

LakeZurichCourier

Lake Zurich's Schlereth primed for 2010 U.S. Transplant Games

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When her boyfriend Craig Johnson died four years ago, Lake Zurich resident Mary Schlereth needed somewhere to turn.

At the time, she was teaching at Schaumburg High School and turned to another teacher who had undergone a liver transplant. After talking with his family about how she and the rest of Johnson's family decided to donate his organs, Schlereth signed up to attend the U.S. Transplant Games in May 2004 in Minneapolis, just four months after Craig's death. Since then, she has attended the 2006 (in Louisville, Ky.) and 2008 (in Pittsburgh) games and will be co-manager of the 2010 games in Madison, Wis.



Mary Schlereth has recently taken on the task of being co-manager of the U.S. Transplant Games for 2010 in Madison, Wis.

(Eric Davis/for Pioneer Press)

The Transplant Games participants compete in sports similar to those in the Olympics, only donor recipients compete. Living donors and donor families are also invited and attend a series of workshops to help with the healing process.

"It's (transplant) a treatment that brings people a second chance at life and the Transplant Games is a venue that really demonstrates that quite strongly," said Willa Lang, CEO of the National Kidney Foundation of Illinois.

The foundation helps the team with fund-raising efforts and promotion of the games.

"I think at that point, I was just looking for any type of healing or something that would just show me that what we had done in donating Craig's organs was helping someone else," Schlereth said. "I didn't know any of these recipients up there (the 2004 games) and it's amazing to see them swim and play basketball and know they are living because of a donor."

Participating in the games even contributed to a career change. After leaving Schaumburg High School, Schlereth worked for the National Kidney Foundation of Illinois and now works at the Illinois Eye Bank, an organization specifically for cornea and eye donation.

As a co-manager for the 2010 games in Madison, Wis., Schlereth is already hard at work organizing the team and brain storming fund-raisers. As much hard work as it is, she looks forward to contributing more to the event.

"I just felt that this is another way for me to give back and honor Craig's memory," Schlereth said.

For more information on the Illinois team, log on to team-illinois.org.