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Organ donors saluted

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JOHNSTOWN — Dino Persio of Ebensburg knows he owes the last 15 years of his life to the compassion of a swimming accident victim's family who were facing heart-wrenching decisions in 1998.

"I am able to stand here today because of families like yours," Persio told those attending the annual Organ Donor Recognition Wall Rededication ceremony Wednesday at Memorial Medical Center in Johnstown.

The 24-year-old man had died at Allegheny General Hospital in Pittsburgh just as Persio was fighting for his life with liver failure across town at UPMC Presbyterian.

"They said I had the type of liver disease that very few people get, and that very few people survive, except with a new liver," Persio told the audience of organ donor families in Memorial Atrium courtyard.

A few weeks before his tragic death while swimming, the young man had just told his family that he checked the "organ donor" box on his driver's license renewal.

That conversation helped his family honor that request and saved Persio's life, he said.

"That is how important it is to make known our wishes," Persio said.

Susan LeComte of Ashville remembers the conversation with her son, Daniel, in 2010.

A few weeks before the 19-year-old died from a traffic accident, he confronted his mother and her friend at their home about her insistence that he check the organ donor box.

Susan LeComte remembers explaining the importance to Daniel, based on her experience as a trauma center nurse in Maryland. She told him to donate her organs if she would die.

"He gave me a kiss and he said, 'OK, I trust you,'" Susan LeComte said at Wednesday's event. "He gave me his approval."

Ron McCombie of Cresson knew his wife, Drinan, had thought about organ donation.

The 43-year-old had developed severe diabetes before a brain aneurysm took her life last year.

“She told me, no matter what, if there is nothing the doctors could do for her, not to drag things on, but to help as many people as she could,” McCombie said before visiting the donor wall on Wednesday.

“She told me that all the time.”

The need is great, said Shanté Wells, director of professional services for the Center for Organ Recovery and Education, explaining that there are about 117,000 on the organ donation waiting list.

“Every 12 minutes, a new name is added to the list,” Wells said. “Eighteen people a day die while they are waiting.”

The 34 names added to the CORE wall this year represent 56 lives saved with major organ donations and 1,500 people whose quality of life was improved with eye and tissue donations, said Dr. S. Lee Miller, surgery chairman at Memorial.

“Countless” more were helped through research made possible by organ and tissue donation, Miller said.

Here is a list of the 34 names and photos added to the organ donation wall in honor of their gifts of life:

George Adams III

Lisa Balderson

William Brolley

David George

Patricia Gregory

Cynthia Sponsky Hale

Neal Hammond

Robert Hillegass

June Hinson

Robert Hohman

John Kawchak

Joseph Lehman

Shane McCartan

Drinan Marie McCombie

Kerry McCulley

Lawrence McDowell Sr.

John McMillan Jr.

Ida Miller

Allen Nickol

Tiffany Patterson

Michael Pcola

David Peters

Donald Peters

Donald Plunkard

Brian Polk

Mary Ravenscraft

Annette Rector

Steven Schrader

Marsha Shockey

Ralph Spicher

Dale Thomas

Richard E. Thomas

Robert Walter

Joseph Weinzierl

Keith Wilkinson

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