

# GIFT of LIFE NEWS



A publication of *Gift of Life Donor Program*, the region's organ and tissue transplant network, serving the eastern half of Pennsylvania, southern New Jersey and Delaware.

## HUMANITY, GENEROSITY and RESILIENCE Sustain Us Our Life-Saving Mission Continues

This year has brought major disruptions and widespread uncertainty to our daily lives amid the coronavirus outbreak. **Throughout this unprecedented public health crisis, Gift of Life Donor Program steadfastly persisted in advancing its life-saving mission.** This is a testament to the dedication and expertise of our staff, the commitment and compassion of our hospital partners and the inspiring generosity of our donors and donor families. Thanks to them, we are continuing to save lives and support families – families of all races, religions, and nationalities; people of all genders, ages, and backgrounds.

### GENEROSITY BY THE NUMBERS: January-July



Organ transplantation continued as a federally-designated essential medical practice since the start of the COVID-19 crisis. **Gift of Life rapidly adapted to unparalleled challenges** to preserve the opportunity for donors to leave a heroic legacy as its team navigated restricted access to medical centers, COVID-19 testing of potential donors, PPE (personal protective equipment) procurement, and adjusting communication with hospital partners and donor families to meet all standards.

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A Donate Life Organization

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DONOR PROGRAM  
THE REGION'S ORGAN & TISSUE TRANSPLANT NETWORK  
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# #DashFromHome: A Social Media Smash

Our first #DashFromHome virtual event sparked non-stop action on social media in place of an in-person Donor Dash on the weekend of April 19. Planning for our 25th anniversary Dash was progressing at full speed when coronavirus restrictions were enacted. *Gift of Life* quickly pivoted to launch #DashFromHome. More than 250 supporters refused to let COVID-19 dampen their Dash spirit as they walked or ran in their neighborhood while observing social distancing. Their flood of photos posted with the hashtag #DashFromHome reached more than 100,000 people on social media.

MISSION, continued from page 1

Every day, our transplant coordinators are in hospitals, counseling and consoling families in their darkest moments, offering them the chance to give the gift of life. Many families still want to help others despite their grief. We are so grateful for the generosity of these families.



**“Donors, donor families, recipients and their families are an inspiration. They root me in the field of organ and tissue donation. Serving as a Gift of Life Transplant Coordinator allows me to join with colleagues and hospital partners to work with donors and donor families and create legacies.”**

—Kimberlee Mander, RN, CPTC

While the coronavirus situation is unprecedented, our *Gift of Life* team addresses highly complex, life-saving clinical situations every day. Our team is on call 24/7 working with 128 acute care hospitals and 15 transplant centers.

We have also found special ways to support our clinical partners and healthcare colleagues in hard hit areas – by providing PPE, care packages and meals, and even donating spare ventilators to help save the lives of coronavirus patients.

*Gift of Life* has worked to improve our community’s health and well being for nearly 50 years. We’ve saved more than 50,000 lives through organ transplants. And more than 1.5 million people have received life-transforming tissue transplants.

**As the nation’s leader in organ donation, our community shows remarkable humanity, resilience, and generosity every day.** This goodness will sustain and strengthen us now and through the future.

We look forward to channeling the enthusiastic support for #DashFromHome into a blockbuster celebration when the 25th anniversary Donor Dash is rescheduled!

**“I will never be able to thank my angel donor in person, but we can honor her memory by signing up to be an organ donor, and spreading awareness about the need for organ donations. We use the Dash to also celebrate the gift of life, and the second chance I have received because of my transplant. We dress as unicorns because a group of unicorns is called a blessing, and a blessing is exactly what I have received. I have the gift of watching my son grow up, and living my absolute best life, all because of my donor, and the selflessness of her family during their darkest hour. Remember to live each day with a positive attitude and loving heart – life is so precious!”**

—Andrea Itnyre, liver transplant recipient, Ephrata, PA



Megan Stier, mother of two-year-old cornea recipient, Cinnaminson, NJ

Carlene, a dietician at Jefferson Transplant Institute, with Herbert and Niclas Welles, North Philadelphia, PA

# NATIONAL DONOR SABBATH November 13-15

## For All Houses of Worship

National Donor Sabbath is a time for people of all faiths to spread the power of registering as an organ, tissue and cornea donor through houses of worship.

Faith-based groups are encouraged to hold a program on National Donor Sabbath weekend, November 13-15, or any time during November as we celebrate the season of Thanksgiving.



Check out *Gift of Life's* new Faith video at [donors1.org/nds](https://donors1.org/nds)

Help us dispel myths and share the fact that all major religions support donation as a generous act of compassion. Here are ways to participate:

- Host a guest speaker via a Zoom presentation.
- Highlight an inspiring story of donation or transplant from your congregation.
- Light a Donor Sabbath candle in honor of heroes who gave the gift of life and patients awaiting a transplant.
- Publish an announcement in your congregation’s newsletter or bulletin and share information via social media. We can provide samples.

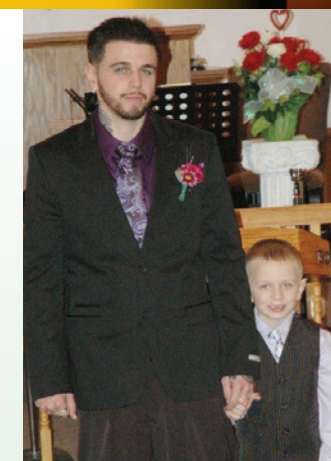
Speakers and materials are available for faith-based organizations and houses of worship. Contact Leslie Jean-Mary at [ljean-mary@donors1.org](mailto:ljean-mary@donors1.org).



## My Brother, My Hero

By Connor Rigione

Here is an excerpt from an essay by Connor Rigione written when he was 12 in memory of his brother, Michael F. DeBiase Jr. of Bangor, PA. Michael, 23, saved six lives as an organ donor following a cerebral hemorrhage in 2015.



As soon as we arrived at the hospital, they took us into a room and told us we couldn’t see my brother yet. We waited for what seemed like an eternity. All my mom could do was walk back and forth as she was crying. My dad started to call our family and my brother’s friends to tell them what was going on. The doctor came in to talk to mom and dad. He said my brother was in critical condition. He took us to see him.

I walked into the room and my brother was connected to tubes and machines. I was so sad and confused. The doctor said his brain was swelling and he might not make it. I held his hand and cried, “Please don’t let him die.” The doctor told me, “I will do everything I can to save him.”

The next two days were hard. We stayed by his side. I helped by bringing friends and family in one at a time to see him.

The doctor told us on the second day that his brain was dying and that he probably wasn’t going to live. My mom and dad asked about organ donation. At that moment, my big brother became my forever HERO. They told us he was a registered organ donor. When it was time to say my final goodbye, I whispered to him “I love you Bro, fly high with the angels! You are my HERO. You are going to save lives.”

Our lives have never been the same. After the transplants were completed, my mom got a phone call and was told that my brother saved six lives! How amazing is that? He lives on in others. So the reason it is important to register as an organ donor is to save lives and so that other families don’t have to lose their loved one and go through the pain of missing someone every day of their lives like we do.

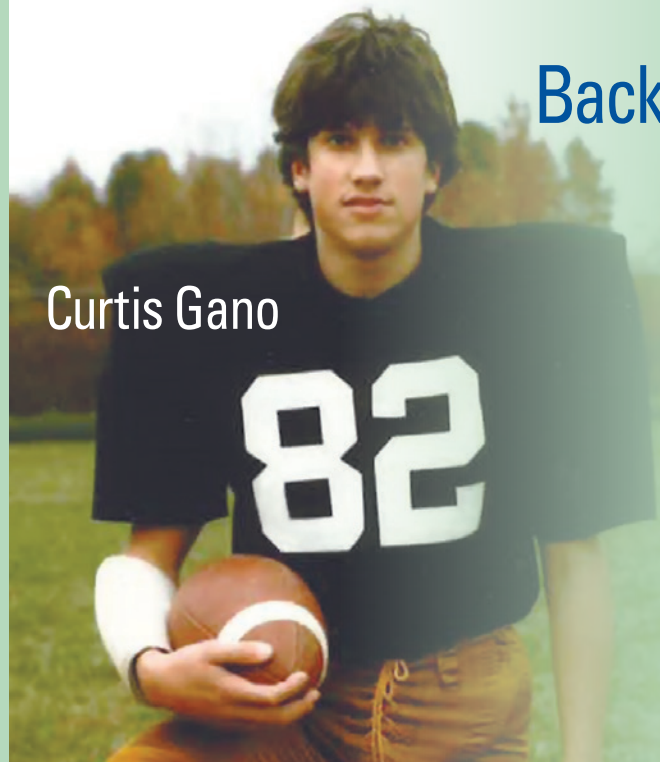
## NATIONAL MINORITY DONOR AWARENESS MONTH

# Strength in Numbers, Power in Diversity

National Minority Donor Awareness Month was observed throughout August to raise awareness about the importance of registering as an organ and tissue donor in multicultural communities. This outreach can benefit everyone by increasing the number of registered donors and creating greater diversity among donors.

More than 50 percent of patients waiting for a life-saving transplant in *Gift of Life's* region are from multicultural communities. In 2019, 25 percent of our donor heroes were from these communities; they included the selfless donor and generous donor family who made it possible for surgeons to perform the first African-American face transplant in U.S. history.

Help us continue to spread the word to increase donor registration and also promote better health among communities at risk for high blood pressure, diabetes, heart disease and kidney failure. **For more information, email Leslie Jean-Mary at [ljean-mary@donors1.org](mailto:ljean-mary@donors1.org).**



Curtis Gano

## Back to School: Hero's Story Inspires

For more than a quarter of a million students, the word "hero" means somebody very similar to themselves, an ordinary teenager, but with an extraordinary legacy.

Curtis Gano was just 16 when he was riding his bike to a friend's house and was struck by a van. Tom and Vivian Gano reached beyond their shock and grief to say "yes" to donation when they knew that there was nothing more that doctors could do to save Curtis. Curtis saved four lives as an organ donor and healed many others as a tissue donor – gifts that saved other families the pain his parents faced.

**"I never wanted anyone else to feel how I did** when Curtis died," said Vivian Gano of Cherry Hill, NJ. "We prayed for a miracle that Curtis would be okay. When we knew that wasn't going to happen, we prayed that he could be a miracle for someone else."

# 270,000 Students

Curtis lives on far beyond those who were saved and healed by his donation. More than 270,000 students in New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Delaware schools have heard the inspiring story of this teenage hero thanks to his parents' tireless advocacy.



Tom and Vivian Gano received the "Quarter-Million Marvel" Award in January for sharing their son's story with more than 250,000 students. Pictured with them are Gift of Life President & CEO Howard M. Nathan (l) and Todd Franzen of GLDP Community Relations (r).

**"It makes me happy to talk about Curtis** and for kids to know who he is. I always pass around a picture of him. So many people know his name and have seen his picture," said Tom Gano. **"Talking about Curtis gives me peace. It helps me keep his memory alive and also save lives."**

Tom's life-saving outreach in schools began more than 25 years ago. His achievement in reaching thousands of students shows the impact that one volunteer can have.

**"I've met many teenagers who said that they registered to be a donor after hearing me speak.** I've had teachers go online while I'm there and register," Tom said. **"It's really rewarding** when they come up to me and let me know they registered because of hearing me talk about Curtis."

Gift of Life has speaking opportunities – including virtual – for donor families, transplant recipients, living donors and donation advocates. We provide training, mentorship and materials through our Ambassador Program. **For more information, contact Colleen Duran at [cduran@donors1.org](mailto:cduran@donors1.org).**

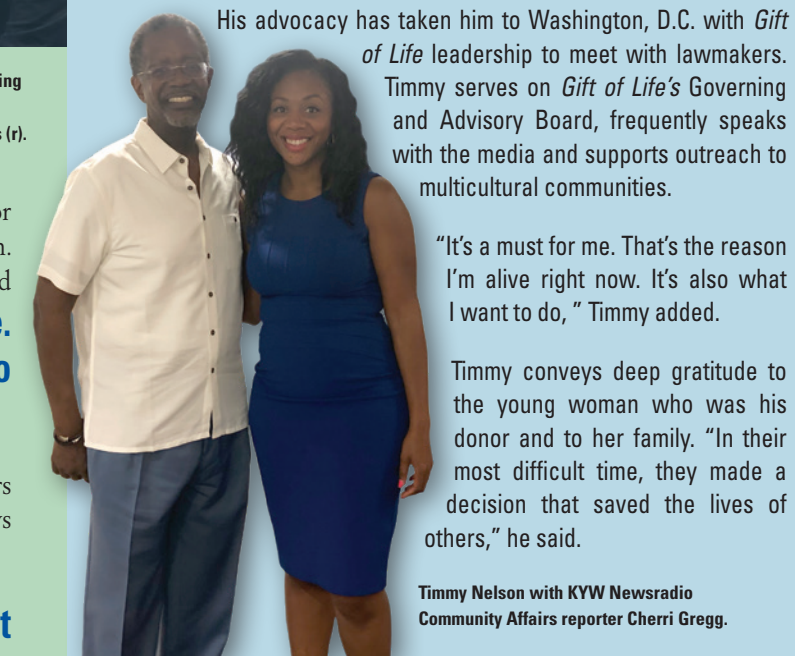
## Recipient, Ambassador, Advocate

Timmy Nelson makes an impact. Whether he is chatting with someone in line at a grocery store or addressing a group of doctors, his personal experience as a transplant recipient brings the high stakes, life-and-death need for more registered donors into sharp focus.

"It makes people stop and pay attention," he said. And getting people to pay attention can lead someone who never gave much thought to donation to sign up and help save lives.

Registering as a donor "seemed like the perfect thing to do" when Timmy moved to Pennsylvania and got his driver's license. "Little did I know that I would need a kidney ten years later," he said.

Timmy was diagnosed with stage three kidney failure that progressed to stage four. He began dialysis and was placed on the transplant waiting list. This summer marks the third anniversary of his life-saving transplant and he's "been going strong ever since."



His advocacy has taken him to Washington, D.C. with Gift of Life leadership to meet with lawmakers. Timmy serves on Gift of Life's Governing and Advisory Board, frequently speaks with the media and supports outreach to multicultural communities.

"It's a must for me. That's the reason I'm alive right now. It's also what I want to do," Timmy added.

Timmy conveys deep gratitude to the young woman who was his donor and to her family. "In their most difficult time, they made a decision that saved the lives of others," he said.

Timmy Nelson with KYW Newsradio Community Affairs reporter Cherri Gregg.

# CLINICAL ORDER

## CARE PACKAGES, MEALS, VENTILATORS Supporting Our Healthcare Heroes

We thank all of our hospital partners for their heroic work during these challenging times.

Intensive care units and emergency departments at many hospitals in our region received care packages containing hand sanitizer, snacks and thank-you cards from Gift of Life in April as part of National Donate Life Month.



teams who have volunteered as Home Cook Heroes at Gift of Life Family House.

Also, early on in the public health crisis, Gift of Life sent spare ventilators to hospitals in some of the communities hit hardest by the pandemic. Two ventilators went to Staten Island University Hospital and one to St. Barnabus Hospital in Livingston, NJ to help save the lives of coronavirus patients.

On National Blue & Green Day, our Gift of Life Hospital Services coordinators provided meal deliveries to four hospitals with healthcare

Temple University Hospital

Thomas Jefferson University Hospital

ChristianaCare Christiana Hospital

AtlantiCare Regional Medical Center



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