

## Organ donations offer second chance at life

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By **KATE R. HOULIHAN** Staff Writer

Sabine Miller has two birthdays.

One is Jan. 25, the day she came into this world. The other is July 8, the day she received a small intestine organ transplant and felt like she had been given a second chance to live.

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**Sabine Miller of Bolingbrook speaks Sunday at Naperville Central High School during a dedication ceremony honoring organ and tissue donors and their families. Miller became a recipient of an organ donation in 2005.**

*Terence Guider-Shaw / Staff photographer*

ON THE WEB

To join the new organ and tissue donor registry in Illinois, a person can visit [www.lifegoeson.com](http://www.lifegoeson.com), visit any Illinois state driver's license facility, or call the Illinois Secretary of State's Organ/Tissue Donor program at 1-800-210-2106.

A new law was implemented in 2006, which now makes a person's decision to be a donor legally binding. Before the new law went into effect, that decision remained with the person's family members. Donors who registered before Jan. 1, 2006, must re-register with the Secretary of State's office to guarantee their wish to donate is fulfilled.

For more information on organ and tissue donation, visit [www.organdonor.gov](http://www.organdonor.gov).

Transplant recipients such as Miller, along with organ donors and donor families, gathered in Naperville Sunday to honor organ donors and families by planting a tree on the grounds of Naper Settlement.

The group first gathered in the cafeteria of Naperville Central High School to share stories and find comfort in the sacrifices of others.

Miller, a 33-year-old native of Vienna, Austria, met her husband Dan in Europe and moved to the U.S. eight years ago. They now live in Bolingbrook. Two years ago the couple's happy life was shattered when Miller's small bowel twisted around itself. The ensuing daily intravenous fluid feedings she endured left her liver severely weakened.

She was placed on a transplant list in March of 2005 and received the call that would change her world yet again in July of that year.

"I will never forget that phone call, that moment," Miller said. "I had never felt so scared, but I felt so relieved that I was given a second chance at life."

Miller has not met the family that donated the organ she received.

"Hopefully they'll be willing to meet me," she said. "I don't think a simple 'thank you' will be able to express my gratitude to them."

### **Family ties**

Sunday's event was the 17th annual hosted by Organ Transplant Support, Inc. Company president Mary Jane Bollinger said this year's turnout was less than in previous years, probably due to the sunny skies and warm temperatures.

But those who came were touched and moved by the stories of people like Chicagoan Maria Prado, who donated approximately 70 percent of her liver to her brother Luis last June. Prado, a native of Mexico, said the decision to help kin was easy.

"My life is not mine," Prado said. "My life is a gift that was given to me by my parents. I had a healthy life. My brother did not get to choose his medical situation ... I made that decision without any regrets. Looking back a year later, I gained a lot."

Those gains? A greater and deeper appreciation for family and its love and a chance to re-prioritize her life.

"Last Thanksgiving was the most wonderful I've had," Prado said. "We had all sorts of special prayers. My nephew thanked me for giving his dad another chance."

### **Nearly 2 million registered**

To date 18 trees have been planted in Naper Settlement through the partnership with Organ Transplant Support. One tree is planted each year with the exception of 2004, when two trees were placed in the ground at separate times. That second tree was to honor company co-founder Donald LaRocco.

This year a red sunset maple was planted in the footprint of the Caroline Martin Mitchell mansion.

"I want to thank every donor here today," said Margaret Pearson, the regional coordinator with the Organ and Tissue Donor program in the Secretary of State's office. "You face a hard decision at a critical time, but it means the world to someone on the transplant list."

Pearson said as of this month, two million people have signed up on the state's new organ/tissue donor registry. The new registry makes certain a person's decision to donate organs and tissue following death will be done. Before a new law went into effect in 2006, the decision was not legally binding and remained with the deceased's family.

Pearson said the number includes a portion of the six million who were originally signed up in addition to newcomers who have signified their intent to donate since the new confidential computerized database went live.

According to the Secretary of State's Web site, approximately 4,500 people in the state are on waiting lists for an organ transplant.

### **A new friendship**

Family members, donors and recipients were able to throw a ceremonial bit of dirt around the base of the tree. Two small arches with names and messages from donors or recipients or donor families were placed next to the maple temporarily.

Anne Hector scooped three shovels full of dirt for her 60-year-old husband Bill. Bill, a Naperville resident since 1985, underwent three transplants. His first was for a kidney in 1987, followed by a first pancreatic transplant in 1988 and a second pancreatic transplant in 2001. The couple has come to almost all of the tree-planting ceremonies.

While Bill does not know who provided him with the organs in his first two transplants, he does know the story behind his third. Hector said in 2001 he met the family of Lisa Corsini, a young nursing student from

Italy who was studying at the University of Illinois when she was killed in September 2001 while crossing the street.

Both Bill and his wife have gotten to know Lisa's parents, who live in Italy. They took the Corsinis to see the tree planted the year after Lisa's death provided Bill - and 32 others - with a new life.

"It was a very special moment for her family," he said. "We've gotten to see the human side of donation."

Now the Corsinis and Hectors are friends, bonded together by a tragedy that turned into something good. Smiling up at the sunny sky after his wife helped pour dirt around the tree, Bill couldn't help but be happy.

"This is about as good as it can get," he said.

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