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## **Former Helena High athlete, Julie Shepherd, to be honored posthumously at Rose Parade in Pasadena, CA**

Kindness and compassion radiated from Julie Shepherd. She would always go out of her way to help others and bring them joy. In her short 17 years, her generosity touched the lives of many.



*Figure 1 Julie's family finishing her floral portrait, or floragraph, to be placed on the Donate Life Rose Parade float*

made out of organic materials such as dried flowers, spices and seeds, on the Donate Life float. Her family had the opportunity to put the final touches on the floral portrait in preparation for its trip back to Pasadena for float decorating.

On Tuesday Nov. 12, Julie's friends and family joined staff from Benefis Health System and LifeCenter Northwest to celebrate her life and honor the legacy she left behind through organ and tissue donation. The event included rose dedications, a spread of Julie's favorite foods, and the completion of her floral portrait, known as a floragraph, which will adorn the Donate Life float at the Rose Parade in Pasadena, California on New Year's Day.

Julie will be one of 44 deceased donors honored with a floragraph,

Just as she did in life, Julie helped numerous people in her passing by becoming an organ, eye, and tissue donor at Benefis Health in Great Falls. Her gifts saved the lives of six people through the donation of her pancreas, liver, lungs, both kidneys and her heart, which was described by the transplant surgeon as the “mythical perfect heart.” Anyone who knew her would agree with that sentiment.

The person whose health is fueled by the beat of that heart was also in attendance. Julie's heart recipient, Maddy, drove up from Utah with her parents to celebrate Julie. A high school athlete, Maddy suffered from Congenital Heart Disease and experienced a heart attack at just 14 years old. Thanks to her life-saving transplant, Maddy is back to swimming competitively keeping Julie's heart in the athletic events she so loved.



*Figure 2 Heart recipient, Maddy, holds Julie's floragraph*

### **About Julie**

Though Julie Shepherd was fiercely competitive and an exceptional athlete, she also had a big heart that extended empathy and kindness to friends and strangers alike. Many of her teachers have remembered how her energy, humor, and outgoing personality lit up the rooms and hallways of the school like nothing they had seen before.



*Figure 3 Julie at a powerlifting competition*

“We are still finding out about all the lives she touched through her kindness,” says her father, Derrek. “We’ve heard stories from a wide span of people including the family of a non-verbal autistic child who would go to Julie’s work just to see her smile. Julie had also recently cut her hair to make a donation to an organization that provides recipients with wigs for free. She was an amazing person.”

While she brought enormous joy and light into the lives of others, she battled a constant darkness within herself. The people who knew Julie were shocked to hear that she struggled with severe depression. Although she talked to a therapist and a psychiatrist and took her medication every day, her mind controlled her reality until she was unable to endure the suffering any longer. Since her death, her family has talked openly about her depression hoping more can be done for the people who struggle with the disease.

“The donation process has helped to ease the pain of her death by giving us the knowledge that other people's lives were helped,” Derrek says. “Her drive to be the best, to compete with all her abilities, to explore, and above all, to love and care for those around her has given our lives new meaning. We love the idea that something good came from Julie’s death.”

### **Rose Parade**

The Donate Life float is part of a national initiative to help share the power of organ, eye, and tissue donation. Each year, LifeCenter Northwest selects a donor from our service area to be honored on the float. We are joined by organizations from across the nation in sponsoring donor families, living donors, and transplant recipients to attend the parade and connect with others touched by donation.

The Rose Parade will be held Wednesday, January 1, at 8 AM PST, please check local listings for broadcast information.

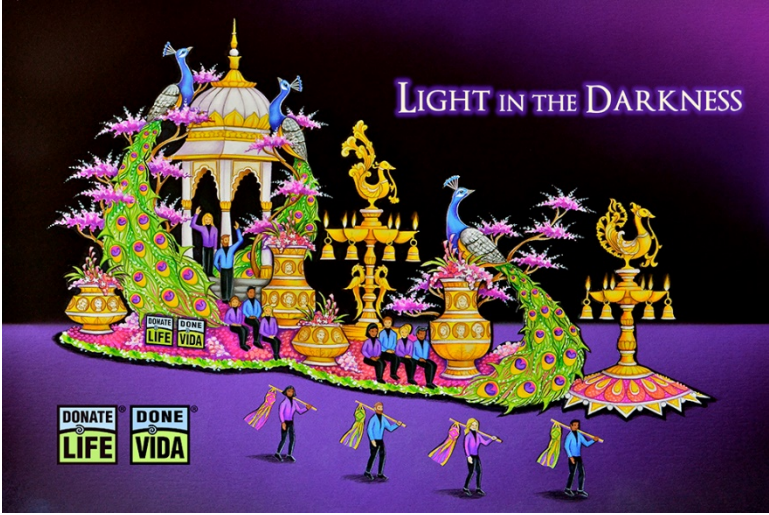


Figure 4 A rendering of the 2020 Donate Life float