



## **PRESS RELEASE**

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### **Eye Donors Save the Sight of 2,775 Cornea Recipients**

#### ***Become a Partner in Donation by Registering as a Donor During National Eye Donor Month This March***

**Columbia, Mo. (February 9, 2010)** – In 2009, 2,775 cornea transplant recipients escaped a lifetime of blindness thanks to the generosity of their eye donors and the work of Heartland Lions Eye Banks. Because of each donor’s remarkable gift, sight was saved for those suffering from an ocular disease, disorder or injury. Said Patricia, a cornea recipient, “I don’t know what I would have done without my donors. Who knows how many more years I would have been able to function without the surgery. Their gift means everything to me.”

During National Eye Donor Month this March, Heartland Lions Eye Banks, now in its 50<sup>th</sup> year of saving sight, encourages individuals to join them as Partners in Donation by pledging to become eye, organ and tissue donors. If you are older, have poor eyesight, or are afflicted with a non-communicable illness, eye donation may still be a viable option. In fact, 2,408 residents of Missouri, Kansas and Illinois donated the gift of sight through the Eye Bank last year alone.

For more information on eye donation, please visit [www.hleb.org](http://www.hleb.org). To pledge to become an eye, organ and tissue donor in your state, visit the Donate Life website at [www.donatelife.net](http://www.donatelife.net) for a full list of registries throughout the United States.

#### **About Heartland Lions Eye Banks**

Now celebrating its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, Heartland Lions Eye Banks is a division of the Missouri Lions Eye Research Foundation, a 501c(3) organization with the mission to preserve and restore the sight of people throughout Missouri and around the world. Since its founding, the Eye Bank has helped give the gift of sight to 33,000 people worldwide. The Eye Bank operates eight branches throughout Missouri, Kansas and Illinois with headquarters in Columbia, Mo. The Eye Bank is one of the five largest eye banks in the U.S. and offers high quality donor cornea tissue to transplant surgeons. In addition, the Eye Bank is committed to research for causes and cures for eye diseases.

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## **Background Information – National Eye Donor Month and Eye Donation**

### **What is National Eye Donor Month?**

Each year the eye banking community promotes the month of March as National Eye Donor Month in order to encourage eye donation in the communities that we serve. The first National Eye Donor Month was observed in 1983 as a result of a proclamation read by President Ronald Reagan to note this special public awareness month. Since then, a member of Congress has continued the tradition and reads a proclamation into the Congressional Record each March.

### **The Need For Eye Donation**

More than 46,000 individuals received the “gift of sight” last year thanks to a corneal transplant. These individuals suffered vision loss from a corneal disease or injury that compromises quality of life, making it difficult to accomplish everyday tasks such as reading or even recognizing faces at a distance.

Fortunately, through the medical miracle of corneal transplantation, sight restoration is possible. The transplantation process depends on the priceless gift of eye donation from one human to another. Thanks to the selflessness and generous choice to pledge to become an eye donor after death, one’s legacy of giving can live on in another’s restored sight.

### **Pledge to Become an Eye Donor**

You can register to become an organ and eye donor through your state’s registry system. While health conditions may restrict you from becoming an organ donor, eye donation restrictions are more lenient. If you are older, have poor eyesight or have a terminal, non-communicable illness, eye donation is still a viable option and a generous gift. For details on registering in your state, please visit the Donate Life website at [www.donatelife.net](http://www.donatelife.net).

### **About Heartland Lions Eye Banks**

Now celebrating its 50<sup>th</sup> year, Heartland Lions Eye Banks is a program of the Missouri Lions Eye Research Foundation, a 501(c)3 not-for-profit corporation with the mission to preserve and restore sight. The Eye Bank retrieves, processes and distributes the highest quality donor eye tissue to corneal surgeons. The Eye Bank services the Missouri, Kansas and Illinois areas with eight branches located in: Columbia, MO, Springfield, MO, St. Louis, MO, Kansas City, MO, Joplin, MO, Hays, KS, Wichita, KS and Springfield, IL.

In 2009, the Eye Bank gave the “gift of sight” to 2,775 individuals by providing donated tissue for corneal transplantation. In addition to providing quality tissue for transplant, the Eye Bank is also actively involved in its local eye banking communities in promoting donation. Likewise, the Eye Bank’s parent company, the Missouri Lions Eye Research Foundation, provides a variety of vision screening and care programs and services in Missouri. For more information, please visit us at [www.hleb.org](http://www.hleb.org) or contact Nicole Plegge, Public Relations, 314-428-4373 x115.

**Heartland Lions Eye Banks | [www.hleb.org](http://www.hleb.org)**

Columbia, MO | Springfield, MO | St. Louis, MO | Kansas City, MO | Joplin, MO  
Springfield, IL | Hays, KS | Wichita, KS