

## Matthew's death gave life

*Donation of organs in aftermath of football-related death*

### **Vince Rembulat**

Reporter

The memory of East Union High's Matthew Zaragoza Van Gelderen lives on.

Take Sarah (last names were omitted for confidentiality), for example.

At the time of Van Gelderen's football-related accident that occurred back in September 2005, the Turlock High student was in dire need of a kidney.

"She had two days to live," said Jose Zaragoza, Van Gelderen's father.

As the Manteca teenager was clinging to life support, the family agreed to donate his organs, with Sarah being the recipient of a kidney.

Today, she's alive and well and enrolled at California State University, Stanislaus.

"She stays in contact with my daughter Katrina through 'Myspace,'" said Zaragoza, who works as a volunteer for the California Transplant Donor Network.

On Friday, he worked the organ donor booth at the San Joaquin County Fair. Featured were jerseys worn by Van Gelderen, including his Cougars and Jaguars - two local youth football teams - and, of course, his Lancers' No. 2.

"I wanted to pay back to the community for the support they gave us," Zaragoza said. "But more importantly, I wanted to keep Matthew's memory alive."

He started his work with the organ donor network about four months after the death of his son.

Norma, meanwhile, received Van Gelderen's heart and lung.

"She always talked about taking skating lessons," Zaragoza said. "And now she's doing it."

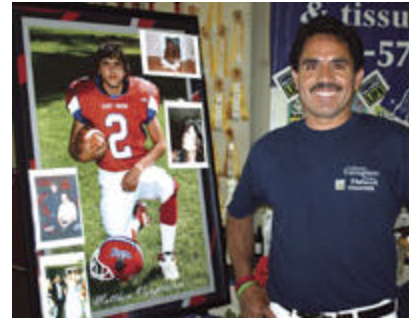
Gary, who was too ill when his daughter was planning her wedding, received the teenager's liver and pancreas.

A wedding day photo of Gary walking his daughter down the aisle along with that of the other organ recipients are displayed at the fair booth alongside the Van Gelderen football portrait.

Zaragoza and his wife, Zona, are hoping to someday meet each of the donors. Reportedly, talk show host Oprah Winfrey is also interested, with her Harpo Production Inc. making a few attempts at contacting the family.

At the time of Van Gelderen's passing, the family kept a low profile on the organ donations for personal reasons.

Zaragoza now speaks on the matter on behalf of the California Transplant Network, making visits



**VINCE REMBULAT/The Bulletin**

**Manteca's Jose Zaragoza stands in front of the San Joaquin County Fair booth featuring a portrait of his late son, Matthew Zaragoza Van Gelderen, along with photographs of the organ recipients.**

to schools in Sunnyvale, Brentwood, Stockton, and Manteca.

It helps him deal with his son's death.

"I could be sitting at home with no one to talk to while just thinking about Matthew," Zaragoza said. "But by going to the high schools and just talking to kids has made my life a lot easier.

"I still enjoy going to the (football) games and I even encourage kids to play football."

Altogether, seven organs were donated to four people.

For more information on becoming an organ donor, contact (888) 570-9400.