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# Reporter

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Staff photo by Erica Benson

Lisle resident Colette Jordan (right) assists Dolores O'Keefe of Woodridge while she registers Aug. 23 to be an organ donor during the Family Day in the Park in Lisle. Jordan is a liver recipient, and she and her husband (portraying the healthy liver) are both active.

## Cause close to her heart

A Lisle resident has made it her mission to persuade people to become organ donors. **PAGE 6**

# Organ recipient takes determination on the road

By Melissa Tussing  
Correspondent

From her healthy complexion and friendly chatter, one would never guess Colette Jordan of Lisle faced end-stage liver disease and a liver transplant two years ago.

A look to her driveway, though, where a blue and white trailer displays the sign "Don't Take Your Organs to Heaven - Heaven Knows We Need Them Here!" betrays Jordan's fervor for organ donation.

That fervor challenged Jordan to travel to Pittsburgh this July to compete in the 2008 U.S. Transplant Games, an Olympic-style event bringing together transplant recipients, living donors and the families of those who have donated organs to celebrate the success of organ donations.

Jordan competed in women's bowling and the women's 1,500-meter racewalk, finishing fourth in both events. Despite narrowly missing a medal ceremony, Jordan said her experience in Pittsburgh supersedes any trophy.

Jordan first learned about her failing liver in April 2006. That's when the moth-

er of three learned she would have to start extensive medication to try to reverse the process.

"I was a working mom," Jordan said. "My own health was on the back burner. The deterioration had been so gradual that I didn't realize how sick I was getting."

On Oct. 26, 2006, Jordan was told she needed a liver transplant. Through divine intervention, she said, a liver was available just five days later, and Jordan went into surgery Oct. 31.

"The next day, Nov. 1, is the national day of rebirth," Jordan said. "I was near death, and I had received life. I had been given a second change. Suddenly, it was not enough to just go back to my job. I had to give back for the gift I was given."

Instantly, Jordan's goals changed.

"Before, I wanted to see my oldest son (Daniel, now 24) married and dance at his wedding. I wanted to take my daughter (Nikki, now 15) to her first concert. I wanted to see my younger son (Ryan, now 17) pitch again," Jordan said. "I want to hold my grandbaby. I just celebrated my 25th wedding anniversary, and I want to celebrate my 50th. Now, I want to help people with terminal illness or on a transplant list

who are waiting. Having been there, I want to comfort people in those kinds of situations."

Jordan returned to school, taking classes at the College of DuPage in the human services adult fast-track program. At COD, she organized a competitive drive between college campuses to register the most teenagers in the organ donor registry. She also has championed the work of Donate Life Illinois for Lisle, an organization that hopes to register 5 million Illinois residents by April 2009. In January alone, Jordan registered 700 people in Illinois' organ donor registry. She credits her most recent accomplishments to her friends and family, and to her "partner in health" Chris Seigars.

Seigars and Jordan had exchanged neighborly pleasantries for 12 years, but their relationship did not run deeper until Jordan returned home from a doctor's appointment in March 2007, now unable to workout at the local health club due to the exposure of germs.

Seigars, a two-time cancer survivor, had been told at the age of 21 that she had advanced ovarian cancer but could not receive treatment.

"They told me to go home and get my affairs in order, that I was not going to live," Seigars said. "I said, 'To hell with that,' and I looked for two or three weeks until I found a doctor who would treat me."

Not one to sit back, Seigars told Jordan to bring her gym shoes the next morning so they could walk outside together. The pair now walks 8 to 10 miles a day.

When Jordan learned of the 2008 U.S. Transplant Games last spring, Seigars decided to attend also.

"She looked at me and said, 'You're going, right?'" Seigars said. "I said 'Of course!' We couldn't imagine spending 10 days without each other anyway."

The Games offer competition in 13 events including badminton, 3-on-3 team basketball, cycling, golf, racquetball, a 5K road race, swimming, table tennis, tennis, a triathlon, track and field and volleyball.

Participants are organized into state teams, and each state receives state pins to trade with other teams inside the athletic village. The gathering of people is an experience in itself.

"It's amazing, because all of these people were in the same place I was," Jordan said. "There's no hope, you're dying, and in the blink of an eye, you can do things you always wanted to do."

Willa Lang, chief executive officer of the National Kidney Foundation of Illinois, said she was overwhelmed by the number of people participating.

"These people are doing something their healthier counterparts can't do," said Lang. "These athletes represent a sense of courage. A lot of people didn't know they would live another day. Now they're competing in an Olympic-style event."

The continual need for organs in Illinois makes spreading awareness through the Games ever more pertinent.

"Organ failure can happen to anyone. There are over 3,500 people in Illinois waiting for a kidney transplant, alone," Lang said. "Some people wait six to eight

Kate O'Connor, the chief operating officer for the National Kidney Foundation of Illinois, was a team manager for the 1998 Games.

"The U.S. Transplant Games show the nation that transplantation works," O'Connor said. "The event humanizes organ donation for people. When you make that decision, you see that it has the potential to change not only a person's life but the lives of the friends and family who surround that person."