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Curing Diabetes, Pigs Turn to Lions

Spring Point Project gains Lions Clubs support in mission to provide an unlimited source of pig islet cells for human transplantation

MINNEAPOLIS, Minn. – Receiving more than \$80,000 from Minnesota and Wisconsin Multiple District Lions Clubs over the past years, Spring Point Project, a non profit organization developing pig donors for pancreatic islet transplantation to cure diabetes, is attending the Lions Clubs International 92nd Convention. Over 12,000 Lions delegates from more than 200 countries are expected to attend the convention July 6-10, 2009, in Minneapolis, Minn.

Spring Point Project will be giving presentations to inform Lions members of this very promising progress toward a diabetes cure. The research is in partnership with Spring Point Project and the Schulze Diabetes Institute at the University of Minnesota. Clinical trials are anticipated to begin within a year.

“The ongoing endorsement and support of the Lions Clubs members and their financial contributions has been extremely important and uplifting to Spring Point Project. It’s great to see two nonprofit organizations joining together toward the cure for diabetes,” says Henk-Jan Schuurman, PhD, Spring Point Project CEO. “The Lions Clubs are, perhaps, best known for their work with eye sight programs, but given that blindness can result from diabetes, Spring Point Project is a natural fit.”

Local Lions chapters work to develop their own programs to support diabetes research and education. A year ago, the Minnesota Lions Diabetes Foundation, Inc. was established by the Lions Clubs of Minnesota, Wisconsin, Manitoba and Ontario – a division of the International Association of Lions Clubs. This group will be spearheading future Lions fundraising efforts to support Spring Point Project and the Schulze Diabetes Institute.

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Schuurman adds, “Although the Minnesota Lions Diabetes Foundation is newly initiated, some Lions members have been connected to diabetes awareness for years. In particular, we are very fortunate to partner with Lion Larry Winner, of Duluth, Minn., due to his commitment in promoting diabetes research for more than 12 years. As a trustee of the foundation, and Multiple District Spring Point Project Chairperson he will lead the way by promoting awareness and financial support for our activities through all reaches of the Lions organization.”

Type 1 diabetes destroys islet cells, which requires people with this disease to inject themselves regularly with insulin in order to stay alive. Diabetes often leads to debilitating conditions such as blindness, stroke and heart attack. Replacing islets is the basis for the potential diabetes cure. Spring Point Project operates a biosecure facility known as the Diabetes Research and Wellness Foundation (DRWF) Islet Resource Facility where high-health, ‘medical-grade’ pig donors are produced as a source for the islets suitable for human transplantation.

The Lions Clubs, www.lionsclubs.org, headquartered in Oak Brook, Ill., is the world’s largest service organization of 1.3 million men and women in 205 countries and geographic areas who work together to answer the needs that challenge communities around the world. Beginning in 1917, the association has provided millions of people with the opportunity to give something back to their communities.

Spring Point Project, www.springpointproject.org, headquartered in Minneapolis, Minn., is working to provide an unlimited source of pig islet cells to accelerate the availability and affordability of islet transplantation to cure diabetes. Spring Point Project and the Schulze Diabetes Institute of the University of Minnesota work in partnership to provide the source and science needed to move toward a cure for diabetes.

Schulze Diabetes Institute, www.diabetesinstitute.org, at the University of Minnesota, began in 1994. The University of Minnesota Medical School capitalized upon its historic strengths in pancreas transplantation by establishing the Diabetes Institute for Immunology and Transplantation (DIIT) to pursue a cure for diabetes. The DIIT was renamed the Schulze Diabetes Institute in 2008.

The Diabetes Research and Wellness Foundation (DRWF), www.diabeteswellness.net, a not-for-profit worldwide network based in Washington, DC, provided a \$6.2 million grant to Spring Point Project. In recognition, Spring Point Project’s Islet Resource Facility was named after the DRWF.

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