

# 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

***“The need for organ donors is so real.”*** —Debra White, kidney recipient's mother  
*Read her family's story on page 2*

**AUGUST IS NATIONAL MINORITY DONOR AWARENESS MONTH** – a time for special focus on the serious health needs of many of our neighbors. Sixty percent of the more than 100,000 children and adults awaiting transplant are from communities of color.

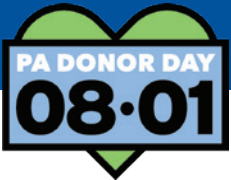
Look inside for personal stories about the powerful impact of donation. *Gift of Life* supports equity in health care and is working to build trust and share the facts about the ultimate act of kindness: organ donation. We all have the potential to be a donor here. What if you or your loved one needed a life-saving transplant?

***Lean more at [donors1.org](http://donors1.org).***



**PA DONOR DAY**

**TUESDAY, AUGUST 1**



**ON 8/1, SPREAD THE WORD:**

***1 donor can save 8 lives!***

Scan here to learn more:



A Donate Life Organization



**GIFT of LIFE**  
THE REGION'S ORGAN & TISSUE TRANSPLANT NETWORK  
DONOR PROGRAM  
800-DONORS-1 • [www.donors1.org](http://www.donors1.org)

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# NATIONAL MINORITY DONOR AWARENESS MONTH



## LOVE, Laughter and Joy

Born with failing kidneys, **Melika Rose** received a life-saving transplant when she was 10 years old. She spent her teen years raising awareness about the critical importance of organ donation. She even hosted kick-boxing classes to raise money and, with her aunt's help, started a foundation called Kidney Kicks. Proceeds went to Children's Hospital of Philadelphia where Melika received her transplant.

Melika enjoyed almost a decade with her transplanted kidney: **"We had ten good years, which gave us plenty of love, laughter and joy," said her mom, Debra.** Sadly, Melika died at age 19, awaiting a second transplant. She became a cornea donor to help others as she was helped by the kindness of a donor hero.



## I Found My Life's PURPOSE

It's been more than 20 years since **Earl Jones** received his life-saving heart transplant – a gift that allowed him to enjoy seeing his daughter and son grow to adulthood and become parents themselves.

Earl had an active childhood despite a genetic heart defect. His life dramatically changed at age 30 when persistent coughing and an emergency room visit revealed he was in congestive heart failure. He waited about two months in the hospital before receiving his healthy new heart from his donor hero, a 22-year-old man.

Earl shares his story to help others make an informed decision about the vital choice to sign up as a donor. **"I think after all these years, I've finally found my life's mission and my life's purpose. I'm living testimony to the power of transplantation."**

**"Discussing organ donation in the African American community is pretty much taboo. But the need is so real,"** said Debra. **"I know the joy and the pain associated with organ donation. We can't escape our mortality. We don't know when or how, but we do know we can make a difference. Please sign up to be an organ donor and let your family know your wishes."**

## PREVENT THE NEED FOR A TRANSPLANT

- ✓ Get an annual health checkup.
  - ✓ Check your blood pressure often. See your doctor if it is above 140/90.
  - ✓ Go for a walk – now. Being physically active for at least 30 minutes a day cuts the risk of obesity, high blood pressure and diabetes.
  - ✓ Choose water instead of sugary drinks.
  - ✓ Maintain a healthy weight and stop smoking. Help is available from your doctor.
- Learn more at [natlmtotep.org](http://natlmtotep.org) (National Minority Organ Tissue Transplant Education Program)

## Waiting for a SECOND CHANCE

The news was devastating when Brianna Bailey experienced kidney failure in 2019: "When I found out I needed to go on dialysis, my first thought was, 'I'm gonna die,'" she said. Brianna has Type 2 diabetes, which affects more than 90 percent of the 37 million people with diabetes in the U.S.

For more than three years, **Brianna's father, Brian, has been by her side as she waits for the transplant that will give her a second chance at life.** The wait can be a grueling five to seven years for a matching kidney to become available from a deceased donor. **Brian said he wasn't signed up as an organ donor before his daughter's health crisis but that quickly changed as he realized how great the need is.**

While they wait, Brian wants everyone to know that the need for a life-saving transplant can affect themselves or their loved ones: "Anyone in your family – you never know. Young, old – it can be anyone," he said.



## PLAN NOW for November Gift of Life Donor Sabbath All Houses of Worship Are Invited

We encourage all houses of worship across our region to share personal stories and vital information about organ and tissue donation as we celebrate Gift of Life Donor Sabbath this November. *Gift of Life* joins with people of all faiths to support those on the waitlist, donor families, transplant recipients and caregivers.

Faith plays an important role in the decision of many families to give or receive the gift of life. Help us dispel myths and share the fact that every major religion in the U.S. supports organ donation as one of the highest expressions of compassion and generosity.

Speakers and materials are available for faith-based organizations and houses of worship. Contact Naja Killebrew at [nkillebrew@donors1.org](mailto:nkillebrew@donors1.org).

Scan here for our inspiring faith video and to learn how you can participate!



## Dannielle's Answered Prayer



Dannielle Small spent her 20s "surviving" as she struggled through seven years of dialysis after an attack of Lupus severely damaged her kidneys. **Through strength and determination, she earned bachelor's and master's degrees, rededicated herself to God and bought a house.** She even worked a full-time job while on dialysis, but it was a lonely, difficult time, she said.

**Dannielle's resilience is now buoyed by gratitude** as she enjoys a healthy new life and a happy relationship with Michael (pictured) **thanks to a donor hero named Andrew** and his compassionate family. Dannielle also received caring support when she stayed at Gift of Life Howie's House. "It's truly been the answer to my prayers," she said. "I'm very grateful." Dannielle's successful transplant produced a ripple effect by making it possible for her to help others through her work as a mental health counselor.



## Family Room Dedicated at St. Christopher's

Gift of Life is committed to providing care and support to families of donor heroes. We joined St. Christopher's Hospital for Children to dedicate a new room for families who are facing loss and considering the opportunity for organ donation.

A dedication ceremony included *Gift of Life Chief Administrative Officer and General Counsel Jan L. Weinstock, Esq.*, *Gift of Life Hospital Services Coordinator Sarah Higgins*; and from St. Christopher's: *Chief Medical Officer Doug Thompson, MD*, *Chief Nursing Officer Ingrid McGovern, RN*; *transplant surgeon Steven Dunn, MD*, *Critical Care*

*Unit Nursing Director Dianna Colonna, BSN, RN*, and *kidney recipient Dylan Contreras*; and *Rafiah Cheeks*, who received a life-saving liver transplant at St. Christopher's more than 30 years ago (pictured with his sister, *Antonia Alford*). Decades later, their mother became a donor who transformed the lives of strangers when she passed.

Thank you to *St. Christopher's* for working with *Gift of Life* to make this special family space in the Pediatric Intensive Care Unit possible.



## Temple Health Supports Donors and Family Husband, Wife Become Heroes Together

A family's generosity combined with strong collaboration between *Gift of Life* and Temple University Hospital staff recently made it possible for a married couple to save and heal lives through donation in a unique case.

Felix and Maria Nunez, married more than 40 years, were hospitalized following a fire at their home. During their admission in the Burn ICU, the couple was placed in adjoining rooms so they could remain side by side. Sadly, their injuries were not survivable. The couple and their large family received extraordinary support from the hospital team throughout the clinical care process.

The couple, both in their 60s, then became heroes together on the same day. Felix successfully donated his liver and Maria donated bone, skin and corneas to heal dozens of people. Their legacy as donors provides comfort and hope to their grieving family.

"Our team was privileged to support this special family and work with *Gift of Life* to provide them with a heroic legacy for both of their parents through donation. Their kindness and generosity in giving a second chance at life to others is truly inspiring," said Danesha Ware, RN, Assistant Nurse Director, Burn Intensive Care Unit, Temple University Hospital, Philadelphia.

*Gift of Life* Transplant Coordinator Angela Crescenti added, "We are so proud to work side by side with our hospital partners to make each donation possible and to help donor families during one of the most difficult times of their life."

Thank you to the *Temple Health team* for your compassionate care of this family, and for your continued partnership with *Gift of Life Donor Program*.

**Pictured:** The Nunez family and Temple Health staff raised a Donate Life flag to honor donor heroes Felix and Maria Nunez.



# 26TH ANNUAL DONOR DASH

"What an emotional and wonderful day."

Our 26th Annual Donor Dash was a joyous celebration of the life-saving power of organ and tissue donation on Sunday, April 16 in front of the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

*Gift of Life* President and CEO Rick Hasz was joined by kidney donor and KYW Newsradio broadcaster Jim Melwert to host an enthusiastic crowd for 10K and 5K runs, a Kids Fun Run, lawn games, a community health corner and more. Uplifting music filled the air thanks to the acclaimed St. Thomas Gospel Choir of Philadelphia. The dynamic Positive Movement Entertainment drumline led the crowd for the day's grand finale: the 3K walk featuring cheering families and friends. Pictured above, Rick (left) and Jim presented the award for "Best Dressed Team" to Donna Shinn of Isabella's Imprint named to honor her daughter, a donor hero.

Thanks to our generous supporters and sponsors, we raised more than a half million dollars for community education and programs that support donor families and transplant recipients!



### HIGHLIGHTS:

- 10,000+ participants
- 268 Teams
- \$540k+ raised and counting
- Virtual Dash in 30 states plus Washington, D.C. and Ireland!

## THANK YOU

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## 2023 World Transplant Games HEARTS OF GOLD

The transplant journey of three heart recipients representing *Gift of Life's* region took them 10,000 miles from home for the World Transplant Games in Perth, Australia this spring. The games showcase the health and vitality of recipients made possible by donor heroes and their generous families.

Each of our athletes came home with both medals and amazing memories of meeting an international array of recipients celebrating the gift of life. **CONGRATULATIONS!**



**JANET DENNIS, Philadelphia:**  
BRONZE in Javelin Throw  
FOURTH in Shot Put  
& Long Jump  
FIFTH in Discus



**TYSHON LEWIS, Delaware:**  
GOLD in Shot Put  
SILVER in Discus



**DR. NEAL STANSBURY, Lehigh Valley:**  
GOLD in 30k Cycling  
Road Race  
SILVER in 10k Cycling  
Time Trial

## JOIN Team Philadelphia Donate Life Transplant Games of America

July 5-10, 2024 • Birmingham, AL



- Honor the heroic legacy of donors, highlight the need for registered donors and celebrate the success of transplantation.
- Organ, tissue and bone marrow recipients, living donors, donor families and supporters are all invited.

Visit [TeamPhilly.org](http://TeamPhilly.org)