



Contact:

Erika Novak
Erika.Novak@sightlife.org
206-414-7146

Cornea donor Ernie Eichhorn Jr. to be honored on 2017 Donate Life Rose Parade Float

Sponsored by SightLife, donor family met cornea recipient and will attend parade festivities

Seattle (December 13, 2016) – [Ernie Eichhorn, Jr.](#) of Lacey, Washington was only 34 when he died in a car accident on the job. His father, Ernie Sr., and family have since found some solace in the fact that he was able to donate his corneas, restoring sight to two women in North Carolina.

On New Year's Day, the Eichhorn family will join [SightLife](#) in honoring this gift of sight with a "floragraph" (portrait created from flowers and other organic materials) of Ernie Jr. on the 2017 Donate Life Rose Parade Float. Sponsored by SightLife, Ernie Jr. and his family will represent cornea donors and families across the country whose gifts have restored sight to others in need, transforming thousands of lives. Corneal surgeon Dr. Keith Walter, who performed the two transplants made possible by Ernie Jr.'s gift, also will attend the Donate Life Rose Parade Float festivities.

The floragraph of Ernie Jr. was created by artists and then completed by his family, friends and cornea recipient, Gail Ray. Ernie Sr. traveled across the country to watch Ray put the final touches on the floragraph after a special—and very emotional—meeting facilitated by SightLife in November in Winston-Salem, N.C.

"I've thought a lot about my donors and fact that people had to die to restore my sight. I'm so grateful for the gift that I've received," said Ray, who suffered from Fuchs' Dystrophy and has now had two corneal transplants. "Going from knowing I was going to be blind to having normal vision is amazing. This has changed my life."

The 2017 Donate Life Rose Parade Float, [Teammates in Life](#), reflects the parade's theme "Echoes of Success" by reminding us that no one succeeds alone. We all thrive by working together and pulling in the same direction. The float depicts a spectacular Polynesian catamaran, which will be propelled by a team of 24 organ, eye, and tissue transplant recipients rowing in unison with strength gained from their donors. The sails of the vessel will feature 60 floral portraits of donors interwoven with Polynesian designs and patterns. Just as the donors' gifts empower the lives of others, the sails help power the catamaran on its journey. Twelve living donors will walk alongside the float carrying flowers in celebration of the life they have given to others and the quality of life they continue to enjoy themselves.

About SightLife

Founded in 1969 and based in Seattle, SightLife is the only global health organization working relentlessly to eliminate corneal blindness worldwide by 2040. Sight restoration has a profound impact on recipients, their families and communities—no one should have to wait to experience the joy and possibilities that vision brings. With the launch of its subsidiary, SightLife Surgical, in the fall of 2016, SightLife became a combination non-profit and for-profit organization. This mission-driven structure maintains the non-profit status of SightLife as the parent organization and adds a for-profit "engine" to power and accelerate achievement of the mission. With partners in 33 countries, SightLife is increasing the number of corneal transplants performed each year to transform millions of lives around the globe.

###