

Rose Parade Float Inspires Worldwide Audience to “Donate Life”

By Bryan Stewart

On New Year’s Day, a bold new approach to promoting organ and tissue donation was inaugurated as the Coalition on Donation Rose Parade float and its rider contingent of donor family members, living donors and transplant recipients joined “America’s New Year Celebration.” As the float traveled down Colorado Blvd. as part of the 115th edition of the Tournament of Roses Parade, it carried the hopes and dreams of 56 official partners, hundreds of volunteers and untold millions touched by donation and transplantation.

The project was originally proposed by lung recipient and TRIO member Gary Foxen of Orange, Calif., who felt a Rose Parade float would be a special way to honor donors, celebrate the gift of life and put a human face on the subject of donation and transplantation.

Carrying the theme *A Symphony of Life*, the float featured two gardens connected by a dramatic 50-foot bridge, symbolizing the living bridge between organ and tissue donors and recipients. The float and its riders attracted extraordinary media coverage, with more than 75 stories in national, regional and local news outlets in major markets including Los Angeles, Chicago, Cleveland, Miami, Milwaukee, Las Vegas, Columbus, Memphis, Buffalo. On top of an estimated 800,000 parade spectators, the number of television viewers watching the parade on CBS, NBC, HGTV, WB affiliates and Univision totaled approximately 40 million nationwide, with another 200 million worldwide.

The week leading up to the parade was marked by a media day at the float decorating site; the “Overture,” an invitation-only reception for float riders and official partners at the historic Castle Green; the timeless tradition of float judging; and a glorious debut in front of nearly 300 well-wishers in the Coalition on Donation’s cheering section. For an illustrated journal of the 2004 float’s journey from start to finish, go to <http://www.onelegacy.org/prod/components/rose/media/images.html>.

Notably, in the month-long buildup to New Year’s Day, more than 700 volunteers—many of them transplant recipients and donor family members—donated hundreds of hours to decorate the float. The dedication and commitment that each volunteer brought to the float was apparent; in fact, float builder Phoenix Decorating, who has built hundreds and hundreds of Rose Parade floats over the years, commented on the extraordinary craftsmanship accomplished by the volunteers.

In the wake of a stellar debut, the Coalition on Donation Rose Parade Float will make its second parade appearance on New Year’s Day 2005. The theme of the 2005 Rose Parade focuses on “family,” promising a unique opportunity to communicate how donation and transplantation saves, heals, extends, creates and otherwise strengthens families.

For information about becoming an Official Partner of the 2005 Coalition on Donation
Rose Parade Float, contact Bryan Stewart at bstewart@onelegacy.org.