

Hospital's Christmas tree honors organ donors, recipients

BY DIANE CALE ANDREASSI
SPECIAL WRITER

Gift giving is never so much on our minds as during the holidays, and people around the country are hoping you'll consider giving the biggest gift of all.

Carol Mancini of Livonia was preparing to die while she was waiting for a lung transplant. Ever since the operation that saved her life, she and her daughter, Shelly Morell of Westland, have devoted themselves to helping others in the same position.

"Last year, before my transplant, I was in really, really bad shape, and the doctors told me to put everything in order," Mancini said. "Then I got the call. If that mother hadn't donate her daughter's organs, I would have died. Hundreds of people die everyday waiting."

Cynthia Grey of Redford said it felt very right when she donated her 18-year-old son's organs. He was declared brain dead after a fall in 1998. Ever since, she has volunteered with Gift of Life organization in an effort to let people know about the importance of organ donations.

A 52-inch Christmas tree at the entrance of Garden City Hospital is another reminder of the importance of organ dona-

tions. The tree is a constant reminder for the need to talk with loved ones about how you feel about donating your organs.

Christmas trees were erected at six hospitals by the Michigan Coalition on Donation and are filled with angels and white ball ornaments, representing donors' lives, recipients and thousands of people waiting for organs, said Jennifer Tierley, Gift of Life community events coordinator.

"What an incredible way to recognize those who have given, those who have received and those who are waiting for a life-saving organ, tissue or cornea transplant," said Diane Russell, president-elect of MCOD, a coalition of 30 hospitals, non-profit organizations, corporations and individuals dedicated to increasing the rates of organ, tissue, eye, blood and bone marrow donation in Michigan. The Gift of Life organization is a primary member.

"Thousands more are waiting for tissue and cornea transplants," Russell said.

LIFE-SAVING TRANSPLANTS

So far this year in Michigan, 465 people have received a life-saving organ transplant, while 161 patients died waiting. There



Handcarved Carr of Dearborn Heights, whose grandfather received a kidney transplant 33 years ago, joins Patricia Kuhn of New Boston, who received a liver transplant, in placing ornaments on the tree. Carr was honoring her grandfather and his donor.

are 2,384 Michigan patients waiting for a life-saving organ transplant.

Mancini, 48, believed she was going to be one of the unlucky statistics while she was hooked to an oxygen machine 24 hours a day because her emphysema and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease restricted her air flow. She received a lung from a Chicago woman in her 20s on Aug. 12, 2001.

Before the transplant, Mancini was so sick she could barely move. "She couldn't clean her

house, go grocery shopping, and me and my dad stepped up to the plate and helped her," Morell said, explaining that she felt hopeless and knew she had to do something to help her mom and other people waiting for organ transplants.

She approached the University of Michigan Hospital asking for guidance. Six months later, Morell launched the first "Second Chance at Life" walkathon in 2001.

"I woke up one morning and decided I wasn't going to let my mother die," Morell said.

"I would do anything I could to let people know how important it is to donate their organs, and if they do it that it saves people lives."

She's planning her third "Second Chance at Life" two-mile walkathon Aug. 3, 2003. Last year, pledges raised from the event raised \$21,000 for the University of Michigan Transplant Center.

Along the walk, there was a Gift of Life table that allowed participants to register as organ donors. "It doesn't matter where you give the organ, because organs come from all over, and the organs can go anywhere," Morell said. "My mother has her life back. When she was on the oxygen, I had one child, and she could hardly hold her. Now she baby-sits (that child and another baby) and is back working."

"She got her second chance at life. There could be a lot more donations if there was more information available."

Mancini participated in a video about transplants for the U of M, and she also wrote about her story in "Taken Flight," a recently published book that chronicles stories from organ-transplant recipients and is available at most large book stores.

If it weren't for people like

Grey, thousands more organ-transplant patients would have died.

Her son suffered the head injury on Oct. 13, 1994, and was declared brain dead. Two days later, six of his organs were given to five people.

Grey said she never spoke to her son, Phillip Lewis, before the accident about donating his organs. If more people talked to their loved ones, it might be an easier decision, if the time comes to consider the possibility, she said.

"It's important to let next of kin know that this is something that you want to do before something critical happens. Events happen quickly, and a lot of times people aren't emotionally equipped to say, yes. You can't take days to ponder the decision."

"At the hospital, they asked whether I would consider organ donation, and it seemed the only and the right thing to do."

Becoming involved with the Gift of Life organization in Ann Arbor has helped Grey grieving.

"I've been meeting wonderful people - recipients and people waiting. It's a source of support that what I did was very right. It's been eight years, and I'm still working on getting through. I felt I had to do something."

Grey speaks to local groups and volunteers with the Gift of Life.

People who want to donate their organs should tell family members or sign-up on the Michigan donor registry by going to the Gift of Life Web site at www.giftoflifemichigan.org or call (800) 482-4681.

Morell asks anyone who is interested in the "Second Chance at Life" walkathon to call her at (734) 513-5187 or visit her Web site at www.secondchancelife.org.

MCOD participates in countless awareness events annually and invites the public to visit www.mcod.org to learn more.

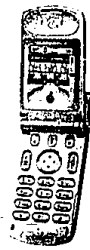
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RELIGION CALENDAR

If you want to submit an item for the religion calendar, fax it to (248) 477-9722 or write: Religion Calendar, Farmington Observer, 3340 Grand River, Farmington, MI 48335. The deadline for an announcement to appear in the Thursday edition is noon Monday.

SERVICES

Ward Christmas Eve

Nardin Park United Methodist Church in Farmington Hills will hold the following Christmas Eve services: family service - 4:30 p.m.; community/metro-politan service - 8 p.m.; traditional Nardin Park Christmas Eve - 11 p.m.

First Christmas Eve

First Presbyterian Church of Farmington will hold Christmas Eve services at the following times: 5 p.m. family worship service; 8 p.m. service of holy communion; 10:30 p.m. special music by choir and soloists; 11 p.m. traditional candlelight service of lessons and carols. The church is located at 11 Mile and Farmington Road. Call (248) 474-6170.

First United Christmas Eve

First United Methodist Church in downtown Farmington will hold two candle-light Christmas Eve services at 4:30 p.m. and 10 p.m.

Service of Hope

First Presbyterian Church of Farmington will hold a Service of Hope at 7:30 p.m. Sunday, Dec. 22. The pastors will lead the service using the Hymns for a Service of Hopeless for those who are grieving, have a major illness, have lost a job or experienced any kind of loss or setback. The church is located at 11 Mile and Farmington Road. Call (248) 474-6170.

ONGOING

Widow/Widower Support

New Hope Center for Grief Support, a Christian-based bereavement outreach center, offers support for widows and widowers with children on the second and fourth Tuesday of each month. The group meets at 7 p.m. at St. Kenneth's Parish offices, 14951 Haggerty, Plymouth. New Hope for Kids meets at the same time and place and is aimed at ages 4-11. (248) 348-0155.

Aglow

Aglow International, a community lighthouse for women, meets for dinner and discussion at 6 p.m. the second Monday of each month at Best Western Executive Hotel, 3525 W. 12 Mile in Farmington. For information or reservations call (248) 476-1053.

Night & Weekend hours: Mon-Fri, 9:00pm-5:59pm, Sat, 12am-Sun, 11:59pm.

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