

# 2011 VOLUNTEERS

## Family celebrates son's legacy

by Ray Gabel, Midwest Transplant Network



Donna Lawrence

"He was the type of kid who soaked up life. He had constant wonder in his eyes and a contagious smile. He always had a kind word and never met a stranger. He would do anything for anybody and would always ask how you were doing or how your day was going," Donna Lawrence said about her son, Dakota.

When Dakota was 8 years old, Donna and her family were faced with making a decision about donating his organs.

"When we were approached about donating, there was no hesitation. We knew Dakota would want it that way. If he could save someone's life, he would do it in an instant," Donna said. "He told me that he wanted to be a doctor so that he could save little kids' lives and make them better. He never got the chance to be a doctor but he has saved lives."

In honor of Dakota, the Lawrence family co-sponsors the Annual Dakota Lawrence Memorial Volleyball Tournament in St. Joseph. For the past seven years, the two-day event has drawn large crowds to celebrate Dakota's legacy and

increase organ donor awareness. Through their volunteer efforts, the Lawrence family has adopted a slogan that reflects Dakota's legacy: "Give Life – Dakota did."

"It's comforting to us to know that there are three people alive because of Dakota. In a sense, Dakota is living on. It's ironic that the person who received Dakota's heart is an 8-year-old boy and a twin – just like Dakota," Donna said. "We keep each recipient in our hearts and prayers and hope they are doing well. It would be wonderful to meet them someday."

Donna has volunteered her time to share her son's story at local hospitals and gives countless hours to the volleyball tournament. In 2008, the Lawrence family was chosen to represent donor families from the Midwest Transplant Network at the National Kidney Foundation's U.S. Transplant Games in Pittsburgh, Pa.

**I**t's comforting to us to know that there are three people alive because of Dakota. In a sense, Dakota is living on."

– Donna Lawrence