



# Life Goes On

Secretary of State Jesse White • Winter 2022

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

The new year brings a fresh opportunity to build on past accomplishments. The Illinois Organ/Tissue Donor Registry continued to increase registration numbers last year, and we anticipate the same in 2022. The registry stands at 7.2 million individuals who have said yes to donation. We observed National Donor Sabbath weekend – Nov. 14-16, 2021 – with a virtual campaign that included information about the significance of the weekend, as well as tools for faith leaders to utilize to spread the word about organ/tissue donation with their congregations.

As donor awareness opportunities increase, our program staff continues to educate people about the importance of registering for the program at health fairs, at community events and in high school driver's education classrooms throughout Illinois. We will be gearing up for National Donate Life Month in April and to raise awareness about the importance of registering as donors. Look for donor events in your communities this spring.

As always, thank you for what you do in our Driver Services facilities to support the mission of this lifesaving program. You are making a difference in the lives of others.

## National Donor Sabbath observed in November

National Donor Sabbath was observed Nov. 12-14, 2021, with a virtual campaign at [www.LifeGoesOn.com](http://www.LifeGoesOn.com). The annual observance encourages clergy and worship leaders to discuss the benefits of organ/tissue donation with their congregations. Clergy were encouraged to share information from the virtual campaign – which included a message from Illinois Secretary of State Jesse White – and were provided educational tools for their sermons. Members with a transplant or donor family story were invited to share personal experiences with their congregations that weekend. Featured in the 2021 virtual campaign was a public service announcement for radio stations by five-time organ transplant recipient, Phillip Hanks of Joliet, who is now a



Phillip Hanks

staff member of the Secretary of State's Organ/Tissue Donor Program.

On Nov. 15, Hospital Sisters Health System (HSHS) St. Mary's Hospital in Decatur held a National Donor Sabbath prayer service to recognize transplant recipients, donor families and those waiting, as well as hospital staff involved with organ/tissue donation. One of the service highlights was a song about

donation performed by the hospital choir. Event organizer and health advocate at the hospital, Sister Ritamary Brown, shared inspirational remarks about donation and the importance of the annual National Donor Sabbath prayer service to the hospital.

Springfield's Lincoln Land Community College student organization Phi Theta Kappa Honor

(cont. on pg. 2)



*Jesse White*

Jesse White  
Secretary of State

## National Donor Sabbath observed in November (cont. from pg. 1)

Society held an event promoting organ/tissue donation on Nov. 15 for its yearly "Honors in Action" service project. Speakers included donor program coordinator, Damarius Blanks; donor family members, Larry and Vivian Lefferts; and living kidney donor, Kenzie Dowding. A donor registration drive was also held.

Donor program coordinators distributed the virtual campaign to churches and those interested in using the material to start a discussion about the benefits of donation and encouraging registration.



On Nov. 15, HSHS St. Mary's Hospital in Decatur held a National Donor Sabbath prayer service to recognize donor families, recipients, those waiting and medical personnel involved with organ donation. The service featured a video message from Secretary White.



Springfield's Lincoln Land Community College student organization Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society held an event and donor registration table on Nov. 15 promoting organ donation for their yearly "Honors in Action" service project.



Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society served Life Goes On cookies for its "Honors in Action" service project at Lincoln Land Community College in Springfield.

## February is American Heart Month — keep your heart healthy

It is important to keep your heart healthy year-round, but February puts heart health in the spotlight. February 4 is National Wear Red Day in observance of American Heart Month. People wear red to remind others of the importance of heart health.

**HEART FACTS:** Did you know your heart pumps about 2,000 gallons of blood through the human body each day? That is about 100 gallons of blood an hour or 5-6 liters every minute. A human heart weighs between 8-12 ounces and beats about 2.5 billion times in an average lifetime. Heart disease puts you at greater risk for contracting COVID-19 and is a leading cause of death in the United States. More than 600,000 Americans die of heart disease each year.

Since 1988, 3,200 Illinoisans have received heart transplants, including 100 babies who are younger than 1 year old. Individuals ages 50-64 have received 1,500 heart transplants.

Help keep your heart doing its job for many years to come with these tips:

- Maintain a healthy weight.
- Eat more fruits and vegetables, eat less red meat and fatty foods.
- Reduce salt consumption.
- Exercise more (just a daily walk helps).
- Keep high blood pressure and cholesterol in check.
- Quit smoking.
- Get enough sleep.
- Drink alcohol in moderation.

At work try to:

- Eat healthy snacks.
- Take exercise breaks.
- Try to reduce stress.
- Take time off to recharge.



## 16- and 17-year-old registry continues to climb

Since January 2018, nearly 218,000 16- and 17-year-olds have said yes to joining the state's organ/tissue donor registry. On average, each month about 4,500 16- and 17-year-olds join the registry – about 53,000 per year. More females than males have joined. Overall, 117,000 females ages 16 and 17 (55% of those registered) have signed up since 2018. Males make up 45% of those registered, or about 96,000.

The pandemic has not significantly affected the number of 16- and 17-year-olds registered. In 2018, 55,000 registered; in 2019, 58,000 registered; in 2020, 49,000 registered (due to Driver Services facilities being closed for in-person visits in April and May of that year); and 55,000 joined in 2021. Donor program staff continued to educate high school driver's education students across the state about donation, giving them information that will help them make an educated decision when they receive their driver's licenses or state IDs.



Living kidney donor Eric Marshall, Normal, showed his support of donation at an American Red Cross blood drive in Bloomington on Nov. 11.



Donor mother Carla Wilson stopped by the donor registration table at the IHSA Cross Country state finals in Peoria on Oct. 6. Her son, Brody, was a donor who saved seven lives.

## Surgeons performing lung transplants for COVID-19 patients

Nearly 250 individuals in the United States have received lung transplants due to COVID-19 lung damage, according to the United Network for Organ Sharing (UNOS). Northwestern Medicine surgeons have performed 20 double-lung transplants on COVID-19 survivors, the most anywhere in the world, according to the hospital. UNOS is reporting that about 10% of lung transplants now go to COVID-19 patients.

In 2021, a 65-year-old man from Glendale Heights received the first known "COVID to COVID" double-lung transplant at Northwestern Medicine in Chicago. The lung donor had previously had COVID-19, but had recovered from mild symptoms without any lung damage, making the lungs viable for transplant. Lung transplants for COVID-19 patients increased between 2020 and 2021, according to UNOS. In addition, transplants for other lung diseases that can necessitate lung transplants like cystic fibrosis, emphysema and pulmonary fibrosis, have decreased.

## New donor program regional coordinator received three transplants



Daru Smith

Chicago resident Daru Smith, 33, has joined the Illinois Organ/Tissue Donor Program as a regional coordinator. At age 29, Daru received three back-to-back transplants – heart, kidney and liver – at the University of Chicago Medicine in December 2018. The medical center made history that day by also giving another patient, Sarah McPharlin, 29, from Michigan, the same triple transplants within 27 hours of Daru's. At the time of the surgery, Daru and Sarah were only the 16th and 17th individuals to receive a triple transplant in the country.

Daru was first diagnosed with heart sarcoidosis in 2014. The rare condition causes inflammation in organ tissues, which can lead to heart failure. In 2015, Daru went for a routine kidney check because he had been born with a horseshoe kidney – one that forms as a single organ, then does not split before birth. It was during this checkup that doctors discovered sarcoidosis was also affecting his liver. Throughout the next three years he was hospitalized numerous times. In November 2018, doctors kept him in the hospital and put him on the transplant waiting list. Before his transplant, he was suffering from heart, liver and kidney failure, fluid retention and pneumonia.

After a successful recovery, Daru, father to 6-year-old son, Daru Jr., is excited to be part of the Secretary of State's Organ/Tissue Donor Program promoting donation at community events, at health fairs and in driver's education classrooms, and sharing his story with others.

"Without organ donation, my father wouldn't have a son, and my son wouldn't have a father," said Daru. "Faith is what keeps me going. I had to be there for my son."



# Employee Connection



For John Kurtovich, Secretary of State's Speakers Bureau, the thought of helping his daughter, Nicole, when she needed a kidney was second nature to him. John, 73, presents the Rules of the Road classes at mobile unit Super Senior classes in the Chicago area. During the classes, John discusses organ/tissue donation, encouraging class participants to register as donors. When his daughter Nicole, now 33, was experiencing kidney failure, John was tested to see if he could be her donor. To their delight, John matched Nicole.

Nicole Kurtovich, left, Plainfield, received a kidney in a paired kidney exchange with her father, John Kurtovich, Chicago.

Nicole had been told from age 13 that her kidneys were starting to fail. She took medications to keep them working, until age 26 when they further deteriorated. Nicole started dialysis when she was living in Peoria. She moved back to Chicago to be closer to family due to her decline in health. Nicole was diagnosed with Focal Segmental Glomerulosclerosis, a form of kidney disease, but had no history of kidney disease in her family.

At the last minute before the scheduled surgery between John and Nicole, their doctors asked if they would be willing to participate in a paired kidney exchange with another pair of individuals who were incompatible with each other — John would donate to another individual and another person would donate to Nicole. John and Nicole agreed to the swap and looked forward to saving another life. Nicole received her kidney Nov. 26, 2018, at the University of Illinois (UI) Health in Chicago from a stranger, while John donated his kidney to another person in need. Two lives were saved by this four-way kidney exchange.



Kidney recipient Nicole Kurtovich (center in pink shirt) received a kidney in a paired kidney exchange with her father, John Kurtovich (center in blue shirt). They participated in a Walk for Kidneys, sponsored by the Kidney Foundation of Illinois.

Nicole has had no complications from the surgery, which was more than three years ago. "It is absolutely life changing," Nicole said. "I didn't feel well when I was going through treatment and dialysis was hard, in fact the most difficult part. The difference is amazing."

"Any father would do what I did. If they had the physical ability to do it, they would," John said. "I'm amazed at how easy it was to do. It affected my life for just the few days in the hospital. Organ donation can be done by most of us with a little down time — a small inconvenience when you look at the greater picture of saving a life."

Both John and Nicole support donation whenever they can. They have participated in the National Kidney Foundation of Illinois' Walk for Kidneys in the past and plan to continue promoting donation.

## 2021 Donor Program Staff List

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