Upcoming Hope for the Holidays Events

The holiday season is here, and we look forward to celebrating donor heroes at upcoming events in Kansas City, Wichita and Columbia. Keep reading to learn more about each event. Registration for all three events is open now.

Wichita Hope for the Holidays

Wednesday, Nov. 29 • 6 – 8:30 p.m.

Exploration Place • 300 N. McLean Blvd., Wichita, KS 67203

Please join Midwest Transplant Network (MTN) staff and fellow donor families for a festive evening at Exploration Place. The exhibition hall will be transformed into an artctic adventure with activities for all ages. Doors will open to registered MTN families at 6 p.m., and we will have a tree-lighting celebration at 7 p.m. MTN will provide sweet treats. “Give Hope. Share Life.” T-shirts will be available to purchase for $5.

We ask each family member attending this event to bring an ornament in honor of your loved one to hang on MTN’s holiday tree. This tree will remain on display at Exploration Place throughout the holiday season.

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Writing to Transplant Recipients

The decision to write your loved one’s transplant recipient(s) is a very personal choice. There is no time limit or protocol for when to write or which party should initiate correspondence. Whether or not you decide to write is your choice.

If you make the choice to write, here are some ideas for what you could include, keeping in mind not to reveal your contact information:

- Use first names only.
- Use the region in which you live (i.e., Midwest, South, etc.).
- Share your loved one’s job or occupation, hobbies and/or interests.
- You may share your family situation, such as marital status, children or grandchildren. (If you provide names, provide first names only).
- Treat religious comments in a sensitive manner.
- It’s OK to include appropriate family pictures.

When you are ready to send the letter, please place it in an unsealed envelope and include a separate piece of paper with your full name, your loved one’s full name and the date of donation. Place those items in another envelope and mail it to:

Midwest Transplant Network
Donor Family Services
1900 W. 47th Place
Westwood, KS 66205

Many people ask the question, “Will I hear from my loved one’s recipient?” The answer is unknown. The recipients may or may not respond. Many recipients have said that they are overwhelmed with emotion and have difficulty expressing their gratitude. They have also been, and may still be going through, a very difficult health condition and are still recovering.

Another frequently asked question is, “Will I ever be able to meet or communicate directly with my loved one’s transplant recipients?” MTN will facilitate a donor family’s request to receive direct communication when the following has been met:

- Each party has written to the other at least one time anonymously.
- Both parties have expressed a desire to exchange contact information.
- Both parties have returned a signed consent and release form to MTN.

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Register to be an organ, eye and tissue donor at ShareLifeMidwest.com

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**Kansas City Hope for the Holidays**
**Tuesday, Dec. 5 • 6 – 9 p.m.**
**Union Station Kansas City • 30 W. Pershing Road, Kansas City, MO 64108**

Please join MTN staff and fellow donor families to watch the holiday movie “The Polar Express” at Union Station’s Regnier Extreme Screen Theatre. Doors will open to registered MTN families at 6 p.m., and the movie will start at 7 p.m. Donate Life T-shirts will be available to purchase for $5.

We ask that each family member attending this event bring an ornament in honor of your loved one to hang on MTN’s holiday tree. The ornaments that attendees brought to this event last year will be on this tree as well. Union Station guests can see the tree throughout the holiday season.

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**Columbia Hope for the Holidays**
**Tuesday, Dec. 12 • 4:30 – 7 p.m.**
**Warm Springs Ranch • 25270 Highway 98, Boonville, MO 65233**

Please join MTN staff and fellow donor families as we enjoy all that Warm Springs Ranch has to offer. Doors will open to registered MTN families at 4:30 p.m. Everyone will have an opportunity to take a tour of the facility and interact with the Clydesdales. Donate Life T-shirts will be available to purchase for $5. During the event, hors d’oeuvres will be served, and each family can honor their loved one by participating in our sand ceremony and holiday tree lighting.

We ask that each family member attending this event bring an ornament in honor of your loved one to hang on MTN’s holiday tree.
The Journey of Grief
Adapted from “What’s Your Grief?”

The road forward after the loss of a loved one is not straight and flat, and often, you don’t have a guide or a compass to help you along the way. There are hills (sometimes mountains), and other times, you may be at a crossroads and feel unsure which direction to take. You may just be starting on your journey, or you may have been on this path for some time. Others may have started their own grief journey at the same time, but are either further ahead or behind, causing anxiety from the pressure to “move on” if others are further along in their journey, or doubt that you haven’t truly grieved the loss of a loved one if your journey moves faster than others.

Navigating grief is universal, in that every person will at one time or another experience a catastrophic loss in their lives and find themselves in the challenge of continuing life without a special loved one. It can be comforting knowing that you are not alone in your feelings, but it can also set you up to feel disconnected because if everyone has a journey, then what makes yours different?

What makes your grief journey special is the relationship you had with the loved one you lost. No one else had the same bond you had with your loved one. Your relationship with them in life was unique, and your journey in life after their loss will also be unique. The duration and intensity of the grief you feel compared to others will vary, and allowing your grief journey to change over time is one of the greatest gifts you can give yourself along the way.

The beginning stages of grief may seem to be only negative emotions, which can feel overwhelming and without an end in sight. Learning to live with grief means accepting that your journey will not always be this way. The ebb and flow of pain after a loved one’s death may surprise or frustrate you; in fact, you may even feel dysfunctional for a while. Making it through your journey requires you to be gentle with yourself every step of the way.

You might find some people stop validating your loss since it wasn’t as acute to them, or you may experience secondary losses without your loved one’s presence. Accepting grief’s ongoing presence in your life, throughout all the various parts of your journey, creates more room to experience comfort and retain and revisit positive memories. By acknowledging your grief journey and letting it just “be,” you can keep an ongoing connection with the person who died.

As you change your relationship with grief by altering how you respond to it, cope with it and conceptualize it, you will likely also find hope and healing. Grief is one instance where there is a strong benefit to accepting its ongoing presence in your life, because doing so creates more room for comfort, positive memories and an ongoing connection with your loved one.
Donor Family Days Recap

MTN hosted donor family days at Tanganyika Wildlife Park and the Kansas City Zoo & Aquarium. Between both events, over 1,800 donor family members and friends spent the day honoring donor heroes and experiencing all that the zoos had to offer.

Tanganyika Wildlife Park is home to more than 500 animals, and prides itself on giving visitors an interactive wildlife experience. Attendees enjoyed a day full of animal meet and greets, including petting giraffes, kangaroos and penguins.

Donor families and loved ones visiting the Kansas City Zoo & Aquarium could experience the zoo's newest attraction, Sobela Ocean Aquarium, which is home to nearly 8,000 animals in 34 ocean habitats.

Many families also purchased T-shirts at both events. The 2023 T-shirt design allows donor families the opportunity to tie-dye the shirts themselves or to decorate them individually in honor of their donor heroes.