

# VISION

Chicago • Bloomington • A Subsidiary of Midwest Eye-Banks • Spring 2013



## Inside

**The Caleb Connection**  
Donor family and recipient find common bond

**In Our News**  
Eye-Bank launches *I Can!* Campaign

**Preventative Eye Care**  
The dangers of improper contact lens use



Visit the Illinois Eye-Bank website

# A note from our Executive Director



Spring is in the air — a time of renewal, with flowers blooming, trees showing new buds and the sight of birds returning to build their nests. After our long winter, we can all take joy in these signs of spring, but they are, perhaps, most beautiful to cornea recipients, seeing the world anew with their restored sight!

As the spring season began, we at the Illinois Eye-Bank were busy celebrating the 30th annual National Eye Donor Month, first proclaimed by President Ronald Reagan in 1983. Held every March, National Eye Donor Month raises awareness about the need for donated eye tissue. We recognized this special time of year with open houses at our Chicago and Bloomington facilities, allowing the communities we serve to see, first-hand, what we do.

Following National Eye Donor Month is National Donate Life Month in April. For 10 years now, National Donate Life month has recognized the generosity of those who have saved and enhanced lives through eye, organ, tissue, marrow and blood donation.

In this issue of *Vision*, we reflect on how eye tissue donation has forever changed the lives of donor families and recipients, while celebrating the memory of those who gave the gift of sight.

Save the date for our upcoming events, which help fulfill our mission of sight preservation and restoration.

In Bloomington, we will celebrate Dr. Catharine Crockett's 20 years of service as Medical Director at the Black & White, Night for Sight on Wednesday, May 29, 2013, at the Illinois State University Alumni Center.

June brings All Eyes On You, the Illinois Eye-Bank's 15th Annual Gift of Sight Gala, honoring Dr. Robert Feder and Susanna Negovan. The event will take place at The Peninsula Chicago on Thursday, June 27, 2013.

Visit us at [www.illinoiseyebank.org](http://www.illinoiseyebank.org) for more details. Hope to see you there!

Diane Hollingsworth  
*Executive Director*

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# IN OUR NEWS

## National Donor Sabbath

Continuing a national tradition since 1997, the Illinois Eye-Bank promoted and participated in National Donor Sabbath events this past November. Each year, the commemorative weekend encourages people of all faiths to promote and support donation discussions within their places of worship. This year, the Illinois Eye-Bank, in partnership with other Donate Life Illinois member organizations, held a successful “Blessing of the Donor” ceremony at Our Lady of Hope Catholic Church in Rosemont, Illinois. The Illinois Eye-Bank also participated in the Eye Bank Association of America’s Walk/Run for Vision. Donor wife Kathleen Fuller and bilateral cornea recipient/Illinois Eye-Bank board member Peter Wroblewski proudly represented the Eye-Bank during the festivities.

## Donate Life America Champion Awards

On February 28, 2013, during a Bulls home pre-game show, a special ceremony highlighted this year’s winners of the Donate Life Champion Awards! Since the fall of 2012, Donate Life America state affiliates have presented more than 50 Donate Life Champion Awards to athletes, teams and other role models within the sports community, all of whom have shown great dedication to increasing the number of registered eye, organ and tissue donors. Donate Life Illinois is proud to announce the following winners of the 2012 Donate Life Champion Awards: Anthony Diaz, Robin Deterding and family, Gina Ferguson, Nathan Weimer, Illinois Secretary of State Jesse White, the family of the late Walter Payton, the Derby Dames, Charles Tillman and family and the family of the late Paco Rodriguez. The Illinois Eye-Bank looks forward to sharing pictures from the event on our Facebook page!

## I Can! Campaign

The Illinois Eye-Bank is proud to announce the beginning of the *I Can!* Campaign, which kicked off during Eye Donor Month in March. The year-long campaign aims to provide educational information regarding eye, organ and tissue donation, eye health, and eye disease and injury prevention. Campaign displays will be located within a variety of optometry and ophthalmology clinics throughout the state. The display posters will feature different recipients, donor families and Illinois Eye-Bank staff members. If you see one of our campaign displays in your local optometry or ophthalmology office, please let us know what you think! If you know of a great location for our campaign, please contact Emily Lewis at [elewis@illinoiseyebank.org](mailto:elewis@illinoiseyebank.org).



## A Lions Connection



Lions Clubs have played a pivotal role in eye banking since the Illinois Eye-Bank’s inception in 1947. Lions Clubs and the Illinois Eye-Bank share a common mission to preserve and restore sight to the vision impaired. Because of this strong relationship, Lions Clubs of Illinois continue to support Eye-Bank services and programs with event participation and generous financial contributions. In 2012, the Naperville Noon Lions Club kindly provided a \$3,000 contribution to support the *I Can Make a Difference!* 5K Walk, honoring donors and donor families, while celebrating the gift of sight, life and mobility with recipients. In turn, the Illinois Eye-Bank provided registration bags for the Naperville Noon Lions Turkey Trot, held annually on Thanksgiving morning.

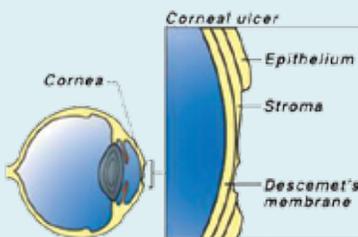
# Preventative eye care goes a long way



*Sincere thanks to IEB Board of Directors Vice Chair Randy Epstein, M.D., for contributing this article to Vision. Dr. Epstein is the Chief Executive Officer for Chicago Cornea Consultants, Ltd. and a Professor of Medicine at Rush University Medical Center.*

Do you wear contact lenses? If not, you likely know someone who does. According to the American Academy of Ophthalmology, nearly 36 million Americans wear contact lenses for corrective vision. Due to the widespread use of contact lenses, one would presume that wearers consistently practice good contact lens care. However, every year, ophthalmologists diagnose patients with serious corneal ulcers largely associated with the improper use of contact lenses and contact lens cases.

## What is a corneal ulcer and who is at risk?



*MedicaLook; Online Resource*

A corneal ulcer is an open sore on the cornea – the clear, dome-shaped piece of tissue that acts as a window to the outer part of the eye. Corneal ulcers

primarily result from varying eye infections. Fundamentally, contact lens wearers should be knowledgeable about proper usage through effective public education and valuable discussions between patients and eye care professionals.

## Corneal ulcers related to improper contact lens use are largely preventable.

Common prevention strategies include community awareness of risk factors for corneal infections; early recognition on behalf of the patient and eye care professional; and lastly, prompt referral in advanced cases to recommended eye health clinics.

There are additional simple steps for contact lens wearers to follow when maintaining good eye health:

First, do not sleep with your contacts in your eyes. Extended wear and overnight wear can both have harsh effects on the cornea.

Second, do not shower or swim while wearing your contacts.

Harmful bacteria and debris can wedge between the cornea and the contact lens. Also, make sure your contact lens solution hasn't expired, do not clean your contact lenses or contact lens case with tap water, and never re-use your contact lens solution. Finally, always clean your contact lens case by rinsing it with **sterile** contact lens solutions **only**, to minimize the possibility of infection. Replace your contact lens case at least every 3 months.

## For those that develop corneal ulcers, are they treatable?

As with any disease, treatment often depends on the individual case. Treatment for corneal ulcers may include a comprehensive microbiological work-up of the ulcers, and individualized therapy based on the initial smear and culture results. Severe cases can require corneal transplantation. This procedure involves the removal of the diseased tissue followed by the replacement of a healthy donated cornea. Recipients of cornea transplants often regain vision as had prior to the infection.

## Donated corneal tissue should be recognized as a gift, offering a second chance at sight.

Surgical human tissue is made available through eye donation. The Illinois Eye-Bank acts as a facilitator, ensuring that recipients receive the highest quality tissue for transplantation. As an invested eye care professional and a board member of the Illinois Eye-Bank, I continually encourage my patients to honor their gift of sight by raising awareness of the need for eye, organ and tissue donation in the state of Illinois.

# Emergency cornea transplants save young man's sight

**When Reilly Huber woke up one morning with a little eye pain, it didn't seem like a big deal.**

"It felt like I must have just scratched my eye, and it would go away within the day," he remembers.

But the pain didn't go away – in fact, it got worse. At work that day, Reilly kept going to the bathroom to flush his eye out with cold water, hoping for some relief. During one of those bathroom trips, he noticed a little white dot on his right eye.

"I knew this was trouble," he says.

He called his parents for advice. They decided a trip to the ophthalmologist was in order, so they set up an appointment for a few days later. But each day, the pain in Reilly's eye increased. He was unable to wear his contacts and his vision started to blur.

**At his appointment, his ophthalmologist diagnosed him with corneal ulcers, often the result of improper contact lens use, and prescribed eye drops to fight off infection.**

That night, though, things got worse. The pain, Reilly says, was too much for him.

Reilly's family took him back to the ophthalmologist. There, the doctor took samples from Reilly's eye and gave him powerful broad-spectrum antibiotic eye drops. They made the burning worse, and had to be administered every half hour, but Reilly managed to find some relief, thanks to numbing eye drops and painkillers.

It was a difficult course of treatment, but it seemed to be working. About two weeks after the pain began, Reilly's ulcers were receding and he seemed to be getting better.

But he quickly took a turn for the worse, putting his vision in jeopardy.



*Reilly Huber suffered from corneal ulcers before receiving sight-restoring transplants.*

"My right eye ruptured," he explains.

After being examined by three ophthalmologists who confirmed the rupture, he was sent into emergency surgery at Rush University Medical Center for a cornea transplant to repair his right eye.

Preventative surgery was also performed on his left eye, which was on the verge of rupturing as well. Unfortunately, it still ruptured, and he went back into surgery for an additional transplant the next morning.

Reilly stayed in hospital for nine days, under the careful watch of his ophthalmologist. When he was released, Reilly was required to take medication and use eye drops to further his recovery. At the time, Reilly was pursuing an Emergency Medical Technician license, which he had to put on hold while he healed.

Now, nearly two years later, his life is back on track, thanks to the gift of donated cornea tissue that restored his sight. He has returned to school, and with contact lenses, he can see 20/20. He has also become a strong advocate for donation, sharing his story wherever he can and encouraging others to sign up on the Illinois Organ/Tissue Donor Registry. It's his way of honoring his donors, and showing his gratitude to the Illinois Eye-Bank. He is thankful every day for the Eye-Bank's ability to act quickly, and provide the tissue needed for his time-sensitive surgery.

And after his harrowing experience, he always takes time to practice good contact lens care.



# The Caleb Connection

## Donor family and recipient find common bond

When Cyndy Loula realized that she would need a cornea transplant to treat her keratoconus, the heavy realities of such an operation were all too apparent to her.

“I knew that within a certain time frame, someone would be dying, and in the midst of the unspeakable grief of their family, I would become the beneficiary of their selfless act of donation,” she explains.

It was a treatment option she tried to avoid, even after initial treatments failed. With her vision getting worse, she quit her job as an adjunct faculty instructor at her local junior college because she could not drive at night or see well enough to grade papers.

She was also missing out on her children’s lives; even though she attended their various sports and musical activities, she was unable to see them as they played and performed.

She knew what she had to do.

Seven years after her diagnosis, she underwent cornea transplants to correct her vision in both eyes.

Her donors and their families were never far from her heart.

“I spent much time thinking about and praying for my donors in the days leading up to my transplants, and for their families after,” she remembers. “There is no way to really convey the emotions involved as a recipient, at least for me, of a transplant... It is very humbling to benefit from another family’s deep and personal loss.”

That kind of loss was something Cyndy knew all too well. Years earlier, she had lost her first child, a boy named Caleb.

“Having experienced the death of my own son allowed me a glimpse... into what these families were experiencing,” she explains.

Meanwhile, a Champaign family Cyndy had never met was grieving the loss of their son – coincidentally, also named Caleb – in a motorcycle collision.

His parents, Sheila and Terry Walters, expressed an interest in donating their son’s organs, but were told they would be unable to do so.

Hours later, hope came in the form of a phone call from the Illinois Eye-Bank, wanting to know if the Walters would be willing to donate Caleb’s corneas.

“We were thrilled beyond belief,” says Terry. “It was at that moment that we could smile and know a better day was coming.”

Caleb’s corneas were given to two people, a man and a woman.

Sheila wrote to the recipients, telling them about her son – the youngest of her three children. She told them about his desire to be a police officer, and his love of baseball and the Chicago Cubs.

Sheila quickly heard back from the man, who told her about seeing his daughter get married after his cornea transplant, but no response came from the woman.

**Cyndy had been shocked when she received Sheila’s letter, and learned that her donor’s name was Caleb.**

“I literally fell on the floor,” Cyndy recalls. That information, combined with some transplant-related complications and the sheer emotional wallop of the whole experience, left her unable to respond.

As time went by, both Cyndy and the Walters began to heal. Sheila and Terry started volunteering as Ambassadors for the Illinois Eye-Bank. When sharing their story, Sheila and Terry would display a teddy bear, an important keepsake constructed out of the clothes Caleb wore the day he passed away. In volunteering, they found comfort in hearing from recipients about how the gift of sight had changed their lives.

But still, Sheila wondered about the woman who had received Caleb’s cornea.

She had an unshakable feeling that she should write again, even though four years had passed since Caleb’s accident.

Cyndy received the letter on what would have been her Caleb’s 20th birthday.

This time, she wrote back.

Through letters, Sheila and Terry were able to get to know Cyndy, and vice-versa.

Finally, in December, they decided to meet. Cyndy offered to come to Urbana from Bolingbrook to share a meal with the Walters.

As soon as Cyndy walked in, something clicked.

“When Cyndy entered the restaurant, I was overcome with her presence,” Sheila says. “It was just as I had imagined in my mind.”

They talked for hours, like old friends. Sheila, Terry and their daughter Chelsea told Cyndy about Caleb, and about their lives without him. Cyndy told them about her vision struggles and what things had been like for her before and after the transplant. For Sheila, it was the happiest day she’d had since losing Caleb.

“I wanted to stay right there with Cyndy at the restaurant and not leave,” she says. “I couldn’t get enough of knowing her. Cyndy had so much love and gratitude in her heart that I was so pleased and proud to know that Caleb’s cornea had a wonderful home. I felt complete. I felt so relieved to know that Caleb’s cornea was doing just what we had hoped for — that it was making a difference in someone’s life.”

Since the meeting, Sheila and Terry have stayed in touch with Cyndy. All of them look forward to building the relationship in the years to come. In the aftermath of a tragedy, they have found their silver lining.

“I firmly believe that God does His best work in the darkest times of our lives, and the blessing and gifts that have come out of this entire situation, and the way our families have been intertwined as a result, is awe-inspiring,” says Cyndy. “Being able to learn more about how special Caleb was, and his passion for life, was inspirational. The gift of knowing Caleb’s family and being able to share this journey with them, which came about as a result of some of the darkest times of both of our lives, is nothing short of miraculous.”



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## COMMUNITY CONNECTION

### SAVE THE DATES!



### Black & White Night for Sight

Join us for a night of delicious  
hors d'oeuvres, drinks, music, auctions & more!

Wednesday, May 29, 2013  
6 p.m. to 9:30 p.m.  
ISU Alumni Center  
\$60 per ticket

For more information or to purchase  
tickets, visit [www.illinoiseyebank.org](http://www.illinoiseyebank.org)

## ALL EYES ON YOU

JOIN US FOR THE 15TH ANNUAL  
GIFT OF SIGHT GALA HONORING  
SUSANNA NEGOVAN AND  
DR. ROBERT FEDER.

THURSDAY, JUNE 27, 2013  
6 P.M. TO 9:30 P.M.  
THE PENINSULA CHICAGO

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