

# Vietnamese Reach Out In Community To Help Save Lives

By Lynn Tran  
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A bone marrow drive sponsored by 15 Minute Miracles, Baylor College of Medicine, National Marrow Donor Program and Hope Initiative was held last Sunday at Incarnate Word Catholic Church. According to Thanh Nguyen, a founding member of 15 Minute Miracles, there are currently over 5.5 million potential volunteer marrow and blood cell donors registered, but "unfortunately only less than 1% are Asians."

Nguyen became involved in marrow donating after finding out that a co-worker's friend was diagnosed with Hodgkin's disease. Although the friend was able to find a match, it was not a perfect match and she passed away.

Sara Duong, who works in public health, said the lack of donors has affected her. "I have experienced losing someone who I believe would have lived if she would have found a donor match in time," she said.

Believing there was a dire need to get the public involved,

Duong joined 15 Minute Miracles in hopes of reaching out to the community. "We don't pressure people into registering, we just try to get the word out to educate our community," she says, "it doesn't matter how many people are registered. What matters is that when someone is matched actually donates when they get the call."

Many of the Parish's members were not receptive of the drive on Sunday. The organizers believe that a major reason for this is Vietnamese cultural stereotypes. "When I decided to coordinate these drives, I was fully aware of all the Vietnamese stereotypes and they did make me kind of nervous going into the first drive," says Nguyen. "As much as I don't want to admit it, most Vietnamese people are very hesitant when it comes to being open minded to new concepts and ideas."

Due to the fact that the issue of bone marrow donation is so new to much of the Vietnamese population of Houston, Nguyen found it difficult to even find those that were willing to take the time to listen. "I feel that our best bet



15 Minute Miracles Volunteers at the "Christ The Incarnate Word Catholic Church" drive. (From left to right): Tram Duong, Mark Nguyen, President Thanh Nguyen, Vice-President Sarah Duong, Treasurer Julie Vu, Mary Nguyen, Paul Long.

in overcoming these barriers is to educate the public. 'We fear what we don't understand.' This is why public education is our primary focus during these drives, with donor recruiting following in second place." says Nguyen. "Even if we can't get a particular person to register, as long as they walk away fully understanding our cause then our work is done."

According to the National Marrow Donor Program, every year more than 30,000 people from all races, ethnic communities and socio-economic backgrounds

are diagnosed with life-threatening blood diseases, such as leukemia. Many could be cured with a marrow or blood stem cell transplant, but they need matching donors. Around 30 percent will find a matching donor within their family. The remaining 70 percent will need to search for an unrelated donor.

The next bone marrow drive will take place June 22, 2006 at 6:30 p.m. at The Social Lounge and Bar. For more information, you may email Thanh Nguyen at [nguyenthanht@gmail.com](mailto:nguyenthanht@gmail.com).