

Virginia's First Lady Speaks at Rededication Event

UNOS presents first NDM award of excellence

In a poignant ceremony held the evening of June 21, UNOS rededicated the National Donor Memorial (NDM) on the grounds of its headquarters in Richmond, Va. A number of the members of the UNOS board of directors, who were in Richmond for their biannual meeting, also were able to participate.

UNOS staff welcomed the guests, including several participants from the national advisory committee that guided the design of the memorial in 2003.

"A number of the people who gave their time and talents for the development of the memorial took part in its groundbreaking in 2003, but they hadn't been able to see the memorial in its final form," said UNOS executive director **Walter Graham**.

"We are honored to welcome them back," he added, "representing the hundreds of thousands of people personally touched by the experience of organ and tissue donation."

Maureen McDonnell, First Lady of Virginia, was a featured speaker at the event, and she took the occasion to speak for the first time at a public event about the fact that her sister, **Ellen Gardner**, received a lung transplant in January.

"Because an individual signed an organ donor card, or a courageous family is willing to make the gift of life, every candidate on a waiting list has hope," she said. "And thanks to the talented medical teams, their lives are renewed and transformed."

"My family," she said, "is now part of the UNOS family."

UNOS PRESENTS FIRST NDM AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE

Another highlight of the ceremony was the presentation of the first National Donor Memorial award for excellence to donor parents **Milt and Janet Bemis** of David City, Neb.

In 1984, their two-year-old son, Matthew, became a donor after an accidental drowning. The family has maintained an exceptionally close relationship with the recipient of Matthew's liver, **Lily Mandel** (now **Lily Allen**) and her family. (Allen and her husband also attended the NDM rededication.)

The Bemis family has generously volunteered for many years with Nebraska Organ Recovery System, advocating donation education in area schools and supporting state legislation to promote donation. The Bemises and the Mandels, including Lily, participated together in the 2009 Tournament of Roses Parade, where Matthew was honored with a floragraph on the Donate Life "Stars of Life" float.

Nominations for the NDM Award for Excellence were sought from all OPOs in the United States, with an emphasis on "unsung heroes" who have not received national recognition.


For this initial award, 21 nominations were received. All nominees have received a certificate of recognition.



TOP: Virginia's First Lady Maureen McDonnell (right) and her sister, Ellen Gardner, a double-lung recipient. McDonnell was a keynote speaker at UNOS' rededication of the National Donor Memorial. BOTTOM: Donor parents Janet and Milt Bemis (front) are the winners of the first National Donor Memorial award of excellence. Beside them is liver recipient Lily Mandel Allen and her husband, Brian. The Bemis' son, Matthew, was Lily's liver donor.

"It is heartwarming to see the efforts of these volunteers to spread the word about donation throughout our nation," said **Jill McMaster**, OPTN/UNOS vice president for patient and donor affairs. "They represent just the 'tip of the iceberg,' as there are thousands of others nationwide contributing to this effort."

The NDM, supported entirely by private and charitable contributions (see p. 26), honors organ and tissue donors and their families who have saved and enhanced the lives of others.

The memorial includes a 10,000-square-foot garden on the grounds of UNOS' headquarters as well as a website, donormemorial.org. The website currently displays more than 900 tributes from family and friends of organ and tissue donors, transplant recipients and others touched by donation. 

 For more about the National Donor Memorial, visit donormemorial.org. The website includes a narrated tour of the memorial and an explanation of the symbolism of its various components.