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For more information contact:
Annie Kuhl, PR Manager
314-428-4373 x 107
annie@mlerf.org

HEARTLAND LIONS EYE BANKS RANK FOURTH IN COUNTRY FOR CORNEAL TRANSPLANTS

ST. LOUIS – The Heartland Lions Eye Banks are proud to announce that they are the fourth largest eye bank in the U.S. in terms of corneas provided for transplant. The Eye Bank has remained in this position for a second year in a row among other Eye Bank Association of America (EBAA) member eye banks.

According to a report released by the EBAA, during the 2006 calendar year, the seven HLEB branches received 1,631 corneas for transplant. This averages to a little more than four people each day who are able to receive the “gift of sight” with tissue that is carefully retrieved, processed and distributed throughout our eye banking system. The EBAA’s report is a compilation of information from 76 U.S. eye banks and 10 international eye banks.

The EBAA also reported a significant increase in the number of endothelial keratoplasty (EK) procedures as well. This procedure only uses the endothelial cells from the donor cornea, as opposed to the entire cornea. This allows for a less invasive surgical procedure and faster recovery time for corneal recipients. HLEB began offering tissue pre-cut for EK surgeries in January 2007, and has completed 79 procedures YTD.

HLEB has performed 376 corneal transplants in Missouri during the 2007 fiscal year, and a total of 1,518 transplants around the country and worldwide. Of the Missouri transplants, HLEB has performed 92 corneal transplants so far in the Kansas City area, while there have been 85 transplants in the St. Louis area. Currently HLEB is at a 12 percent increase over the number of transplants completed during the 2006 fiscal year.

“We are continuing to receive more and better tissue, which has kept us near the top of the donor facilities in the country,” said Ron Walkenbach, Ph.D., Executive Director. “We are experiencing an exceptional year in our HLEB eye banks.”

Heartland Lions Eye Banks is a program of the Missouri Lions Eye Research Foundation, a statewide 501(c)3 corporation based out of Columbia, Mo., with the mission to preserve and restore eyesight through the work of its community programs and eye bank operations. The Missouri Lions Eye Research Foundation programs include: Amblyopia Prevention Screening, Eye Care Assistance, Glaucoma Detection Screening, Eyeglass Recycling, Heartland Lions Eye Banks and support of ocular research. For more information on our programs, please visit www.mlerf.org or www.hleb.org.