



## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **ROSE BOWL PARADE FLOAT WILL INCLUDE HOUSTON TRANSPLANT RECIPIENT**

*Houston mother & daughter to represent Donate Life Texas in 2016 Rose Bowl Parade*

**Houston, TX (August 6, 2015)** – Donate Life Texas proudly announces its 2016 delegates for the Donate Life Rose Parade Float, Marilyn and Monica Burnom. The mother and daughter pair from Houston are eager to share the story of their journey as a way to promote education about the need for organ, eye and tissue donation and the importance of joining the Donate Life Texas donor registry.

For more than eight years, Marilyn has been an employee of the Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS), an organization that plays an essential role in making donor registration easy and convenient. Today Marilyn is a dedicated champion for donor registration after her daughter Monica endured a five-year wait on the national waiting list for the kidney transplant she needed to survive. (See attached for the full story.)

Since the Donate Life Texas donor registry was created in 2005, the Texas Department of Public Safety Driver License Division has been the single most effective registration portal. In fact, 98 percent of Donate Life Texas' 7.6 million registered donors joined while applying for or renewing a driver license or ID card.

"Marilyn and Monica's story gives us a unique opportunity to recognize the unparalleled contributions of the Texas Department of Public Safety," says Donate Life Texas executive director Suzy Miller. "By representing Donate Life Texas at the Rose Parade, Marilyn and Monica can shine a light on how this work truly helps save lives."

The Donate Life Rose Parade float has become an annual parade tradition to celebrate donation and its unique power to save, heal and transform lives. The float is accompanied each year by donor families, living donors and transplant recipients. It is also decorated with floral portraits, called floragraphs, of donors who have given the ultimate lifesaving gift of organ, eye and tissue donations.

Marilyn and Monica are also committed to helping educate others about the rising need for transplants, which is disproportionately high in some diverse communities, due in large part to the prevalence of high blood pressure and diabetes – both of which can contribute to kidney and heart disease.

In Texas, more than 45 percent of the nearly 10,800 people on the transplant waiting list for a kidney are Hispanic or Latino, and more than 25 percent are African American. Though organs are not matched with recipients according to race/ethnicity, compatible blood and tissue type play a critical role and are more likely to be found among people of similar ethnic backgrounds. A greater diversity of donors has the potential to make more transplants possible and to improve transplant outcomes.

Since seats on the Donate Life Rose Parade Float are reserved only for transplant recipients and donor family members, Monica will ride on the float while her mother watches proudly from the Donate Life section of the stands. Both will participate in special events leading up to the parade, including a ceremony to place roses dedicated with personal messages from Texas transplant recipients, donor families and other donation advocates in the float's Rose Dedication Garden.

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## DONATE LIFE TEXAS ROSE PARADE REPRESENTATIVES (continued)

### **About the Donate Life America Rose Parade Float**

Since its debut on New Year's Day 2004, the Donate Life Rose Parade float has become the world's most visible campaign to inspire people to become organ, eye, and tissue donors. Now in its thirteenth year, Donate Life's Rose Parade float participation is celebrated at hundreds of events nationwide.

In honor of the 2016 Tournament of Roses Parade theme "Find Your Adventure," the Donate Life float is entitled "Treasure Life's Journey." Like an oasis discovered during a journey across the desert, organ, eye, and tissue donation saves lives, renews hope, and sustains people, families, and communities.



The float features a colorful caravan with 60 donor floragraphs that honor the invaluable treasure of the gift of life. Twenty-four float riders continue to share in life's adventures through the gift of organ donation. Sixteen living donors will walk beside the float carrying provisions of fruit accented with flowers, symbolizing the life-sustaining gifts that have been given. And Dedicated Roses placed by families create floral jewels that ornament the base of the float.

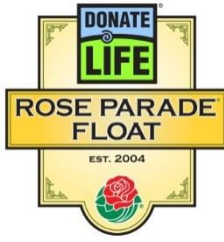
**Resources:** Rose Parade graphics and more information available [here](#).  
[Dedicate a rose](#) for the float's Rose Dedication Garden.

### **About Donate Life Texas**

The Donate Life Texas organ donor registry started in 2006 and celebrated its 7 millionth registration in January 2015, making it among the fastest growing registries in the country. The registry is supported by all three Texas organ procurement organizations, LifeGift, Southwest Transplant Alliance and Texas Organ Sharing Alliance and the eleven eye and tissue banks serving the state.

Signing up is fast and easy at [DonateLifeTexas.org](http://DonateLifeTexas.org) and provides a way for individuals to make their decision to be an organ, eye and tissue donor known to the right people at the right time, automatically. It also provides legal consent for donation after death, which removes the burden of decision-making from the family during an already difficult time.

Donate Life Texas is part of the Donate Life America not-for-profit alliance of national organizations and local partners across the United States, serving as a national voice and inspiring all people to save and heal lives through organ, eye and tissue donation.



**Monica and Marilyn Burnom**  
Donate Life Texas delegates to the  
2016 Donate Life Rose Parade Float.

## A MOTHER AND DAUGHTER'S JOURNEY

### Before

Marilyn Burnom has been with the Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS) since the state's driver license office staff first began asking license and ID applicants about joining the Donate Life Texas organ, eye and tissue donor registry. However, she wasn't aware of the true value of the program at first.

"To be honest, I wasn't sure about it myself. I didn't really want to think about what donating an organ meant," confesses Marilyn. But, that was then.

### Everything changed

In the summer of 2007, Marilyn's 25-year-old daughter Monica was diagnosed with lupus, an autoimmune disease that can cause extensive and irreversible organ damage. She received aggressive treatment, but by the following winter, the disease had so ravaged her kidneys that Monica needed regular dialysis treatments. In June 2009, just two years after her original diagnosis, Monica's doctor at the Houston Methodist J.C. Walter Jr. Transplant Center added her to the national transplant waiting list.

Determined, Monica pushed herself to keep striving for her goals. She continued working, teaching Sunday school and staying active, even when things got really tough. If it was hard for Monica, it was equally difficult for her mother.

"She's is so strong, but she's my baby," Marilyn says with a tiny quiver in her voice. "Watching her go through that and not being able to help her broke my heart a little every day."

### Waiting, praying and offering hope

Trusting in faith, the two waited for five long years, praying all the while. Monica prayed for a second chance, ready to get back to her once busy and active life. Knowing her daughter couldn't survive on dialysis indefinitely, Marilyn prayed the organ Monica needed to live would come in time.

On the night of February 28, 2014, the call came. Though it was the answer to their prayers, it was bittersweet. They both knew that, while they celebrated a new start, another family was grieving a devastating loss.

After a successful surgery, Monica has a new kidney and a renewed sense of purpose. She has a full-time accounting job and is pursuing her MBA. Monica also volunteers to educate people about lupus, kidney disease and organ donation. She will soon complete training as a patient advocate at the dialysis center where she once spent many long hours as a patient. With a slight lift of her chin, Monica says that her new goal is to offer hope to those who are now on the same journey she took not so long ago.

### No holding back now

After her transplant, Monica was told that her kidney donor had registered with Donate Life Texas through a DPS driver license office. This news gave Marilyn an entirely new perspective on the powerful role the DPS staff play in providing a simple and convenient way for people to join the Donate Life Texas organ, eye and tissue donor registry.

Now, she makes a point to speak openly and passionately with co-workers, friends, fellow church-goers and just about anyone, about the benefits of registering. She has first-hand experience to knowledgably help others make informed decisions about this life-saving donation opportunity.

“My daughter is alive right now because someone made a thoughtful and life-saving choice to register as a donor when getting a card at the DPS,” she says. “People may see it only as a box to check on a driver’s license application, but it’s important for them to know it’s really a chance to be someone’s hero.”