

Our View: Sign up to be an organ donor and save a life

RRSTAR.COM EDITORIAL

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An average of 18 people die each day while waiting for an organ or tissue donor, according to the Gift of Hope, an organ and tissue donor network.

Last year, more than 300 people in Illinois died while waiting for a transplant.

This year, there already has been a notable death by a person waiting for a donor.

Vikki Tulus, who had worked for the secretary of state's donor program since 2007, died Jan. 9. She needed a kidney.

The issue of organ donation has become a personal one for Secretary of State Jesse White. He came to the Ethnic Heritage Museum in Rockford to dedicate a tree and plaque Thursday in memory of Tulus.

She was featured last April in a television commercial to promote donor registration. In the video she says: "Before, my job depended on the organ donor program. Now my life depends on it."

Many lives depend on the generosity of others. Nationally, almost 106,000 people are waiting for an organ transplant. In Illinois, 4,700 are.

Illinois' organ donation program has been very successful, but even though 5.2 million Illinoisans have signed up to donate their organs and tissues, many more are needed.

Every 10 minutes, a new person joins the national transplant waiting list.

With each advance in medicine, the need for organ donation increases. Doctors can do amazing things, but they still do not have a long-term, technological substitute for a human organ.

We often hear and read about successful, life-saving transplants. Coralee Hardwick of Machesney Park shares such a story about her granddaughter in today's letters to the editor.

Before White became secretary of state, his sister, Doris Ivy, received a kidney transplant. Since then, he has become a leading proponent of organ donation.

White has other stories about organ donation to share. A 17-year-old member of the Jesse White Tumblers was shot and killed in 2006 outside a Chicago movie theater. His family donated six of his organs.

Driver's license facilities across the state use countertop photo displays to illustrate the local effect of organ donation. The displays feature an organ recipient, family member of a donor or other people affected by donation.

April is Organ Donor Awareness Month, and we expect more people will be added to the donor registries. Will you be one of them?

Need to know

What it means: Illinois has first-person consent: If you join the state's organ and tissue donor registry, that will be the last word. No family member has to agree to the donation when you die, no witnesses or additional signatures are needed, and no one can override your decision.

Kin in the know: However, it is a good idea to discuss your wishes with your family so there is no confusion. They need to know that no family is ever charged for removing organs, and no one receives compensation. An open-casket funeral is possible, and organ donation is consistent with the beliefs of most religions.

Age of consent: You have to be 18 to join the registry. But if you are younger and want to be a donor if you die prematurely, discuss your wishes with your parents. In a painful time, knowing that they are carrying out your wishes could be a comfort to them.

How to register: Visit LifeGoesOn.com, call 800-210-2106, or sign up when you get or renew a driver's license or state identification card.