed her brother's lead and donated one of her kidneys to another brother, Michael Cochran, waiting for a match.

Roughly 1 in 20 Americans will need some type of medical tissue transplant during their lifetime, according to the Secretary of State's office which maintains Illinois' organ and tissue donor registry.

While tissue donations don't necessarily save lives like organs do, it's easy to overlook the effect of tissue donations. They can replace a bone on a cancer patient, graft skin on a burn victim or replace a damaged heart valve. Tissue can help repair a torn Achilles tendon or repair a common sports injury such as an anterior cruciate ligament. It can also restore a person's sight.

"You'd be amazed what kinds of things tissues can be used for," Bosch said.

Tyrrell's car crashed into a utility pole on March 6. Though he wasn't brain dead, his brain was bleeding, he couldn't breathe on his own and he wasn't waking up. After several days and countless meetings with doctors, Tyrrell's family decided it was time to let him go.

When doctors took Tyrrell's eyes, they took his corneas, the eye's clear outer lining. The cornea is about as thick as a dime and refracts light like a lens, said David Hearn, regional coordinator for the Illinois Eye Bank.

Someone left with little to no vision suffering from a diseased or damaged cornea can regain their full sight with a corneal transplant, Hearn said.

That was the case for Genevieve Starkey, 72, who suffered from Fuchs Dystrophy, a disease causing her corneas' inner layer of cells to die off.

"You know what it feels like when you have an eyelash in your eye," said Starkey of Bloomington. "Times that by about 50."

She underwent her first corneal transplant in 2005 where physicians sewed in the new cornea with a thread thinner than a strand of hair, according to Hearn. She had the same done to her other eye in 2007.

"What helped me, of course, was sad news for someone else," said Starkey who has since become an organ donor. "It makes you very grateful that someone else was more thoughtful than you've been."

As the Tyrrell family grieves for Matt, his father Andy said he admires his son's decision to donate his organs and tissues.

"I can live to be 100 years old and never have the opportunity to save a life. And here at 22 he had the opportunity to save several," said Tyrrell. "We take comfort in knowing that our son is still out there helping a heart beat, eyes see, fight infection for a burn victim and provide the means for someone to walk or use their arms and legs."

### **Register to be a donor**

In Illinois, if you registered to be an organ donor before 2006, your family has the right to stop doctors from donating your organs and tissue. If you registered after 2006, your decision to be an organ and tissue donor cannot be altered by family members. The Secretary of State's office estimates that the new program will save 100 more lives each year.

To register, visit [www.LifeGoesOn.com](http://www.LifeGoesOn.com), go to any Illinois state driver's license facility or call the Illinois Secretary of State organ/Tissue Donor Program at 1-800-210-2106.