

Mattoon Journal Gazette, Times-Courier

Thursday, October 18, 2007 12:27 AM CDT

Share life: EIU group encourages students to sign up to become donors

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CHARLESTON — It's the sort of decision college students may not think much about — like drafting a will or pre-planning a funeral.

But Donate Life Illinois has turned organ donation registration into a competition between campuses, and Eastern Illinois University has joined the race to get the word out about organ donation and the need to re-register after Jan. 1, 2006.

"Our studies and research both on a state and national level have shown that despite college students traditionally being supportive of the issue, they tend to procrastinate in designating their decisions to be donors," said David Bosch, Donate Life Illinois Campaign Chair and communications director for Gift of Hope ORgan & Tissue Donor Network.

Last week, EIU's student-run public relations group The Agency hosted a table in the Martin Luther King Jr. University Union to encourage students to sign up there or online.

"We were just shoutin' out to people, 'Have you registered to be an organ donor since Jan. 1?'" said Katrina Zaret, student director of The Agency.

The campaign runs through the end of the month, and Zaret said the first leg of EIU's effort registered 127 people. Colleges and universities can win a trophy for the number of people registered or the percentage of the student body they register, Zaret said.

Zaret was contacted about the Donate Life campus campaign and said it seemed like the kind of campaign the group could take on.

"As a non-profit, it was worth it because of the people who need transplants and the number of organ donors on the donation list," she said.

Those students who missed out on the registration drive last week can still sign up and credit EIU with the registration on the group's Facebook site, EIU Students for Organ Donation. Zaret said the group also is planning presentations for other student groups and is posting fliers around campus to let people know it's going on.

Re-registering takes 30 seconds and simply involves filling out a form, Zaret said.

That quick act can save families from having to make the decision later, possibly in a time of tragedy.

EIU student Mallory Devens said she whole-heartedly supports the campaign, and her sorority is pitching in to help, because her brother died in a car accident in 2003.

"Before my brother passed away, organ donation did not cross my mind," she said. "My brother was an organ donor, but at that time, my parents had to provide additional consent to recover his organs in order to save other people's lives."

His decision to be a donor helped his family through their grief, Devens said.

"Although my brother is no longer physically with my family, the healing process has been aided by knowing he has saved so many lives," she said.

Her family received a letter from Gift of Hope Organ & Tissue Donor Network that explained how her

brother's organs were used, she said. Her family also met one recipient and her mother spoke with another recipient.

"Knowing other people's lives can go on as a result of my brother donating his organs makes me feel better about this tragedy," Devens said.

Anyone can join the new donor registry by visiting the Donate Life Illinois campaign site at www.IAmAreYou.org; visiting any driver's license facility; or by calling the Illinois Secretary of State Organ/Tissue Donor Program at (800) 210-2106.

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