

THE TENNESSEAN

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Consider lasting gift of being an organ donor

By Jill Grandas and Sam Ramos

Feb. 14 is the day many of us set aside to offer tangible expressions of love to those close to us. Flowers, cards and candy are often the order of the day, and the impact of those gifts can be found in the eyes of our loved ones. It has been said that “the eyes are the window to the soul,” and on this day each year, we should take a moment to remind ourselves that we can give the gift of love, but we can also give the gift of sight itself.

National Donor Day, established in 1998, encourages all Americans to register and become organ and tissue donors. Millions of us have used this day to sign up on the national donor registry, but the demand for transplantable organs and tissue continues to rise.

That’s especially true when it comes to corneal transplants.

The first successful transplant of a cornea occurred in 1906. This year, more than 40,000 Americans will have their sight returned to them because someone signed up to become a donor. Through our work, in the communities we serve, we have restored sight for more than 1,000 people on an annual basis. With a success rate of more than 95 percent, corneal transplants are one of the most successful transplantation procedures available to patients with surgically reparable blindness and the ongoing advancement of laser technology that continues to improve their effectiveness.

And with the commitment to our local communities, and health care professionals, our mission is to ensure that every person in need receives the gift of sight. Enhancing lives — through donation and transplantation of a cornea or ocular tissue — can be one of the greatest expressions of love imaginable.

Registering as an organ donor is simple. You just check the “Yes” box next to “organ donor” when applying for or renewing your Tennessee driver’s license. You also can sign up by visiting www.donatelifetn.org. More than 1.85 million Tennesseans have already registered to become organ donors.

The national goal is for 50 percent of licensed drivers in each state to be registered as donors. In Tennessee we are working toward that at 32 percent of our state’s drivers signed up on the donor registry, adding 3,500 new, potential donors every week.

It takes only a few minutes to register, but it can mean a lifetime of joy for a recipient who can once again see the loving smiles of family members on Valentine’s Day, next month during National Eye Donor Month, or any day. Today, as you celebrate those you love, think about what it would mean to give that gift to others through organ and tissue donation.
