

# Journal Gazette Times-Courier

Thursday, April 19, 2007

## Students spread awareness of organ donation

By **KATE HENDERSON, Staff Writer**  
[khenderson@jg-tc.com](mailto:khenderson@jg-tc.com)

CHARLESTON — Taking notice that Illinois' waiting list for lifesaving organ transplants has surpassed 4,700 for the first time, college students throughout Illinois have mobilized Donate Life Illinois campus campaigns to help register people as organ/tissue donors and offer those patients a second chance at life.

April is National Donate Life Month and college students throughout Illinois are working as part of the Donate Life Illinois campaign to get the word out to Illinoisans that they need to re-register in the state's new organ/tissue donor registry.

Signing the back of a driver's license no longer makes organ donation official. Registering online or on a donor card overrides any decisions that can be made by families of those wishing to donate.

Katrina Zaret, director of The Agency, a student-run public relations agency at Eastern Illinois University, said her group got involved with Donate Life because it was for a good cause and it was a way to learn more about the public relations business.

"It gets people involved in society and organ donation is a very big thing," Zaret said. "People don't realize the need for transplant is so large and the actual number of people willing to donate their organs isn't."

Terri Johnson, The Agency faculty advisor, said students went to classes to pass out forms, made boxes for sororities and fraternities on campus to collect registration cards and posted flyers and banners around campus.

"It's been a great experience for them," Johnson said. "They get to work with actual PR account executives."

Zaret said the campaign has been going on since January and awareness is up, but the number of those registered isn't where she hoped it would be.

"We didn't have a specific number," she said. "We hoped to get 300 to 400 and we already have at least 100 people we signed up on donor cards."

Along with The Agency, the Interfraternity Council at EIU is also working on the campaign.

"College students are sometimes stereotyped as being apathetic to what's going on outside of their own campus bubble, which is obviously not the case," said Dave Bosch, president of Donate Life America and chair of the Illinois campaign. "The level of support we have received from students throughout Illinois and the excitement they have demonstrated has been an inspiration to everyone working on this campaign. In many cases, these are students who have no personal connection to donation or transplantation—just personal conviction that saving lives is the right thing to do. They're truly making a difference."

Zaret said The Agency hopes to have a few more registration days in the Student Union as well as continuing to hand out flyers and spread awareness.

Donate Life Illinois is a coalition of donation-related agencies leading a campaign to register 3.5 million Illinoisans in the new organ/tissue donor registry by April 2008. The campaign is part of a national effort through Donate Life America to increase to 100 million the number of Americans who have designated donation decisions.

Zaret said the campaign hasn't reached out to the community very much yet, but that is one of their goals for next year. She said what's really important is that people realize the need for organ donation.

"I hope they think it's important," she said. "There's a big need and it's a big help to people who need it."

To join the new donor registry or for more information visit <http://www.IAmAreYou.org>; any Illinois state driver's license facility; or call the Illinois Secretary of State Organ/Tissue Donor Program at 800/210-2106.

Contact Kate Henderson at [khenderson@jg-tc.com](mailto:khenderson@jg-tc.com) or 238-6858