HEROES of the YEAR

The men and women in these pages reached into their hearts—and found ways to make the world a better place.
2009 HEROES AMONG US AWARDS

THE KIDNEY CHAIN
How a single organ donation changed 20 lives and created the longest-running transplant chain

Matt Jones tried to calm his fright-ened fiancée and explain, once again, why a working dad with a blended brood of five would want to donate his kidney to a perfect stranger. “Tell them you’re not doing it,” a teary Meghan Bunnell pleaded. But the sturdy car-rental agency manager from Petoskey, Mich., held his ground. “I want to do something so the kids can look at and remember me by,” Matt, 30, explained. “I want to leave a legacy.”

He did that—and much more. For when Matt donated his kidney in July 2007, he set off a chain reaction that changed the lives of 20 people in what has become the nation’s first and longest-running open-ended kidney-transplant chain. How it works: A person who needs a kidney is matched with a stranger in exchange for a friend or family member’s donation of their own kidney to another member of the chain (see box).

Last month, at a hockey game in Toledo, Matt shared hot dogs with Angela Heckman, 34, and Barbara and Ron Bunnell, other members of the life-giving connection and now close friends. “Matt won’t take credit,” says Angela; she received a kidney from Ron, who donated his organ after Barbara got a kidney from Matt. “But he gave us a second chance at life.”

Just a few years ago Barbara, Angella and others were tethered to dialysis machines three times a week and, in a few cases, counting their days. Now Barbara and Ron, both 56, of Phoenix, are taking their grandchildren to Disneyland. Angela, who nearly died twice during her 11 years on dialysis, has returned to college to become an ultrasound technician. Her mother, Laurie Sarvo, 54, donated to Cecilia Janiesek, an Ohio grandmother who lost four toes to complications from kidney failure but, after her transplant, was able to take a Caribbean cruise. “There’s nothing better,” says Laurie, a bar owner, “than watching someone’s life improve.”

The chain’s home base is the University of Toledo Medical Center, where transplant surgeon Mike Rees performs operations and coordinates the program through his nonprofit, the Alliance for Paired Donation. People enter the chain because they need a kidney and have a friend or family member who is willing to donate, but who isn’t a match. Once they enter the chain, Rees’s staff inputs their names, blood types and other information into a database of other patient-and-donor pairs, the
Everyone thought I was crazy. But I wanted to do something for someone else.

MATT JONES

Pay-Forward Transplants

For the 22,555 people on the United Network for Organ Sharing (UNOS) kidney waiting list, canceling a transplant no longer means the end of their lives. Patients who undergo Kidney Registry have helped create more than 1300 transplants. A new option allows patients who need a kidney transplant to give or receive a kidney to go to those who are on the waiting list. However, kidneys are of short supply and need to be used as quickly as possible to prevent kidney failure. So far, in addition to people in the U.S., there have been more than 250 transplants involving kidneys from living donors in New Zealand and Japan. The program is a winner for patients who need a kidney. It reduces the time patients have to wait for a transplant and it decreases the number of people who require dialysis. Patients who undergo the procedure are also able to return to their normal lives faster.

By Aimee Short/with Nettie Hasselbacher, Covering the News

The Cops

Save Jayce

The world's first fully functional font has been designed by the team at the University of California, San Francisco, and it is called “font.” It is the result of a collaboration between the university and the company that makes the font, Asics, which is based in Japan. The font is designed to help people with visual impairments by making it easier to read and write. The font is called “font,” which stands for “font.” It is a combination of Latin letters and Japanese characters.

List Campbell 47, and Max Jacobs 21, both of San Francisco, California, are two of the students that worked on the project. They are members of the team that is working on the project. They have been working on the project for over a year. They have been working on the project for over a year. They have been working on the project for over a year. They have been working on the project for over a year. They have been working on the project for over a year. They have been working on the project for over a year. They have been working on the project for over a year. They have been working on the project for over a year. They have been working on the project for over a year. They have been working on the project for over a year. They have been working on the project for over a year. They have been working on the project for over a year. They have been working on the project for over a year. They have been working on the project for over a year. They have been working on the project for over a year. They have been working on the project for over a year. They have been working on the project for over a year. They have been working on the project for over a year. They have been working on the project for over a year. They have been working on the project for over a year. They have been working on the project for over a year. They have been working on the project for over a year. They have been working on the project for over a year. They have been working on the project for over a year. They have been working on the project for over a year. They have been working on the project for over a year. They have been working on the project for over a year. They have been working on the project for over a year. They have been working on the project for over a year. They have been working on the project for over a year. They have been working on the project for over a year. They have been working on the project for over a year. They have been working on the project for over a year. They have been working on the project for over a year. They have been working on the project for over a year. They have been working on the project for over a year. They have been working on the project for over a year. They have been working on the project for over a year. They have been working on the project for over a year. They have been working on the project for over a year. They have been working on the project for over a year. They have been working on the project for over a year. They have been working on the project for over a year. They have been working on the project for over a year. They have been working on the project for over a year. They have been working on the project for over a year. They have been working on the project for over a year. They have been working on the project for over a year. They have been working on the project for over a year. They have been working on the project for over a year. They have been working on the project for over a year. They have been working on the project for over a year. They have been working on the project for over a year. They have been working on the project for over a year. They have been working on the project for over a year.