



**PRESS RELEASE**

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**Pledge to Give the Gift of Sight During National Eye Donor Month**

**Columbia, MO (January 20, 2009)** – Each year, more than 46,000 cornea transplants are performed in the U.S., allowing thousands to regain vision that was lost due to an ocular disease, disorder or injury. Thanks to generous donors who pledged to give “the gift of sight,” grateful individuals across the country have been granted a new outlook on life. During National Eye Donor Month this March, Heartland Lions Eye Banks encourages you to change the lives of others by pledging to become an eye and organ donor.

Registering as a donor takes just minutes, and almost anyone, including senior citizens, those with non-communicable illnesses and even those with poor eyesight, are eligible to donate. To find your state’s donor registry, visit [www.donatelife.net](http://www.donatelife.net).

Media outlets who wish to speak with a Heartland Lions Eye Banks representative about the importance of eye donation and new donor registry changes can contact Nicole Plegge at [nplegge@mleerf.org](mailto:nplegge@mleerf.org) or 314-428-4373, ext. 115.

The 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. The Eye Bank operates seven branches throughout Missouri, Kansas and Illinois with headquarters in Columbia, Missouri. HLEB is the fourth largest eye bank in the U.S. and offers high quality donor cornea tissue to transplant surgeons around the world. 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**

Over 46,000 individuals receive the “gift of sight” each year thanks to a cornea transplant. These individuals suffer vision loss from 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.

By registering on your state’s First Person Consent Organ and Tissue Donor Registry ([www.missouriorgandonor.com](http://www.missouriorgandonor.com) in Missouri or [www.lifegoeson.com](http://www.lifegoeson.com) in Illinois), you automatically indicate your intent to become an organ donor. Your legally-binding decision will be recorded in the online database and kept confidential until your passing. With this new system, your family will not have to make a decision about your final wishes.

Those in other states can find their registries at [www.donatelife.net](http://www.donatelife.net).

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

The 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 Heartland Lions Eye Banks services the Missouri, Kansas and Illinois areas with seven eye bank branches located in: Columbia, MO, Springfield, MO, St. Louis, MO, Kansas City, MO, Joplin, MO, Hays, KS and Springfield, IL.

In 2008, the Eye Bank gave the “gift of sight” to 1,748 people 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 Heartland Lions Eye Banks’ 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