

# 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.

## National Minority Donor Awareness Month Neighbor Helping Neighbor in Every Community

**Multicultural communities play a vital role in donation and transplantation.** August is National Minority Donor Awareness Month and we're uniting with one voice and one vision to save lives and improve the quality of life of diverse communities.

**Nearly 60% of the more than 107,000 patients on the national transplant waiting list are from multicultural communities.** There are more than 5,000



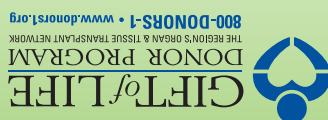
**ONYI KENINE, *Liver Transplant Recipient* | Organ donation gives people a second chance at life. One organ donor can save up to eight lives.**

children and adults on the waitlist in *Gift of Life Donor Program's* region, which includes the eastern half of Pennsylvania, southern New Jersey and Delaware.

Education is so important. Let's work together as neighbors helping neighbors to dispel myths, diversify the donor registry and build a positive culture of organ, tissue and cornea donation.

**Visit [donors1.org](http://donors1.org) to learn more.**

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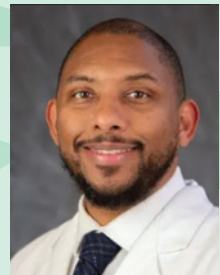
A Donate Life Organization



National Minority Donor Awareness Month

# Voices for Life Advocates **SPEAK OUT**

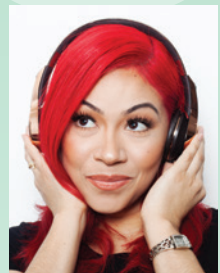
## Thomas Butler, MD, MS, FACS



Transplant and Hepatobiliary Surgery,  
Crozer Health

**It's people who look like us who need these organs** and people like us who are dying every day. High blood pressure, diabetes – our communities are prone to these types of diseases.

## Roxy Romeo



Power 99 Host

To me, it's a no brainer to **register as an organ and tissue donor.** I don't need (my organs) when I'm gone so **why not allow somebody else to live?**

## Ramona Howard



Multi-Organ Transplant Recipient

**I love telling my story especially to people of color** because they have such a distrust of the medical system. I have been given the best of care and nobody treated me

less than I deserved to be treated. **I encourage people – go to the doctors, trust them,** they're not there to hurt you. I didn't just get one organ. I received multiple organs. I'm a person of color. Everybody advocated for me and here I am.

## Jerry McCauley, MD, MPH



Director, Division of Nephrology,  
Jefferson University Health

We have transplanted literally hundreds of thousands of patients. **(Transplants) are very successful. That's very important for people to know.**

## Cynthia London



Donor Mom

My son (Sipho) was in a tragic situation and we had to make a decision. I'm so glad we did the right thing. Donation works for the donor family as well as the recipient.

**We said "yes" to organ donation and we know that six people benefitted and had quality lives.**

## Kimberly Autumn Forde, MD, PhD, MHS

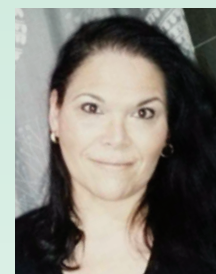


Associate Professor, Medicine,  
Lewis Katz School of Medicine  
at Temple University

Our patients need a lot of support. It's very difficult to wait a long period of time for a transplant. The importance of donation really speaks to that. This is a

**demand versus supply issue. We need to address that gap and then we will begin to see those waiting times get shorter.** One donation really can impact many people. The gift of life is quite amazing.

## Dawn Ortiz



Donor Mom

**We did the right thing and honored the wishes of my son, Rickey, to be a donor.** He donated both corneas, 14 tissue grafts and heart valves. **He still makes me proud.**

# CELEBRATING National Donate Life Month

Thank you to everyone who joined us online and throughout our community to celebrate National Donate Life Month and other special observances in April. We harnessed the power of social media and community partnership to bring our life-saving mission to a wide audience via **Facebook Live presentations with Black Girls Run, iHeart Media/WDAS and 6abc.**

The month also featured **healthcare partners, DMV staff** and even **landmark buildings adorned in Donate Life colors** of blue and green. We presented **special programs for multicultural communities and donor families, celebrated our Gift of Life Ambassadors** during National Volunteer Week and **honored extraordinary legacies of generosity and compassion** on Donor Remembrance Day.



## Spirit of "Dash" Spans Hundreds of Communities

**More than 3,000 transplant recipients, donor families, living donors and advocates took part in Dash From Home,** a virtual version of *Gift of Life Donor Program's* annual Donor Dash.

**Our supporters brought awareness of organ and tissue donation to 37 states across the country** as they walked or ran in their community, helping save lives with every step. **Participants raised nearly \$400,000** to support *Gift of Life* programs that provide education about the critical need for everyone to register as an organ and tissue donor.

## THANK YOU to Our Generous Dash From Home Sponsors



- |   |  |  |
|---|--|--|
| <b>Presenting Sponsor</b><br>Community Tissue Services                  | <b>Bronze</b><br>Bridge to Life<br>CSL Behring<br>Penn Transplant Institute<br>Quick Courier<br>Thomas Jefferson University Hospital | Cornerstone Institutional Investors, Inc.<br>CTI<br>NORA<br>Veloxis Pharmaceuticals  |
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|   |  | <b>Celebration Video Waiting Room Sponsor</b><br>Albert Einstein Medical Center  |





# CLINICAL CORNER

## 225 Healthcare Partners join in 'EXCELLENT' SUMMIT

Gift of Life's Hospital Services team presented a dynamic virtual Organ Donation and Transplantation Summit featuring a distinguished faculty and cutting-edge topics on April 28.

More than 225 healthcare partners from 61 hospitals took part making it one of our most well-attended summits to date. Three-quarters rated the program "excellent." And 153 signed up on the spot to join us again in October.

Featured speakers included **Eduardo D. Rodriguez, MD, DDS** of NYU Langone Health and his patient, **Joe DiMeo**, recipient of the world's first successful face and bilateral hand transplant. Dr. Rodriguez paid tribute to the *Gift of Life* donor and donor family who made this historic transplant possible saying, "I am always impressed by donor families, who at the most difficult time in their life are able to make a decision to help humanity."

Other presenters were **Niels D. Martin, MD, FACS, FCCM**, Perelman School of Medicine University of Pennsylvania; **Laura A. Siminoff, PhD**, Temple University Hospital; and **Amy J. Goldberg, MD**, Temple University Hospital.

Positive feedback from attendees included: "I am always impressed with the *Gift of Life* organization. Their professionalism and compassion are top notch. Awesome presentations."

**THANK YOU**  
to our Team Philadelphia athletes who took part in this summer's **Donate Life Transplant Games of America**



We salute your dedication, hard work and perseverance. We can't wait to be with you at the 2022 Transplant Games in San Diego, CA! Visit [teamphilly.org](http://teamphilly.org)

## NOVEMBER 12-14: National Donor Sabbath An Invitation for All Houses of Worship

People often turn to faith leaders when faced with issues of life and death. National Donor Sabbath is an opportunity to engage the faithful, dispel myths and encourage everyone to register as an organ and tissue donor.

"The subject really needs to be explored congregationally," said Rev. Dr. Paul R. Lee, pastor of Jones Memorial Baptist Church. "Many believers avoid (this topic) because of our lack of understanding. Let's put it on the table of consideration." Dr. Lee encourages the faithful to share life by registering as a donor and becoming an advocate for donation – both profound ways to be a blessing to others.



## Gift of Life CEO Inspires Graduates

Congratulations to *Gift of Life Donor Program* President & CEO Howard M. Nathan, who delivered the commencement address at his alma mater, Juniata College.

Howard described his life's work and passion: "A 24/7 stream of phone calls, rapid response and urgent coordination to recover organs and tissues from those whose lives had tragically ended so that others might miraculously live. A life, in other words, of second chances." **He asked the graduates, "And as you leave here today, ask yourself how many lives will you change?"** How many genuinely wonderful lives?"

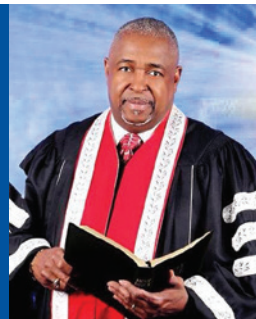
**USA Today featured his words along with those of President Biden, John Legend, Ruby Bridges, Mike Pompeo and other prominent leaders.**

Howard was introduced by 17-year-old liver recipient Onyi Kenine, (pictured on front), whose life-saving transplant was coordinated by *Gift of Life*.

**Howard received an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters degree at the ceremony. The program acknowledged his contributions as one of the world's leading authorities on organ donation and transplantation.**

He joined *Gift of Life Donor Program* in 1978 and has served as President and CEO since 1984.

Under his leadership, *Gift of Life* has grown to be the largest organ procurement organization (OPO) in the U.S., responsible for coordinating the most life-saving organ donors every year for the past 13 years. He is the longest-serving CEO of any OPO in the U.S.



November 12-14 is the designated weekend for National Donor Sabbath. Faith-based groups are encouraged to hold a Donor Sabbath program during November as we celebrate the season of Thanksgiving or at any time during the year. *Gift of Life Donor Program* provides speakers, materials, and resources to faith-based organizations and houses of worship.

For more information, contact Leslie Jean-Mary at [ljean-mary@donors1.org](mailto:ljean-mary@donors1.org).

# A Miracle on Top of a Miracle

By Lindsey Kay Allgeier

**When I listened to my recent ultrasound, I could hear two heartbeats. One belonged to my son, and the other belonged to Samantha Whitney.** Samantha was a beautiful young woman and passionate about helping others. She told her parents when she got her drivers' license that she wanted to register as an organ donor. When a tragic accident took her life, her decision saved my life.

I had incurable heart disease. My doctor told me I probably wouldn't live long enough to graduate high school. A heart transplant was my only chance.

**It is a miracle on top of a miracle when someone who received a transplant goes on to have a child.**

When I met Samantha's parents, Al and Sandra, I told them that I think about their daughter every day. I asked them to be a part of my life. A few years later, Samantha's dad and my dad – together – walked me down the aisle at my wedding. Now her parents can count seven lives that their daughter made possible: the five people who received the gift of an organ transplant, my young son, and his little brother, who arrived in May.

It is a miracle on top of a miracle when someone who received a transplant goes on to have a child. **The people who paved the way for me – a handful of dedicated researchers in Philadelphia – are nothing short of miracle workers.** Thanks to them, I am one of around 100 women in the United States known to have had a baby after receiving a heart transplant.

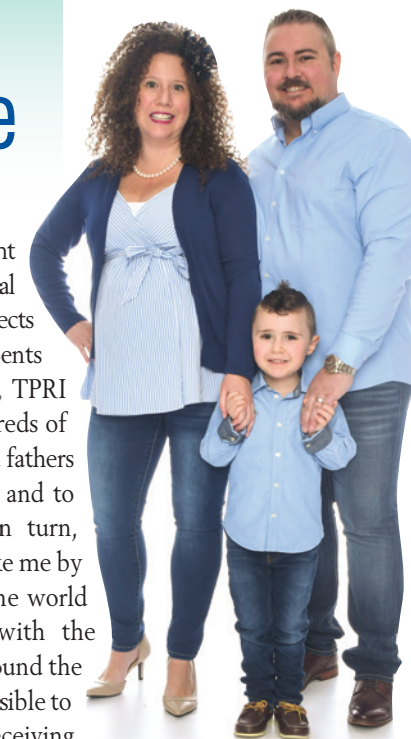
The history of transplants and pregnancy is a difficult one. The answer to the question "Is it safe for transplant recipients to have kids?" differed depending on who you asked. I'll never forget what one of my doctors said when I first told him I hoped to have kids. He looked at me and said that I would have to get a "tubal ligation," or in other words, medical sterilization. I was so upset I didn't know how to respond.

I was on the receiving end of a big, basic problem in the medical community: extremely limited data. Researchers need large population groups to study treatments and risks, but **the number of transplant recipients who go on to have children is very small in any given region.**

As an example, think about immunosuppressants. Transplant recipients must take medication to lower the risk that our bodies will reject the new organ. Some of these medications are associated with a high risk of birth defects.

Thirty years ago, a **visionary researcher, Vincent Armenti, MD, PhD**, saw this medical problem and decided to solve it.

Gift of Life Institute's Transplant Pregnancy Registry International (TPRI), based in Philadelphia, collects data from transplant recipients around the world. Each year, TPRI coordinators speak with hundreds of current and future mothers and fathers who are transplant recipients, and to their healthcare providers. In turn, they shine a light for people like me by publishing their findings for the world and sharing their research with the transplant community. They found the answer to my question: It is possible to have a safe pregnancy after receiving an organ transplant. Their work helped my doctors care for me.



Lindsey with her husband Albert and their son Jonah.

**Thanks to TPRI's research,** my doctors were able to find a substitute for medications that were not safe for me to take during pregnancy. That discovery, and others like it, made it possible for me and thousands of other recipients to have children.

If you have received a transplant and are considering pregnancy, I encourage you to contact TPRI.

**I promised Samantha's parents that I would live my life to the fullest and appreciate every day.** Becoming a mom allowed me to do that. There is no word that captures the gratitude I feel for the people who made it possible.

This story was originally published on [smerconish.com](http://smerconish.com).



Celebrating our **30th** Anniversary

## 3 Decades of Special Deliveries

Transplant Pregnancy Registry International

- Studying post-transplant parenthood and effects of medications on fertility and pregnancy
- Founded in 1991 by Vincent Armenti, MD, PhD
- Tracking more than 4,900 pregnancies
- Enrolling participants from 27 countries on 6 continents
- Celebrating nearly 100 grandchildren

[transplantpregnancyregistry.org](http://transplantpregnancyregistry.org)