

State Thanks Organ and Tissue Donors and Donor Families for Giving the “Gift of Life”

In the spirit of the Thanksgiving holiday, living organ and bone marrow donors or the family members of deceased organ, tissue and eye donors will soon be properly thanked by the State of New York for donating the most precious gift of all . . . the “Gift of Life.”

Due to the support of several legislators, including Senator Kemp Hannon and Assemblymen Sam Hoyt and James Conte, Governor George E. Pataki signed legislation in 2002 establishing the New York State Gift of Life Medal of Honor Program to recognize the selfless life-saving contributions of organ and tissue donors. As part of that legislation, the Governor has commissioned a medal to be presented to families of deceased organ and tissue donors and to living organ, bone marrow and peripheral blood stem cell donors.

According to the legislation, the medals will be distributed by local organ procurement organizations, tissue and eye banks, as well as transplant facilities to donors or families whose donation occurred in 2002. Donors and families involved in donation prior to 2002 should contact the recovery organization or transplant facility involved at the time of donation for more information.

The medal features a sugar maple tree, the official tree of New York State and comes in a box with two matching lapel pins that can be worn by donors or donor family members. The medal was designed and produced in such a way that it allows family members to have the medal affixed to the deceased donor’s head stone as a means of recognizing their life-saving decision, as well as be used by living donors as a commemorative of their altruistic act.

“On behalf of the more than 8,200 New Yorkers who are waiting for organ transplant, and the tens of thousands of more awaiting tissue transplants, we thank Governor Pataki and our legislators for supporting the Medal Program,” says Carla Williams, executive director of the New York Alliance for Donation, a statewide organization whose mission is to inform and educate the public about donation. “We can’t think of a more fitting way to honor New Yorkers for their generous donations and to encourage families to discuss the opportunity to give life’s most precious gifts.”

The New York Alliance for Donation is a nonprofit organization comprised of organ and tissue recovery organizations throughout New York State, health professionals and individuals whose lives have been affected by donation. The primary goal of the Alliance is to increase donation through education and awareness.

The Rochester/Finger Lakes Eye & Tissue Bank is a founding Board Member of the New York Alliance for Donation.