

The Doings Oak Brook

Clarendon Hills family keeps son's memory alive with friend's help

BY CHUCK FIELDMAN | cfieldman@pioneerlocal.com December 3, 2012 10:50AM

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Rob (from left), Carley and Lori Chana, and Erik Tofte hold up the banner Tofte carried with him while serving overseas in January-October. | Chuck Fieldman—Sun-Times Media

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CLARENDON HILLS — The Chana family always is happy to see Erik Tofte, a close friend to Cameron Chana, who was killed in a 2009 bus accident near Eastern Illinois University in Charleston. He was 22 years old.

Cameron was the oldest child of Rob and Lori Chana, whose other children are Christopher, 22; Cole, 20; and Carley, 15. As an organ and tissue donor, the 2005 Hinsdale Central graduate helped save the lives of five people who received his organs and the sight of someone who received his corneas.

Tofte, who has remained very close with the Chana family, carried a "Donate Life" banner in support of organ and tissue donation through the Middle East and Africa this year. He put together a scrapbook of photos of the banner in different locations, and presented both the album and the banner to the Chanas on Sunday.

"I did it because of the kind of person Cameron was," Tofte said. "He was the most sincere and genuine person I've known. He was the nicest guy you could meet. And his family is probably the most loving family you could know."

Tofte was overseas with the National Guard, having been in the service from 2001-2005 before enrolling at Eastern Illinois University. The Chana family and Tofte have maintained ties with Gift of Hope, an organ and tissue donor network.

The Chanas were very touched by Tofte's gesture, as they previously had known nothing about his travels with the "Donate Life" banner.

"Erik does a great job," Lori Chana said. "He is very much a part of our family. It's very easy once the 'emergency' is over that people go back to their normal lives, and we've been incredibly touched by Erik and others who continue to remember Cameron.

"We have no concept of the ripple effect. It's really incredible when you start to think about all the people who have been helped by Cameron's organs, the people they may touch. To lose a son, a child, it does make you numb. But to have the opportunity for this type of positive impact keeps us going."

And the Chanas want to see organ and tissue donation continue to grow. The Sigma Pi Fraternity to which Cameron and Tofte belonged recently started a national effort to increase organ and tissue donor registration at college campuses.

"This is an enormous ball that is just starting to move, and it's something that could have a huge positive impact," Rob Chana said.

The Chana family set up a website, <http://www.cameronchana.org>, to provide information on Cameron's life, as well as keep people informed on how he continues to impact people through his organ donation gifts. The website also has information about organ donation for others.

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