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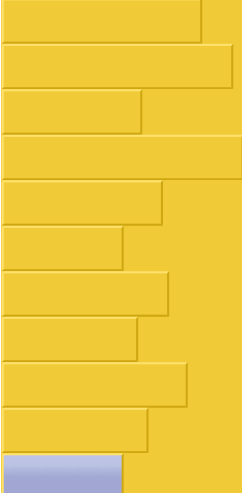
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## PHOTOS

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(GILLARY FAMILY PHOTO)

Kimberly Gillary, who had a heart condition, died in 2000. Her family started a foundation in her name.



### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

#### Wear red

Participate in National Wear Red Day on Friday to show support for awareness of women's heart disease.

To learn more about heart health, see Twist's next issue.

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HEART HEALTH

# Help for hearts

*January 27, 2007*

**BY PATRICIA MONTEMURRI**

In a few weeks, we'll celebrate Valentine's Day. But the entire month of February is also devoted to matters of the heart -- heart health. Gov. Jennifer Granholm proclaimed the week of Feb. 7 as Congenital Heart Defect Awareness Week.

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While we associate heart disease with aging, for some families the impact of heart disease falls on children.

Sandy Bilpo, 39, of Sterling Heights gave birth six years ago to Ethan, who was born with the left side of his heart underdeveloped and nonfunctioning. He's a lively preschooler now, but it took three surgeries to reroute circulation in his heart.

Emily Gillary Kucinich, 29, lost her sister, Kimberly Gillary, in April 2000 when the 15-year-old Troy Athens High School student collapsed during a water polo match. The autopsy revealed Kimberly had an undetected condition known as hypertrophic cardiomyopathy, a genetic disease that can lead to sometimes fatal heart rhythms. In the wake of what happened to their loved ones, both families have rallied to help others.

Sandy is one of the cofounders of Hearts of Hope Michigan, a nonprofit support group for families of children with congenital heart defects. It has grown to about 150

members, who share tips and resources and stories of survival at get-togethers and on the Web site, [www.heartsofhopemi.org](http://www.heartsofhopemi.org).

"To have other moms ... really understand what you're going through, to have a listening ear is very nice," Sandy says.

"Our hope is that our kids will grow up and remain friends, and join baseball leagues together," Sandy says.

The Gillary family started a foundation in Kimberly's name. With seed money donated by her father, Randall Gillary, it raised nearly \$800,000 to buy automatic external defibrillators (AED) for Michigan schools. Defibrillators can restore a heart's rhythm.

The Kimberly Anne Gillary Foundation has donated more 370 defibrillators to Michigan schools, and has another 119 schools on a waiting list.

The foundation also pays for instruction so that at least five people in the school know how to use the AEDs.

"We wanted to do something constructive to help other people," Emily says. "And to do that, it helps you through the grieving process as well."

Kimberly didn't know what she wanted to be, but she always said she wanted to help people, Emily says. "And this is one way our dad is able to help her do that."

For more information, go to [www.kimberlysgift.org](http://www.kimberlysgift.org).

Patricia is a Twist writer. You can talk to her at 313.223.4538 or [pmontemurri@freepress.com](mailto:pmontemurri@freepress.com).

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