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## Lafayette Family Works for Donor Awareness

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(L-R) Warren Heffelfinger, Carla Combi, Cole Combi  
Photo Rob Combi

loving, kindhearted, Burton Valley dad who was willing to give away one of his kidneys.

On the day Heffelfinger donated a kidney he met Cole for the first time and on March 23, 2009, Cole received the transplant. Over a year later he is thriving.

The Combis are grateful not only to Heffelfinger, but to his whole family, the community and the doctors who worked to save Cole. Rob Combi, Cole's father, says Cole "has expressed how thankful and happy he is to have such great friends at school and in the community. For Carla and me, it really has made us proud to be part of Lamorinda and we continue to be amazed by the generosity and spirit of the people."

As young as he is, Cole realizes that he has been very fortunate and is enjoying life to its fullest. He loves to play baseball and cheer on the Mets and Lakers. He is older brother to Cate and Luke, who he reportedly likes to playfully tease. Alongside his supportive family, Cole is also finding ways to give back to the community.

The Combi family is committed to promoting organ donor awareness and raising funds for the California Transplant Donor Network. The Heffelfinger family has also been very involved in the campaign. Together, the two families recently completed a relay to support organ donor programs. The run went from Napa to Santa Cruz and covered over 199 miles. A team of twelve runners completed the event and Cole led the final two hundred yard sprint to the finish line. Through various events the Combi family has raised over \$40,000 to help promote organ transplant awareness.

Anyone interested in becoming involved can participate, with the Combi family, in the "Donate Life Night" tailgate barbeque at the Oakland A's baseball game on August 21st. For more information about Cole visit his website at [www.drinkcole.com](http://www.drinkcole.com) (and discover why it is called "drink Cole".) To learn more about organ transplants and find donor information visit the California Transplant Donor Network at [www.ctdn.org](http://www.ctdn.org).

Remember when you first got your driver license and checked the box certifying that you are willing to be an organ donor? My first reaction was a dull headache and a slight churning in the stomach as I considered the notion. After some thought I realized my liver, kidneys and, for that matter, heart could save a life.

Although a majority of people check the organ donor box at the Department of Motor Vehicles, some may not understand the impact of organ donations. In fact, nearly 100,000 individuals around the country are waiting for an organ donation and approximately eighteen people die each day while on the waitlist for a transplant. One Lafayette family is on a mission to increase awareness and encourage individuals to donate a part of themselves for the benefit of a family member, friend or even a complete stranger.

The Combi family's determined efforts were inspired by the experience of twelve-year old Cole Combi, who was diagnosed with Posterior Urethral Valve (PUV) obstruction at birth. During embryonic development Cole's kidneys failed to develop properly. As a result he was born with only ten percent kidney function. Doctors ordered an immediate kidney transplant. Cole's mother, Carla, was the donor. At the young age of one, Cole had his first surgery and for the next eight years he led a relatively normal life. He attended his first few years of school and got involved in sports.

When Cole was nine his body began to reject his mother's kidney. Cole was put on dialysis at Lucille Packard Children's Hospital at Stanford and the family began the long search for a new kidney.

Family members and close friends were tested to see if their kidneys were compatible with Cole. Organ compatibility is extremely important because the rejection of an implant can prove devastating. When no positive matches came up the family turned to the surrounding community through an expansive outreach program. The responses were immediate; over a hundred individuals were tested. A precise match was found in Warren Heffelfinger, a fun-