



# Life Goes On

Secretary of State Jesse White • Winter 2019

*A newsletter for Secretary of State facility employees and other organ/tissue donation advocates*

The Illinois Organ/Tissue Donor Program staff observed National Donor Sabbath in November. It was a busy month with additional efforts to increase awareness about organ/tissue donation with events throughout the state. A press conference with several faith-based leaders and donor advocates highlighted National Donor Sabbath weekend, Nov. 9-11, 2018. I visited three churches in the Chicago area on Nov. 11, speaking to worshipers about the importance of registering as a donor.

The number of 16- and 17-year-olds joining the Illinois registry was a highlight of 2018. We have approximately 54,000 16- and 17-year-olds registered. Our donor staff has been attending high school driver's education classroom programs to educate and encourage students to consider signing up when they receive their driver's license or identification card. Students learn about the benefits of donation and are encouraged to take the information home to share with their families.

As always, a heartfelt thank you to those at the facility level who make an effort to register new individuals each day across the state. Every 'yes' from a customer has the potential to save several lives down the road. The Illinois Donor Registry stands at 6.6 million individuals thanks to your help. Let's keep the momentum going!

*Jesse White*

Jesse White  
Secretary of State

## National Donor Sabbath shines spotlight on donation

### Pastors support donation at churches

National Donor Sabbath, a faith-based observance of organ and tissue donation, was celebrated Nov. 9-11, 2018. Clergy from many religions were encouraged to participate in worship services and other donor events to increase awareness for donation.

Secretary of State Jesse White held a press conference about National Donor Sabbath on Nov. 8 at the James R. Thompson Center in Chicago and was accompanied by several faith-based leaders, donor advocates, transplant recipients and those who have lost loved ones. Speaking at the press conference with Secretary White were Chicago Police Department Superintendent Eddie Johnson, a kidney recipient; Renee Ferguson, the first female African-American investigative reporter on Chicago television (NBC5 Chicago) who recently lost her husband, publisher Ken Smikle, because he

did not receive a heart transplant; and Very Rev. Esequiel Sanchez, rector of the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Des Plaines. Ferguson and Rev. Sanchez recorded donor public service announcements for National Donor Sabbath in English and Spanish, which were distributed to dozens of religious radio stations throughout Illinois.

"We recognize Donor Sabbath to raise awareness in faith communities because people often believe their religion doesn't approve of donation," said Secretary White. "We want to dispel this myth since the majority of religions support and respect this act of generosity. Each year 300 people die in Illinois, people like Renee's husband, because of a shortage of organs."

Also speaking at the press conference were Senior Pastor David Potete of Chicago's Northwest Community Church and his parishioner, Kelly Roberts, who received a

(cont. on pg. 2)



Secretary White, surrounded by donor advocates and clergy, spoke about the need for more organ and tissue donors at a press conference in observance of National Donor Sabbath.



# National Donor Sabbath shines spotlight on donation (cont. from pg. 1)

kidney from Pastor Potete. "One of the core values of our church is servanthood, or serving others," Pastor Potete said. "I can't tell you how good it felt to help a friend."

Rev. Sanchez emphasized the fact that most major religions consider donation "a life-giving and charitable act." Rev. Sanchez survived the Aeromexico jetliner crash in the Mexican state of Durango in the summer of 2018. All 103 passengers made it out safely before the plane burst into flames. Rev. Sanchez, who had a badly broken arm, returned to the plane in the pouring rain to offer help to others. He knows what a close call all the passengers had that day.

Others supported Secretary White's message, including Tracy Alston, First Ladies Health Initiative; Rev. Anthony McPherson, Mid-America Transplant Service; Shibu Peter, Chicago's Indian community's donor awareness coordinator; and staff from the Gift of Hope Organ & Tissue Donor Network, National Kidney Foundation of Illinois and Eversight Illinois.

Secretary White traveled to three Chicago-area churches on Nov. 11 to promote the message of donation to those in attendance. He recognized each of the churches with a plaque recognizing its support and efforts in support of organ/tissue donation. Pastor and heart

recipient Stephen Richardson, of Jordan Temple Baptist Church in Hillside, welcomed Secretary White to speak to his congregation. Pastor Richardson, a two-time heart transplant recipient, received his first heart on Nov. 11, 1996, and his second heart in November 2013. He recently celebrated 25 years in the ministry. Pastor Clarence Stowers, of Mars Hill Baptist Church in Chicago, greeted Secretary White as the Secretary spoke about donation at the church. Rock of Ages Baptist Church in Chicago also embraced Secretary White's donor message with pastors Marvin Wiley and David Lowe supporting the Secretary's efforts to raise awareness about National Donor Sabbath.

In Decatur, HSHS St. Mary's Hospital hosted a National Donor Sabbath event on Nov. 9 to recognize donor families, recipients and those waiting for a donor match, as well as medical personnel involved with organ donation. A large crowd attended the candlelighting ceremony. The Irons family, of Maroa, participated in the observance. Gillian Irons, 13, is awaiting a second kidney transplant; her 6-year-old sister, Grace, is also waiting for a kidney.



Renee Ferguson, former investigative reporter for NBC5 Chicago, spoke at the press conference about losing her husband, publisher Ken Smikle, because a donor heart was not available.



Senior pastor David Potete of Chicago's Northwest Community Church spoke about donating a kidney to his parishioner, Kelly Roberts, left, standing with her daughter Shannon. To the right of Secretary White are Jack Lynch, Gift of Hope Organ & Tissue Donor Network; and Eddie Johnson, kidney recipient and the superintendent of the Chicago Police Department.



Secretary of State Jesse White, right, presents Hillside's Jordan Temple Baptist Church pastor Stephen Richardson, left, a heart recipient, with a plaque of appreciation for his church's support of organ and tissue donation in observation of National Donor Sabbath. Pastor Richardson, pictured with his wife, First Lady Cynthia Richardson, recently celebrated his 25th year as pastor of Jordan Temple.



## Employee Connection

### Introducing donor program coordinator Gavin Dillon

For Gavin Dillon, 26, of Libertyville, life took an unexpected turn when he was in college. Not feeling well, he made several trips to the doctor and was finally diagnosed with the liver disease Primary Sclerosing Cholangitis (PSG). This is the same liver disease that the late Chicago Bears great Walter Payton developed. Gavin struggled to finish college, and his disease advanced to the stage where he needed a liver transplant. Luckily he was notified that there was a whole liver available to him from a deceased donor.

At age 23, two-and-a-half years ago, Gavin received his gift from a 21-year-old donor. The transplant was performed at Northwestern Memorial Hospital in Chicago in April 2016. Gavin reached out to the father of his donor and they have since met. His donor's father shared stories about his son and is happy to know that Gavin's life was restored by his son's liver. Gavin has been with the Secretary of State's donor program for more than six months, making donor awareness presentations to high school driver's education students, staffing donor tables at health fairs and speaking about his personal transplant story.

"I know how lucky I was to receive my new liver two-and-a-half years ago. It was certainly a gift of life for me. And I am enjoying being part of the Secretary of State's Organ/Tissue Donor Program and being able to share my personal story with many individuals. If I can encourage people to sign up because of my story, I am happy to share it.



Gavin Dillon, center, shares his personal experience as a beneficiary of organ donation at various events. In his personal and professional life, Gavin advocates for others to become part of the registry for organ/tissue donation.



Secretary White, left, presents Chicago's Rock of Ages Baptist Church pastor David Lowe with a plaque of appreciation for his church's support of organ and tissue donation during National Donor Sabbath.



HSHS St. Mary's Hospital in Decatur hosted a National Donor Sabbath event to recognize donor families, recipients and those waiting for a transplant, as well as medical personnel involved with organ donation.



Gillian Irons, of Maroa, lights a candle at HSHS St. Mary's Hospital as a part of their National Donor Sabbath event on Nov. 9 in Decatur. Gillian and her 6-year-old sister, Grace, are both on dialysis awaiting kidney transplants.



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To strengthen the Illinois Organ/Tissue Donor Registry through outreach and registration initiatives.



# High school driver's education students on board with donation

Many have joined or plan to do so soon

Hundreds of high school driver's education students throughout Illinois are hearing classroom presentations about organ/tissue donation from donor program coordinators. The coordinators are educating teens about organ and tissue donation before they are asked to join the donor registry when they receive their driver's licenses. Coordinators often bring a transplant recipient or someone with a personal donor story to share his or her experience with students or they share their own real-life experiences. Two coordinators can personally attest to how organ donation changed their lives.

As of December 2018, 54,000 16- and 17-year-olds have registered their donor decisions. The number continues to climb as teens become more aware of the program and the fact that they can make their own decisions at age 16 and 17. Many teens cite the ability to make a difference in the lives of others as what fueled their decisions to sign up. The teens who have known someone with a transplant, sometimes within their own families, share those stories with their classmates and encourage their peers to participate.



Morrisonville High School driver's education students proudly display their green donor awareness wristbands following a donor classroom presentation on Oct. 4.



Plano High School driver's education teacher Kyle Kee, far right, and his students sport green Donate Life Illinois lanyards after an organ and tissue donor presentation on Oct. 25.



Driver's education students at Chicago's Hubbard High School hold up a Life Goes On banner after a donor classroom presentation.



Jeremy Stillwagon, Jaden Marchky and Kylie Lafie show their support for donation at the IHSA Football State Finals at the University of Illinois Memorial Stadium in Champaign on Nov. 23.



Nursing program students at Rasmussen College in Romeoville surround heart recipient Gwen Westlund (center holding brochures).

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