Life Goes On

Secretary of State Jesse White • Spring 2003

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

April is an important time of year for the Secretary of State's office as we celebrate Organ/Tissue Donor Awareness Month. Donor families, recipients and friends are speaking out about the importance of organ and tissue donation.

To emphasize the need for more organ donors, our Organ/Tissue Donor Program is sponsoring many events throughout the month in Bloomington, Carbondale, Chicago, Springfield and other Illinois communities. It is exciting to witness the resounding support the program receives from local community groups and organizations.

Driver Services facilities throughout the state are showing their support by displaying Organ Donor posters and distributing materials to customers. Many facilities are hosting organ/tissue donor awareness tables, handing out materials and answering questions and concerns from customers. The hard work of our facility personnel is reflected in our Organ Donor Registry. Currently, there are more than 5.6 million potential donors listed in the registry, making Illinois' registry the largest in the nation. I thank each of you for doing your part in giving the gift of life to those in need.

Jesse White

Jesse White
Illinois Secretary of State

Illinois celebrates Organ/Tissue Donor Month

Here in Illinois, the entire month of April is designated as Organ/Tissue Donor Awareness Month; however, National Organ/Tissue Donor Awareness Week is officially April 20-26.

This year, 10 Illinois communities have formed committees to coordinate "Life Goes On" events in April. They include Bloomington/Normal, Carbondale, East St. Louis, Illinois Valley, Springfield, Chicago, Quincy, Peoria, Randolph County and Rockford. Schools, local businesses, clergy, labor, medical personnel, procurement agencies, recipients and donor family members will join together to spread the word about the critical need for organs and tissue to help save lives.

In some areas, volunteers will sponsor displays at local Driver Services facilities, and several school districts are holding essay contests. A "Hoops for Hope" event is planned in Carbondale, and other areas are sponsoring health fairs. Green ribbons are being distributed in various areas of the state to remind people that there are 5,000 people in Illinois waiting for organs.

The Springfield "Life Goes On" Committee prepares for their big April event.

"Each year we are amazed to see how the registry numbers increase in those areas where 'Life Goes On' activities are held," said Secretary of State Jesse White. "This proves that education is key to a successful program, and through that effort more and more Illinois residents agree to participate in the registry."

If you would like to participate in Organ/Tissue Donor Awareness Month events in your community, have an idea for promoting organ/tissue donation or know of someone who has a story to tell about organ/tissue donation, please call 217-782-6258.

Members of the Peoria "Life Goes On" Committee.

Co-worker Connection

The Ultimate Gift

At age 5, Sandy Kerutt of the Wheaton and Lombard facilities was told she had juvenile onset diabetes.

Even after the diagnosis she was fortunate to have many years of good health and a happy childhood.

In 1991, Sandy's health took a turn for the worse and she was placed on the transplant list. "Even though I had to start dialysis, I always kept a strong will and did not let the process get me down," said Sandy. Her brother wanted to help and offered her one of his kidneys, but he was not a match.

In August 1994, Sandy received the phone call that changed her life. A kidney and pancreas had been procured that were a close match. After a successful surgery and recovery period, Sandy celebrated her birthday with no more dialysis or injections — and a big piece of birthday cake! She says that most transplant recipients have two birthdays, the day they were born and the very special day when their life returns after a successful organ transplant.

Sandy shares a special bond with another woman who received a liver transplant from the same donor. Neither will ever forget the generosity of the family of a young girl who gave them a second chance at life. Life truly goes on for Sandy.

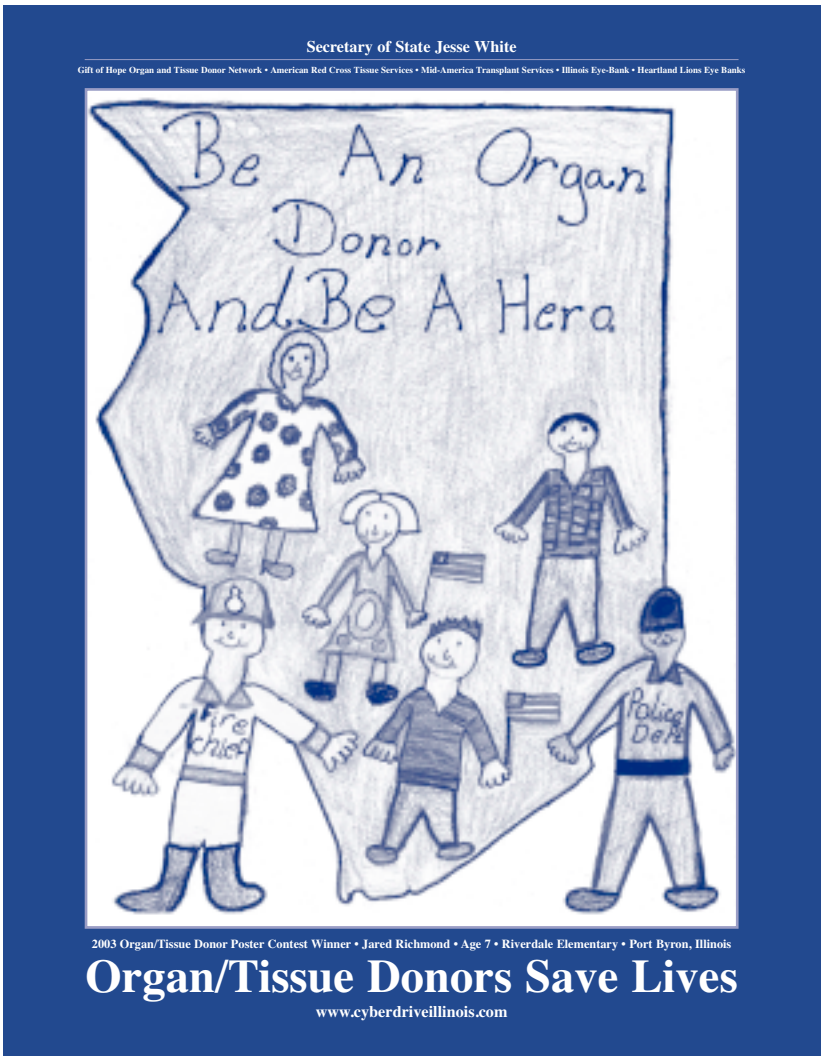
If you have had a personal experience with donation and wish to share your story, please contact Lisa Kirk at 312-814-8921 or lkirk@ilsos.net.

Port Byron student wins Organ Donor Poster Contest

Each year, the Secretary of State's office sponsors an Organ Donor Poster Contest for Illinois students. The contest begins in September and runs through the end of December. Winners are announced in April during Organ/Tissue Donor Awareness Month.

Secretary of State Jesse White is pleased to announce that Jared Richmond, age 7, from Riverdale Elementary in Port Byron, IL is the 2003 Organ Donor Poster Contest first-prize winner. Jared's design was chosen from among thousands created by students from across the state in kindergarten through 12th grade.

Organ Donor posters with Jared's design are posted at all facilities to remind customers about the importance of organ donation.



LIFE GOES ON. BE AN

Representatives from several organ donation organizations judged the more than 300 final entries sent from Illinois schools for the Organ Donor Poster Contest in December 2002.

Organ procurement organizations

Our most important partners

The Illinois Organ/Tissue Donor Registry is an invaluable resource to the two organizations in the state that coordinate the organ donation process with hospitals and families.

The Gift of Hope Organ and Tissue Donor Network serves the northern three-quarters of Illinois, and Mid-America Transplant Services serves the southern quarter of the state. These two organizations are among 59 such not-for-profit organ procurement organizations in the nation responsible for:

- Evaluating potential donors for medical suitability.
- Discussing donation with family members of potential donors at the hospital.
- Coordinating the organ procurement process.
- Educating healthcare professionals and the general public about donation.
- Offering support to families of donors.
- Assisting hospitals with the development of policies and procedures for donation.

Each time the staff at Gift of Hope or Mid-America are called out to a hospital to evaluate a potential organ donor, they contact the Secretary of State's Organ/Tissue Donor Registry to determine whether the patient is registered as a donor. When the patient's family has accepted their loved one's death and is ready to discuss end-of-life decisions, the staff talks to them about organ donation and their loved one's status in the registry. Knowing their loved one's wishes helps a family better make a decision as to whether to consent to donation.

For more information about these organizations, please contact: Gift of Hope Organ and Tissue Donor Network, 888-307-DON8, www.giftofhope.org or Mid-America Transplant Services, 888-376-4854, www.mts-stl.org.

Q&A

Q If I have signed the back of my driver's license indicating that I want to be an organ/tissue donor, will my wishes be carried out automatically?

A Signing the back of your driver's license or carrying an organ donor card is certainly the first step in becoming a donor. However, you also need to tell your family that you want to be a donor. At the time of donation, your family must provide written consent for donation to take place. Making your wishes known to your family is probably the most important step you can take.

Q If I do not specify which tissue or organs I want to donate, everyone will be confused about what I want.

A If you wish, you may donate only specific organs or tissue. However, if you do not specify, you could save up to seven lives and improve the lives of as many as 50 others! Many people think of donation as involving just major organs; however, skin, corneas, bone and heart valves can make dramatic improvements in the lives of many people.

Organ Donor License Plate

Illinois Secretary of State Jesse White presents Chicago Bear Brian Urlacher with an Organ Donor License Plate bearing Urlacher's jersey number 54. Urlacher has teamed up with Secretary White to promote organ donation and remind Illinois residents that license plates benefiting the Organ Donor Program are available through the Secretary of State's office. The plate costs $103. A portion of that money goes to enhance the Organ Donor Program. For more information, please call 217-782-7758, or visit www.cyberdriveillinois.com.

FACTS YOU SHOULD KNOW

- ✓ Studies show that African-Americans are particularly susceptible to cardiovascular disease, possibly as a result of the high incidence of high blood pressure and diabetes documented in the African-American community, as well as genetic factors.
- ✓ A computer system matches organs with recipients based on the recipient's length of time on a waiting list, the severity of the recipient's condition, blood types, size of the donated organ and, in some cases, the donor's genetic make-up.
- ✓ A bill that took effect Jan. 1, 2003, allows state employees to take up to 30 days paid leave for donating organs or tissue. The legislation was introduced by Secretary of State Jesse White to emphasize his support of organ donation.
- ✓ State employees also may take one hour of paid leave every 56 days to donate blood and up to two hours, 24 times a year, to donate blood platelets.

Jesse White, Secretary of State
Produced by the Secretary of State Communications Department.
Printed by authority of the State of Illinois, April 2003 – GA 689 – 5M

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