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Rose Parade float to feature floral portrait of Eastern student killed in bus accident

Staff Report

CHARLESTON — Ever since Cameron Chana was killed in a May bus accident in Mattoon, his parents have been honoring his life and his decision to be an organ donor.

Now, the efforts of Rob and Lori Chana of Clarendon Hills to honor their son will be part of a Rose Parade float on Friday in Pasadena, Calif. A floral portrait of Chana, an Eastern Illinois University graduate, will represent the Gift of Hope Organ and Tissue Donation Network in the Donate Life float in this nationally televised parade.

Chana had just graduated from EIU and was preparing to begin a master's in business administration program when he and Justin Sleezer of Yorkville, both 22, were killed in the double-decker bus accident on Illinois Route 16 in Mattoon. Working with Gift of Hope, Chana's parents agreed to organ and tissue donation.

Lori Chana said in a letter provided to Gift of Hope that the loss of any child is devastating, and no parent is prepared to deal with the myriad of issues when their child unexpectedly dies.

"Cameron continues to help his family, even in his death. When the organ donation representative approached us at the hospital, she provided us with a document that Cameron had executed years before. He had taken the decision of organ donation out of our hands by taking all the appropriate steps to be an organ donor long before his unexpected death.

"Our family is now focused on spreading the word and the importance of signing up to be an organ donor, focusing on the positive impacts it has on others in a time of extreme pain and grief," Mrs. Chana said.

The Donate Life float's floral portraits are images captured in flowers, seeds and spices to represent millions of people touched by organ and tissue donation, including donor families, living and deceased donors, transplant recipients and those waiting for a transplant. The Chanas helped decorate their son's portrait on Dec. 12.

"This year Gift of Hope will have its first-ever floragraphs on the Donate Life float," said Gift of Hope spokesman David Bosch in a press release. "Cameron's story has inspired many others, especially college-aged residents, to consider organ/tissue donation. We're incredibly proud to have Cameron featured on the float."

Nick Urig, a representative for Gift of Hope, said that the memory of Chana helped spur fellow EIU students to register more than 200 organ/tissue donors, claiming the winning spot in the 2009 Donate Life Illinois Campus Challenge.

Urig noted that Rob and Lori Chana also have memorialized their son by creating the www.CameronChana.org Web site, which includes a letter from a recipient of one their son's organ donations.

Mrs. Chana said her son worked at a local pharmacy while in high school, volunteered at Hinsdale hospital, and went on mission trips to The Czech Republic and The Dominican Republic. At EIU, the marketing major held several offices and headed up many activities as a member of the Sigma Pi fraternity.

"Cameron was truly gifted at developing relationships. As a son, brother, relative or friend, Cameron set the benchmark on caring, supporting and loving others," Mrs. Chana said.

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