



Student's video helps spread the word

Trivoli woman wins statewide contest for organ donation awareness

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BY STEVE STEIN

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NORMAL - Audrey Williams wants to be a television news reporter someday. On Friday, several television and newspaper reporters interviewed her.

The 20-year-old Farmington High School graduate and Illinois Central College sophomore was the center of media attention because she won a video contest created to promote organ and tissue donation.

Williams' video profiling 10-year-old heart transplant recipient Mikahla Thornton and her mother, Wendy Montgomery of Bloomington, was judged the best in the statewide collegiate competition.

The Illinois Secretary of State's McLean County Life Goes On Committee and Donate Life Illinois, a coalition of organ-donor agencies, were the contest sponsors.

Secretary of State Jesse White honored Williams at a news conference Friday at Illinois State University, and her video is online on YouTube.

White is on a statewide tour during National Donate Life! Month, making Illinois residents aware that anyone who applied to be an organ/tissue donor before Jan. 1, 2006, must re-register because of a change in the state law.

A person's wish to be an organ/tissue donor is now legally binding. Family consent or additional witnesses are no longer required.

Williams is studying mass communication at ICC. The Trivoli resident plans to continue those studies at Illinois State after she graduates from ICC.

After finding out about the video competition in early March, Williams went right to work. She learned about Mikahla through Life Goes On and Donate Life Illinois volunteer Moreena Tiede of Normal.

"The interviews I did with Mikahla and her mother (shot on the Peoria riverfront) took about a half-hour to 45 minutes, but the editing took about five hours," Williams said.

A reporter is supposed to be objective when telling a story, but Williams found it difficult to distance herself from Mikahla's inspirational story while putting together the video.

"Once I found out that many people need to reregister to be an organ and tissue donor, I sent an e-mail about that to my family, friends and co-workers," said Williams, an intern at Hoerr Construction Inc. in Peoria.

More than 3.2 million state residents have signed up for the new donor registry since Jan. 1, 2006. Nearly 5,000 state residents are on waiting lists for an organ transplant.

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