

Local



COURTESY OF DONATE LIFE FLOAT

Philip Dhanens, 18, of Bakersfield, died of alcohol poisoning in 2012 as part of a fraternity pledge process at Fresno State University. His image will appear on this year's Donate Life float in the Rose Parade. From left to right are his parents, Diane and Paul Dhanens, and girlfriend, Cal Poly Pomona student Zoe Tucker.

# Dhanens among honorees on Donate Life Rose Parade float

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A "floragraph" of Fresno State fraternity pledge Philip Dhanens will be among 72 honoring organ and tissue donors on a float in the 126th Rose Parade Thursday.

Composed of coffee, seeds, flowers and other natural materials, Dhanens' head shot will adorn the Donate Life float, "Never Ending Story," which depicts a library of books around a garden full of butterflies.

The theme of this year's parade is "Inspiring Stories," so this, the organization's 12th annual float in the parade, couldn't be a better fit, said Tom Mone, chief executive officer of OneLegacy. That's a nonprofit organ and tissue recovery organization serving seven Southern California counties, including Kern.

"We will have 30 riders, all transplant recipients," Mone said. "And there will be 12 walkers who are living kidney donors. They're there to show you can donate a kidney and walk the 5½ miles of the parade route and live to tell about it."

The base of the float will have 72 books adorned with the faces of donors, including that of Dhanens.

"It's bittersweet," said his mother, Diane Dhanens, 52, of Bakersfield.

Fresno police said the younger Dhanens, 18, of Bakersfield, was only a couple of weeks into his first semester of college when he pledged with the Theta Chi fraternity. On Aug. 31, 2012, he went to a party at the frat-

ernity's off-campus house, where 14 pledges — 12 of them younger than age 21 — were locked in a room with eight bottles of hard liquor. The pledges were told they couldn't come out until the bottles were empty, police said.

The college freshman consumed enough liquor to reach a blood-alcohol level of 0.36, more than four times the legal limit to drive. He died the next day.

The question of whether to donate the teen's organs came up during the intervening hours, said his mother.

"We knew pretty quickly that Philip at best was severely brain-damaged," she said. "During that time, his dad brought this up."

Diana Dhanens said her father-in-law was a kidney transplant recipient, so the family knew the impact of organ donation.

"Before that he'd been on dialysis, but he had a very nice life afterward so we know that after donations, these people are doing well, and it's pretty amazing," she said.

Being able to transform a terrible loss into a life-saving gift was a source of at least a little comfort during a difficult time, Diana Dhanens said.

The family's gift of the teen's cornea, heart, kidneys and liver helped four patients.

Three current and former Theta Chi fraternity members faced criminal charges in connection with the binge drinking, and the family settled with the fraternity in a related civil action.

Former Theta Chi member Leonard Louis Serrato, who was with Philip

Dhanens when he died, received 90 days in the Fresno County Jail, 90 days in the county's adult offender work program and three years of probation. He was also ordered to pay a \$220 fine.

Another former Theta Chi member present that day, Aaron Joseph Raymo, received a 30-day jail sentence and 90 days in the work program. He also has to serve three years of probation and pay a \$220 fine.

Fraternity president Daniel Woodward Baker was given three years of probation, 30 days in the adult offender work program and 200 hours of community service.

After Philip Dhanens' death, Theta Chi revoked the Fresno State chapter's charter.

In addition to highlighting the donors, this year's float will honor Gary Foxen, who a dozen years ago conceived the idea of a parade float to raise awareness about organ donation.

Foxen died two months ago at the age of 79, 15 years after receiving a lung transplant, OneLegacy's Mone said.

Rising above an open book on the float will be 60 butterflies representing "the 60 or more lives that can be saved or improved from a single donor," Mone said. "The butterflies represent a metamorphosis of life going on."

The Rose Parade will take place Thursday in Pasadena, and will be broadcast live beginning at 8 a.m.

— *The Fresno Bee* contributed to this report.

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