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## Clarendon Hills man honored as organ donor

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By **AMY DEIS** [adeis@pioneerlocal.com](mailto:adeis@pioneerlocal.com)

Lori Chana sprinkles coffee grounds over a thin line of Elmer's glue, forming one eyebrow on an organic portrait of her son, Cameron.

She stares lovingly at the recreated face made of crushed flower petals, seeds and sand.

"Isn't it amazing?" she says, holding the portrait in front of her for the rest of the family to view.

Lori and her husband, Rob, of Clarendon Hills lost their 22-year-old son May 30 in a bus accident. The portrait of Cameron, who graduated from Hinsdale Central High School in 2005, will be one of 76 floragraphs on the Donate Life float in the New Year's Day Rose Parade as a tribute to him being an organ donor.

'It's a great joy in a time of sadness'

On Saturday, Rob and Lori with their three other children, Christopher, 19, Cole, 18 and Carley, 12, finished the floragraph at the National Kidney Foundation's Chicago office by adding on his eyebrows.

It's there they meet Barrington resident Anne Gulotta with her children Elizabeth and Jay Jr. They complete the floragraph of their father, Jay Sr., who died seven years ago. Anne is one of this year's float riders.

The morning is a mix of tears, laughs, hugs and memories as the Gulotta and Chana families gather not only to finish the floragraphs but also to commemorate Jay's and Cameron's decisions to become donors.

Although Rob doesn't know exactly when Cameron registered to be an organ donor, he knows the outcome of him registering online

"There are five people alive because of him," Rob says.

The float portrays a giant phoenix with its tail sweeping down. The floragraphs will be place on the tail, hovering over flames scattered around the base of the float.

"Everybody is so touched to see what the float is about," says Dave Bosch, communications director for Gift of Hope organ donation. "You'll have so many opportunities to share your stories."

'I want to feel your heart beating again'

Following the accident, Rob and Lori stayed at the hospital with Cameron until Gift of Hope placed his organs. Just before the donation, Lori laid her head on his chest, praying that one day she would be able to hear his heart beating in someone else's chest.

"I draw great comfort that he had the thought of doing it," Lori says. "But there are pieces of him living on."

His lungs went to a 54-year-old Illinois man, his liver to a 52-year-old Illinois man, his kidneys to a 42-year-old North Carolina woman and to a 15-year-old Kentucky boy. His corneas went to a Chicago man and Peoria man and enabled them to see.

"Cameron had a bit of a lazy eye when he got tired, so we've got to wonder who got that one," Rob says, laughing.

When Rob and Lori talk about their son's organ donation, their smiles are mixed with joy and sadness. They hadn't known Cameron made the decision to become a donor.

"He made everybody else better," Rob says. "He brought out the best in people and continues to do so in death."

Cameron's heart went to Nathan Dyer, a 55-year-old African American of Chicago. Last Thursday, Rob and Lori Chana met Nathan and his fiance, Royann, and his mother, Vivian, at Simon's in Villa Park.

The organ donation is full of coincidences. Dyer suffered his first heart attack the year Cameron was born and he and Royann were supposed to get married June 2, one day after his heart transplant.

Those first few moments of the meeting were emotional for all parties.

"(Nathan) stood and said, 'Do you want to hear?' " Lori says. "That's what I prayed for."

The first four nights after Dyer's transplant, the beating of Cameron's healthy heart kept him awake.

"He has always referred to it as Cameron's heart," Rob says.

More than 100,000 Americans are on the donor waiting list, 4,700 of those in Illinois. One in 20 people will need an organ or tissue donation, according to the Gift of Hope Web site. About 35 percent of people on the kidney transplant waiting list are African American, and for kidney donation, genetic makeup, including race, is key for a healthy transplant.

Those numbers are why the story of Cameron Chana doesn't end with his parents meeting the organ recipients. The couple has talked about speaking with Dyer to encourage others, especially African Americans, to become registered donors.

"We have all these positives," Lori says. "Losing a child is terrible, but now we can make more memories. He left us with many gifts."

How to donate

Those who registered to be an organ donor before Jan. 1, 2006 must go online to register again because the decision is not legally binding under the new law. To become a registered organ donor, visit [donatelifeillinois.org](http://donatelifeillinois.org).

For more information on the Rose Parade Donate Life float, go to [donatelifefloat.org](http://donatelifefloat.org). Visit [www.giftofhope.org](http://www.giftofhope.org) to find more information, including Frequently Asked Questions, on organ donation.

The family also set up the Web site [www.cameronchana.org](http://www.cameronchana.org) to educate others about Cameron's life and donation.

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