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12-year-old twin cornea recipients receive award for volunteer efforts

KALAMAZOO – Michigan Eye-Bank Ambassadors Madison and Malia were honored for their efforts on behalf of the Eye-Bank when they received a Star Award earlier today. The 12-year-olds, who are twins, use their personal experiences with corneal transplantation to inform and inspire the public about eye, organ and tissue donation.

Sponsored by the Volunteer Center of Greater Kalamazoo and the Kalamazoo Gazette, Star Awards are given annually to recognize groups and individuals for volunteer work performed throughout the year.

Born with congenital glaucoma, Madison and Malia have dealt with vision issues for their entire lives. Cornea transplants allowed them both a second chance for sight, but they still travel to the University of Michigan Kellogg Eye Center in Ann Arbor weekly for check-ups and to relieve any pressure that may have built up in their eyes since their previous visit. To show their gratitude for the generous eye donors and their families who made their vision possible, the girls became Ambassadors for the Michigan Eye-Bank, sharing their story in the hopes of convincing others to join the Michigan Organ Donor Registry.

As Ambassadors, Madison and Malia have tirelessly promoted donation, addressing groups of up to 200 people – but perhaps their greatest achievement is “The Blind Porcupine,” a children’s book they wrote and illustrated at age nine, which tells the story of a porcupine’s sight restoration through corneal transplantation.

“Their book has 6,000 copies in circulation around the state and is available at a few local stores, libraries, and many Lions Clubs,” explains Alex Teska, Community Engagement Associate for the Michigan Eye-Bank, who nominated the girls for the Star Award. “All contributions for ‘The Blind Porcupine’ go to the Eye-Bank, and those funds are used to keep the book in circulation.”

The Michigan Eye-Bank is a charitable, not-for-profit organization dedicated to the restoration of sight. It recovers, evaluates and distributes human eye tissue for transplantation. It also supports research into the causes and cures of blinding eye conditions, promotes donation awareness through public and professional education, and provides humanitarian aid to people in need of corneal transplantation throughout the world. For more information, visit the Michigan Eye-Bank online at www.michiganeyebank.org or call (800) 247-7250.

