

2012

Donor mom reaches thousands

by Ray Gabel, Midwest Transplant Network



Connie Koch

When a person or an organization defines the “ideal” Ambassador or volunteer it should be based on a person like Connie Koch. She is outgoing, full of energy and incredibly dedicated.

Connie’s story goes back to 1998 when her youngest son, Jesse Harrison, passed away at the age of 17 in a car accident on Fourth of July weekend. When she found out he would not survive, she asked that his organs be donated. She did not know at that time that Jesse had already filled out an organ donor card. “To be a donor mom, unfortunately, you have to have lost a child; he saved and enhanced the lives of more than 60 people, so that makes Jesse my little hero,” said Connie.

Connie has taken what would be hard for any mom to deal with, and turned it into a mission to help others understand the importance of organ and tissue donation. With close to 14 years as an Ambassador for the Midwest Transplant Network, she has definitely made a difference.

She has given countless speeches at health fairs and community outreach events. As the former director of the United States Air Force community center at Whiteman Air Force Base, she ensures that every service person understands the importance of organ and tissue donation.

In 2004, a group of cyclists, called the Five Points of Life Riders, whose mission is to promote organ, tissue, blood, plasma and bone marrow donation, came through Knob Noster, Mo., the home of Whiteman Air Force Base. Connie jumped at the chance to help out. She arranged for these dedicated riders and crew to stay on base and to get a rare opportunity to sit in a stealth B-2 bomber. Connie was so moved by these committed individuals that she chose to join the group in 2006. She rode 3,000 miles with the team, which traveled from Ottawa, Canada to Miami (South Beach), Fla., continuing the legacy of her son, Jesse.

In 2012, Connie met Jesse’s heart recipient, John Frieling, and his wife Margaret. Connie and Margaret volunteered at the 2012 Missouri State Fair to promote the importance of organ and tissue donation. Unfortunately, John has since passed, but Connie and Margaret remain friends and Midwest Transplant Network Ambassadors.

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