

Homewood woman works for transplant awareness

April 26, 2009

BY [JOHN K. RYAN](#) Staff Writer

Homewood resident Angelique Marseille said she was scared, shocked and devastated when she first heard the news. Still in her 20s, Marseille was informed that her liver was failing and she had less than two weeks to live without a transplant.

"It was even scarier because I have an identical twin sister, and I worried she may have the same situation," Marseille said, recalling her reaction to the 1992 diagnosis.

Marseille discovered that the cirrhosis she suffered from was not because of alcohol or drugs, nor was it genetic.

She also learned that needing an organ, even in such dire circumstances, did not assure her of getting one. She was admitted to the University of Chicago and put on a list with hundreds of thousands of others in need of organ donations. She lay in bed thinking about her situation.

"I realized that finding the right match can be a long shot," Angelique said. "It was so strange. Up until then, I had no reason to ever be in a doctor's office or hospital."

Three weeks passed and her system was weakening. The family had called in a chaplain.

"I felt I was on my death bed. I couldn't hear, and my vision became blurred. I came to terms that I was dying," she said.

It was in that desperate moment that she received the news that a liver was available.

"I was excited, but I thought that a family in its darkest hours had to make that decision that ended up saving my life. It's a blessing that I'm still here, but I know somebody's life ended to make that so," Marseille said.

During her time waiting for a liver, Marseille was visited by a woman who was alive because of a liver transplant. The woman, who since has died, would spend long hours holding Marseille's hand and encouraging her to stay positive. The woman's kindness inspired Marseille.

"That's why I volunteer so much time today," said Marseille, the director of the South Suburban Task Force for Organ and Tissue Donation.

The married mother of two sons, both born post-transplant, has been volunteering ever since she regained her health.

Any given week she can be found speaking at colleges, churches or at local meetings about the importance of organ donation.

This month's National Donate Life Month has been particularly busy with a variety of events across the Southland, all while she supervises 22 volunteers.

Her job as a substitute teacher in Homewood School District 153 gives her flexibility to stay so busy with her efforts to encourage organ and tissue donations.

"There is a huge need out there right now. My job is to tell my story and get the word out," she said.

Dave Bosch, communications director for Gift of Hope Organ and Tissue Donor Network, said part of the demand for donors comes from a substantial change in the form of consent to donate organs made Jan. 1, 2006.

Before that date, donating organs required the legal next-of-kin to consent after a person died. Since that date, the decision to donate is carried out without the need for such consent. Bosch said anyone who signed an organ donation card before Jan. 1, 2006, needs to register again with the new consent format.

"It is why we need to get out there to educate people about the current state of donations even more," Bosch said.

According to the network:

- Historically, about 125,000 join the registry a month at Illinois driver's facilities; however, during the past several months, those numbers have dropped below 100,000 per month.
- Although 87 percent of Illinois adults say that registering to be an organ donor is the right thing to do, fewer than 50 percent are registered as donors.
- The number of organs available for the 4,700 Illinoisans waiting has dropped by nearly 20 percent since 2006.

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Angelique Marseille, director of the South Suburban Task Force for Organ and Tissue Donation, said some of the toughest challenges she faces in encouraging organ donations are the myths associated with it. Most have no validity to them, Marseille said. Among the top five myths are:

- **Myth:** can't have an open casket at my funeral if I donate my organs.

Fact: Organ donation doesn't change the option of having an open casket if preferred.

• **Myth:** Major religions do not allow it.

Fact: Marseille said she has never run across such a religion.

• **Myth:** I'm too old to donate organs.

Fact: What matters most is how healthy organs are when a person dies. Marseille said an 80-year-old person recently donated organs.

• **Myth:** Costs to my family will be high.

Fact: There are no costs associated with organ donation.

• **Myth:** Famous people in need of an organ transplant get moved up the list unfairly for available organs.

Fact: There's only one list and, if there is a good match, then it comes down to how sick the person is and how long a person has been on the list. Marseille uses Chicago Bear Walter Payton to dispute this myth. "He died waiting for a liver," she said.

If you'd like to help ...

Those seeking to donate organs or tissues can obtain more information at www.donatelifellinois.org.