

Organ recipients thank donor families

By [Bill Zlatos](#)

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Born two years ago without the left side of his heart, Jameson McKain was blue, his fingernails gray and his breathing labored.

His development did not even register on the medical charts, recalled his mother, Danielle McKain. He underwent four open- heart surgeries before he was 3 months old, and had a heart transplant at 11 months.

“The feeling that your child is waiting to survive based on the passing of another child was probably the most emotional time in my life. It was by far the most confusing time I ever had as a mother,” said Danielle McKain, 33, of Cecil.

The McKains were among about 1,200 organ recipients, their families, donor families and staffers of the Center for Organ Recovery and Education, or CORE, who attended its annual memorial ceremony, A Special Place, on Sunday at its headquarters in RIDC Park in O'Hara.

The ceremony gave organ recipients and families an opportunity to say thanks to the loved ones of those who donated organs to help others. Some people lingered at quilts containing squares dedicated to organ donors or at the Special Place, a granite wall that commemorates donors.

A bagpiper played “Amazing Grace.” Caged doves were released, and blue and green balloons soared against a backdrop of clouds.

Last year, 49,000 people in CORE's area of Western Pennsylvania, West Virginia and Chemung County in New York received transplants of skin, bones and heart valves, said Susan Stuart, president and CEO of the group. She said another 843 received the gift of sight through cornea transplants, and 101 are no longer tethered to oxygen tanks because of lung transplants. In addition, 317 people received kidneys last year; 139, livers; 51, hearts; 30, pancreases; and eight, intestines.

Nationally, more than 117,000 people are awaiting an organ transplant, including 8,000 in Pennsylvania. Every day, though, at least 18 people on the waiting list will die without getting an organ, including two from CORE's area.

Mary Ellen Dickson of Allison Park discussed her son, Scott Lang, the late men's basketball coach at La Roche College. He had a bad heart, collapsed during a practice on the court on Dec. 10, 2010, and died at 41. He had arranged to donate his tissue. Her husband, Bob, had donated a kidney to his brother.

Lang's mother urged others to donate their organs, too.

“Please don't wait,” she said. “Out there somewhere, the phone is ringing for someone else.”

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