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Cornea recipient shares his story

by Nicole Plegge, Heartland Lions Eye Banks

Prior to receiving his cornea transplant, Mike Foley saw everything around him in a blur. He had never been able to enjoy the beauty of the stars in the sky or Christmas lights during the holiday season. However, the joy of seeing Christmas lights for the first time with his family after he received his transplant was truly an incredible experience. And that's what Mike has been able to do so much more of since his surgery – experience new things thanks to receiving the gift of sight from a generous donor family.

Mike developed keratoconus, a condition in which the cornea becomes cone-shaped and the vision becomes impaired, during adolescence. By the age of 24, his vision became so bad it affected his ability to work and to enjoy his favorite activities – a transplant was the only option to restore his vision.



Mike Foley

Prior to surgery, Mike's vision in his left eye was 20/220; soon after his transplant, his vision drastically improved to 20/40. With his restored sight, Mike was able to get off welfare and secure a career that allowed him the freedom to financially support himself for the first time in his life.

Mike feels a special connection to the donor family and the people who have worked to help make his transplant possible. For Mike, his true heroes are the donors and donor families who made the decision to share sight and life with others. Since his transplant, Mike has been one of Heartland Lions Eye Banks' most active volunteers, encouraging Missourians to register as eye, organ and tissue donors. He speaks about his journey regularly at Celebrations of Life, Lions Club meetings, and other community events. He also served as a recipient spokesperson for the Eye Bank's media campaign in conjunction with the annual Donate Life America Rose Parade Float. In 2011, Mike was the face for the Eye Bank's holiday appeal fundraising efforts.

Every day, Mike is reminded of the gift he has received and gives thanks for the chance to finally see the world around him. The stars that he put on the ceiling in his house remind him how truly wonderful it is to be able to see life's small beauties again.

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