

Hope in Sight®



Utah Lions Eye Bank
John A. Moran Eye Center

SPRING 2022

Stories of Hope

By Carlos Jasso, Digital Creative Producer, DonorConnect



Left: Tayzli Hale
Inset: Carlos Jasso with
his wife Lisa and his
Golden Spike Award

“Tell me about the day your 3-year-old little girl died.”

That was the question I asked a young couple who lost their daughter in a horrible accident. The pain in their eyes was something I won't ever forget, yet the reason they were telling me this gut-wrenching story was one of the most courageous things I had ever witnessed.

My name is Carlos Jasso and I work at DonorConnect, an organ procurement organization. We help families on their worst day by asking them to consider letting someone else live through organ donation. I work in the public relations department. I have many responsibilities and one of them is to get as many people as possible in Utah to register to be organ, eye, and tissue donors. These donations save or help improve the lives of the over 800 Utahns who are currently on the waiting list.

I do this by telling “Stories of Hope.” Stories like Tayzli Hale. Tayzli was thrown from her horse when an approaching car spooked the animal. When she fell, she hit her head and suffered a traumatic brain injury. As hard as it was, her parents, Whitney and AJ made the decision to help as many people as they could by donating her organs. Those organs saved a little boy who needed

a heart, and her corneas restored sight to a 31-year-old male from Montana and a 19-year-old in New York thanks to the folks at the Utah Lions Eye Bank.

I was a reporter prior to working at DonorConnect, and I know the power of video and how effective it can be. I took those skills and created a campaign for our social media pages. Once a month, I find a story of hope and pay tribute to those folks who lost a loved one AND saved or improved the lives of many at the same time. Interviewing people who are grieving is hard to do, and at times can be hard on me emotionally, but I must remember the good that it does. These stories inspire people to become organ donors, and through the miracle of organ donation, give others a second chance at life.

I'm happy to say that I've had many people tell me that they registered to be organ donors after seeing one of my stories. I recently won a couple of Golden Spike Awards for this and another campaign. I was honored to accept the awards on behalf of everyone at DonorConnect and the work we do. I was also honored to accept it on behalf of all the families who were brave enough to talk about and

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MYTH: I have a previous history of cataract or laser correction surgery, so I cannot pledge my eyes for donation.

FACT: Very few diseases or conditions interfere with your ability to donate your eyes. Eyes that can't be used for transplant can often contribute to education and research efforts.

DONORS MAKE IT HAPPEN:
**Moran Eye Center Makes
Significant Discoveries About
Age-Related Macular Degeneration**

By Anna Cekola



The John A. Moran Eye Center's Sharon Eccles Steele Center for Translational Medicine (SCTM) has recently shared groundbreaking findings about age-related macular degeneration (AMD) in a string of research papers appearing in some of the field's most respected scientific journals.

Made possible by donated human eye tissue, the discoveries deepen our understanding of genetic protections against developing AMD, a leading cause of blindness for people age 55 and older. They also indicate that a therapy the SCTM and its corporate partner are preparing for human clinical trials could benefit even more patients than initially thought.

"I'm so proud of this team and the strides we've made to help patients with AMD," says Gregory S. Hageman, PhD, executive director of the SCTM. "It's exciting to share this story with the world, and our research is only possible thanks to the support of eye tissue donors."

Years of SCTM research supported by generous donors have shown genes on chromosomes 1 and 10 account for about 90% of a person's risk for developing AMD. Also in the genetic mix are variants that offer protection against

developing AMD. The first treatment developed by the SCTM in conjunction with its corporate partner is a therapy that targets chromosome 1-directed AMD by delivering protective genetic material to the eye through an injection.

"The ultimate goal is to slow or halt AMD with a single injection into the eye," says Hageman.

The SCTM and its corporate partner are seeking clearance from the FDA to start clinical trials in humans, the first step toward FDA approval.

While working to finalize the therapy for chromosome 1-directed AMD, SCTM scientists made a welcome discovery: the treatment may also help patients with chromosome 10-directed AMD. Publishing in *Human Genomics* in fall 2021, SCTM scientists explained combinations of genetic variants, or haplotypes, on chromosome 1 are so protective that they outweigh the risk for people with a combination of risk and protective haplotypes. It's an ace in the hole that can guard against developing chromosome 1- and hopefully 10-directed AMD.

"This finding opens up the possibility that therapeutics designed to target the form of AMD driven by risk on chromosome 1 may also be effective in treating a vast majority of AMD, regardless of genetic cause," explained SCTM researcher Moussa Zouache, PhD, the lead author of the study.

A second study led by SCTM clinician-scientist Steffen Schmitz-Valckenberg, MD, links genetics to rates of AMD disease progression and vision loss. Publishing in the prestigious journal *JAMA Ophthalmology* in February 2022, the team examined data from three sub-groups of AMD patients with genetic backgrounds that put them at risk for developing AMD. The scientists determined patients with two copies of genetic risk variants (homozygous) at both chromosomes 1 and 10 reached sight-threatening, late-stage AMD the earliest, within a median of 4.4 years. In comparison, patients homozygous at chromosome 1 only reached late-stage within 6.3 years, and patients homozygous at chromosome 10 only within 10.4 years.

"We can now employ this information to design more effective clinical trials to evaluate new therapies for AMD," says Schmitz-Valckenberg.

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advocate for organ donation. Without their willingness to share their story, the "Stories of Hope" campaign would not happen.

The day Tayzli fell off her horse and left this earth was the hardest day of Whitney and AJ's life. They told me that she loved dancing, singing, and playing with her

brothers. They started a foundation called the Tay-Tay-Tough Foundation and they tell their story anytime they can. It is their way to channel their grief towards something good and to honor Tayzli. I saw firsthand what courage looked like that day.

A video of Tayzli's story can be seen on YouTube at <https://youtu.be/PkgwGN9dJeA> or by scanning this QR code →





Heart of the Lion Courier Program



Fellow Lions!

The Heart of the Lion Courier program has resumed and we are starting to build up steam! There are a few adjustments from previous years, so we are asking that all couriers (past and present) reach out to receive adjusted training. If you are interested in resuming delivery operations, please contact Wade McEntire at wade.mcentire@hsc.utah.edu to schedule driver training and orientation.

Thank you for your service!

Wade McEntire
Utah Lions Eye Bank

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<https://www.facebook.com/utaheyebank/>

Follow us on  @Utah_Eye_Bank

Follow us on  @utah_lions_eye_bank

Please visit our website at
www.utaheyebank.org

Bereavement Support Groups

For bereavement support group information, please contact the University of Utah College of Nursing

801.585.9522

healthcare.utah.edu/caring-connections

MYTH: Donating eyes for research doesn't restore sight to anyone.

FACT: Donating eyes for research can potentially help thousands of people regain their sight, as research on glaucoma, retinal disease, eye complications of diabetes and other sight disorders helps to advance the discovery of the cause and effects of these conditions. This can then lead to new treatments and cures.



We would love to share your story.

If you are the recipient of a cornea, or have a story of a donor that you would like to share, please let us know. Email uleb.familyservices@hsc.utah.edu or just use the QR code! →





Utah Lions Eye Bank

John A. Moran Eye Center



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Financial Gifts for Sight

The Utah Lions Eye Bank thanks the following individuals for their generous financial donations November 2021–February 2022:

Constance Baker	DeeAnn Gornichec
Arlyn and Norma Bodily <i>in honor of Dr. Mifflin and Dr. Chortkoff</i>	Kathleen Gubler
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Linda and Donald Shearer <i>in honor of Donald Shearer</i>	Judy And Phillip Yeates
Diane and Paul Smith <i>in memory of Steve Brady</i>	John Zudis

Please use the enclosed envelope or QR code to make a donation in memory of, or in honor of, a loved one. Thank you for your support and generosity.

