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Miss Teen USA 2017 Seeks to Increase Organ Donation Registration

Kansas City native Sophia Dominguez-Heithoff lends voice to Green Ribbon Campaign

WESTWOOD, KAN. (August 1, 2018) — She calls herself “just a girl from Kansas City,” but Sophia Dominguez-Heithoff has accomplished much in her 18 years, winning the Miss Missouri Teen USA pageant and going on to claim the title of Miss Teen USA 2017. Now, as a Green Ribbon Champion for Midwest Transplant Network, she’s focused on saving and improving lives through organ and tissue donation.

Nearly 2,500 people in Kansas and Missouri are waiting for lifesaving organ transplants, but approximately a quarter of the population in the two states haven’t registered to be organ donors. Dominguez-Heithoff wants to change that. “It’s all about making sure people are educated and understand what it means to be a donor.”

The Green Ribbon Campaign is personal for Dominguez-Heithoff. Her cousin was an organ and tissue donor, and the impact of his selfless donation is very apparent. “Our family still receives letters of gratitude from those lives that he saved,” she says. In addition, both of her parents have spent their careers in healthcare—her mother is a registered nurse case manager and her father a senior program officer for the Health Care Foundation of Greater Kansas City.

Dominguez-Heithoff has used her voice before to influence change, lobbying legislators in Missouri on behalf of adults with developmental disabilities.

“We are proud that Sophia is using her substantial influence to help us increase awareness of the need for organ and tissue donors,” said Jan Finn, president and CEO of Midwest Transplant Network, the organ procurement organization serving Kansas and the western two-thirds of Missouri. “As a registered organ donor, she will undoubtedly inspire others to learn the facts and join the registry themselves.”

Some facts about organ, eye and tissue donation that Dominguez-Heithoff wants everyone to know include:

- A single donor can save up to eight lives and improve up to 75 more.
- Anyone can register to be a donor, regardless of age or medical history.
- All major religions in the U.S. support organ, eye and tissue donation—it is viewed as a final act of love and generosity.

- Your decision to donate will never interfere with your own medical care. Organ, eye and tissue recovery takes place only after all efforts to save your life have been exhausted and death is legally declared. The doctors working to save your life are entirely separate from the medical team involved in recovering organs and tissues after death.
- Donating life is a gift. Neither you nor your family or estate will incur any costs related to your donation.
- In both Kansas and Missouri, the Organ and Tissue Donor Registry is first-person authorization. That means the choice to donate belongs to you and you alone. No one else may overturn your decision, and your family is not required to give final authorization before donation can occur. If you are 17 or younger, you may join the donor registry, but your parents or legal guardians will remain responsible for making the final decision. The registry will automatically update your status when you turn 18.
- The waiting list and need for organ transplants is ethnically diverse. Nationwide, minorities represent the largest group waiting for organ transplants—59 percent—and Caucasians account for 41 percent. While race is not a factor in determining a donor match, compatible blood types and tissue markers are more likely to be found among members of the same ethnicity, so it is important to have a large number of registered donors from all racial/ethnic backgrounds.
- Among U.S. adults, 95 percent are in favor of organ donation. While overall 73 percent of Kansans and 75 percent of western Missourians are registered organ donors, minority groups in each state represent a smaller percentage of registered donors.

The public will soon see Dominguez-Heithoff in her role as a Green Ribbon Champion in a variety of places across the region and online. Viewers can watch her tell her story in a video featured on ShareLifeMidwest.com, where they can also join the donor registry for Kansas or Missouri. And, as Dominguez-Heithoff will attest, signing up is fast, easy and rewarding.

Green Ribbon Champions—a diverse group of local leaders and well-known personalities who are passionate about making a difference in their communities by advocating for organ donation—are part of a new public awareness campaign from Midwest Transplant Network. H&R Block President and CEO Jeff Jones was the first Green Ribbon Champion. KMBC 9 News Chief Meteorologist Bryan Busby was recently announced as a Green Ribbon Champion as well.

About Midwest Transplant Network

Midwest Transplant Network (MTN) has been connecting lives through organ donation since 1973. As the federally designated not-for-profit organ procurement organization (OPO) for Kansas and the western two-thirds of Missouri, MTN provides services, which include organ procurement and surgical tissue and eye recovery, laboratory testing and 24-hour rapid response for referrals from hospital partners. Midwest Transplant Network ranks in the top quartile nationally among OPOs, which reflects the organization's quality, professionalism and excellence in partnerships throughout the region. For more information, visit mwtn.org.

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