## CONNECTORS CONNECTIONS



#### NATIONAL DONATE LIFE MONTH HIGHLIGHTS

Safe and socially distant ways that PA and WV celebrated the annual national observance



#### CORE TO WORK WITH AMERICAN HEART ASSOCIATION

"Heart of CORE" team to join 2020 AHA Pittsburgh Heart Walk



#### MISSION

To **Save** and **Heal** lives through donation.



#### VISION

Every potential donor will make A Pledge for Life



#### **VALUES**

Innovation, Education Innovation, Integrity, Life, Quality, Respect, Responsiveness.

## A MESSAGE FROM CORE CEO SUSAN STUART



In the three months since my last CEO message, a lot has changed in our world. We've all been forced to confront

uncertainty and fear. I personally cannot remember a time in my life when I have ever been so challenged as a leader, spending so many sleepless nights struggling with how to balance my team's needs with the needs of those we serve. One thing never changed though: CORE's commitment to the more than 110,000 people across the country who need a life-saving transplant and the donor families who find comfort in donation's lasting legacy. Day after day, CORE continued to do what we do best: Save and Heal lives through donation.

Now, as we slowly and cautiously usher in a new normal, I'm so proud to say that, year-to-date, CORE has seen a more than 50% increase in the number of organ donors and a nearly 20% in the number of tissue donors over the same period in 2019, which you'll remember was a record-breaking year in itself. Furthermore, throughout it all, we've kept our facility safely staffed, continued hospital and community education, offered our Advocates virtual volunteer opportunities and supported our donor families.

Recently, I've been asked, "How? How, during a global pandemic, are you keeping your team safe and employed all while saving and healing more lives than ever before?" My answer: "Because we were ready."

As a 2019 Baldrige Award-winning organization, the emergency preparedness CORE plans established during our near decadeperformance excellence journey ensured the continuity of the organization's operations allowing our leadership team and workforce to remain healthy and committed to our mission throughout the constantly-evolving COVID-19 crisis.

Sadly, the amazing celebration when CORE would have accepted our Malcolm Baldrige Quality Award was among COVID-19's cancellations. But as proud as I would have been to accept the crystal award, it would have been second to the pride I'm feeling today. Over the last few months, CORE has proven that we are much more than a Baldrige Quality Award. We are everything our values say we are - compassionate, respectful, innovative, responsive - even in the worst of times. There is no award that will ever be as memorable or as impressive as what the CORE team has accomplished over the last few months.

Someday, when this is all behind us, I have no doubt that CORE will be defined not by how COVID-19 changed us, but by how we refused to let it change us!

Susan Stuart CORE President & CEO

#### DESPITE PANDEMIC, CORE, UPMC PERFORM RECORD NUMBER OF LUNG TRANSPLANTS

While UPMC typically performs about six lung transplants per month, together with CORE, the Pittsburgh transplant center performed 12 lung transplants in the month of April, at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic.

UPMC patient Josh Sarchet was in desperate need of a lung transplant, but knew the risks were higher than usual during this unprecedented time. Pablo Sanchez, MD, PhD, FACS, surgical director of Lung Transplant/ECMO, worked with Sarchet and his family to weigh the risks of the procedure. With a detailed safety plan in place, clinicians completed a successful transplant.

# NATIONAL TRANSPLANT NUMBERS BACK TO PRE-COVID LEVELS

By quickly adapting to COVID-19 challenges, the transplant community kept the system running to honor the gift of life.

Some estimates showed that transplants in the United States were down more than 51% since the COVID-19 outbreak began.

But according to the United Network for Organ Sharing (UNOS), after a month-long decline in transplants performed each week in the United States, the numbers began to gradually increase.

In the last two weeks, they have leveled off close to where they were before the pandemic.



## CORE PARTNERS WITH AHA FOR HEART WALK

For more than 40 years, CORE has been Saving and Healing lives through donation.

This year, we are teaming up with the American Heart Association (AHA) to extend our reach in the community and Save and Heal more lives than ever before.

That's why we've formed the Heart of CORE in support of the AHA. Our organization is driven by eight fundamental values: Compassion, Education, Innovation, Integrity, Life, Quality, Respect and Responsiveness. We recognize these same qualities in the AHA, which has inspired us to walk for their important cause.

The AHA's Heart Walk is a time of celebration, joy and inspiration; people unified in support of a single goal to see a world free of heart disease and stroke, the numbers one and five killers worldwide. Please join our team or donate today and help us change this statistic.

Be a Heart Walk Hero with us and, together, we'll Save and Heal lives.



## FOR THE FIRST TIME, CORE RECOVERS A DCD HEART FOR TRANSPLANT



For the first time, CORE has recovered for transplant a heart from a donor who died of circulatory death. Until now, CORE, like most organ procurement organizations, has only recovered hearts from donors who passed as a result of brain death. The milestone comes only months after a team at Duke University became the first in the United States to perform a donation after circulatory death heart transplant.

Traditionally, donors have been declared brain dead, also known as donation after brain death (DBD). After this declaration, the organs that the donor has designated for donation are recovered, the beating heart is "put to sleep" and removed. The heart is then transported, traditionally on ice, back to be implanted in the recipient.

In donation after circulatory death (DCD), donors often have a devastating neurologic injury, but do not meet the very strict criteria for brain death. They have no chance of recovery and are on mechanical ventilation and infusions to maintain blood pressure. The family has made the decision to withdraw care but want to respect the patient's desire to donate their organs. In this case, ventilated support is withdrawn. When the patient's heart stops, there is a 5-minute "hands off" period and then they are pronounced. CORE can now recover the organs, including the heart. The heart is then placed in the TransMedics Organ Care System (OCS), a portable warm perfusion machine. This allows the heart to be perfused with oxygenated blood, beating and warm, during transportation.

Transplants with donation after circulatory death (DCD) had been performed in the U.S. with other organs, and DCD heart transplants had been performed in Europe and Australia, but a DCD heart transplant had not been attempted in the U.S. until the launch of the Donors After Circulatory Death Heart Trial, which is evaluating the performance of a perfusion system (TransMedics Organ Care System, TransMedics) to resuscitate and preserve hearts from donors after circulatory death as opposed to brain death. If the technology, which is designed to maintain organs in a living, functional state, is successful in preserving hearts from DCD donors, it could increase the size of the donor pool for heart transplants.

As with all donation, this is only made possible by the courage and generosity of donors and their families who choose to give the gift of life in the face of grief and tragedy.

#### VA PGH PERFORMS FIRST LIVING DONOR LIVER TRANSPLANT

In March, the VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System (VAPHS) and UPMC partnered to perform VA's first living-donor liver transplant, in which a portion of a healthy person's liver is transplanted to someone in need of a liver. Army veteran Timothy Yablonski received a portion of liver from his daughter, Alyssa Last. Both transplant surgeries were completed at UPMC.

One of 13 VA transplant centers, VA Pittsburgh performs in-house liver, kidney and living-donor kidney transplants, and now collaborates with UPMC for living-donor liver transplants and small bowel transplants. VA Pittsburgh is the only VA medical center in the nation that now accepts living-donor liver transplant and small bowel transplant referrals. Yablonski's surgery at UPMC marks the first time any VA in the nation has participated in a living-donor liver transplant.

"UPMC has a long history of collaboration and support for VA Pittsburgh and its transplant program. We are proud to offer lifesaving liver transplants to veterans both in our region, and across the country," said Abhinav Humar, M.D., chief of transplantation at UPMC.

Yablonski lives in New York and receives care at the Syracuse VA Medical Center (VAMC). Last lives in Florida and although she is not a veteran, she is eligible for transplant follow-up care at the West Palm Beach VAMC. The Veterans Health Administration (VHA) also provides post-transplant care to veterans who have received a transplant at a non-VA medical facility either through dual care or primary care arrangements.

"As soon as we found out he was able to receive a livingdonor liver transplant, I wanted to help," said Last. "I was the first one who applied and was evaluated for it."

"It made me feel incredible that my daughter wanted to support me," said Yablonski: "What my doctor told me after the transplant is my daughter kept me alive."

All veterans enrolled for VA health care are eligible for consideration for transplant services. VA policies support travel benefits, transplant procedures and follow-up care. VA also uses Clinical Video Telehealth (CVT) to expedite evaluations and follow-up transplant care while allowing veterans to save on travel time and costs.

#### TRANSPLANT GAMES UPDATES



#### TGA REGISTRATION REMINDER

Register for the 2020 Transplant Games at the current registration rates. After July 18, 2020, registration prices will increase. Take advantage of the lower prices while you can!

Current Rates:

\$50.00 Non-Competitor Registration
\$170.00 Competitor Registration
To register, please visit the following link:
https://www.transplantgamesofamerica.org/registration.html

#### TGA VIRTUAL JOURNEY TO 2021

Mark your calendars for July 20-24, 2020 for a special sneak preview of the 2020 Transplant Games being held next July 16-22, 2021.

This terrific week-long virtual event titled "Journey to 2021" will include a comprehensive tour of venues, as well as other activities connected to what we expect to be the largest and most boisterous Transplant Games yet.

See the Zoom of Athletes from many of the state transplant teams, and listen to songs from some of next year's Lyrics for Life competitors. And don't miss the virtual, live trivia competition, and a daily presentation of Stories of Courage.

Finally, there will be two workshop presentations by hospital partners, Hackensack Meridian Health and RWJ Barnabas Health. Watch for details on days and times in the coming weeks on the Transplant Games of America Facebook page and the Transplant Life Foundation website.

#### JOIN TEAM ALLEGHENIES TRANSPLANT!



412-963-3550, option 4 contact@teamalleghenies.org



# FIRST DOUBLE LUNG TRANSPLANT PERFORMED IN COVID-19 SURVIVOR IN US

Patient spent six weeks in the COVID
Intensive Care Unit on a ventilator

For the first time in the United States, surgeons performed a double-lung transplant on a patient whose lungs were damaged by COVID-19.

Before putting the patient on the transplant wait-list, she had to test negative for COVID-19.

The patient, a Hispanic woman in her 20s, spent six weeks in the Northwestern Memorial Hospital COVID ICU on a ventilator and extracorporeal membrane oxygenation (ECMO), a life support machine that does the work of the heart and lungs. By early June, the patient's lungs showed irreversible damage. The lung transplant team listed her for a double-lung transplant, and 48 hours later, performed the life-saving procedure at the Chicago hospital.

"A lung transplant was her only chance for survival," said Ankit Bharat, MD, chief of thoracic surgery and surgical director of the Northwestern Medicine Lung Transplant Program. "We are one of the first health systems to successfully perform a lung transplant on a patient recovering from COVID-19. We want other transplant centers to know that while the transplant procedure in these patients is quite technically challenging, it can be done safely, and it offers the terminally ill COVID-19 patients another option for survival."

"For many days, she was the sickest person in the COVID ICU – and possibly the entire hospital," explains Beth Malsin, MD, pulmonary and critical care specialist at Northwestern Memorial Hospital. "There were so many times, day and night, our team had to react quickly to help her oxygenation and support her other organs to make sure they were healthy enough to support a transplant if and when the opportunity came. One of the most exciting times was when the first coronavirus test came back negative and we had the first sign she may have cleared the virus to become eligible for a life-saving transplant."

"Due to the ability of Northwestern Medicine's ECMO program to support patients with life-threatening lung failure for extended durations, the patient could get adequate time to clear the virus from her body, allowing the consideration of transplantation," adds Dr. Bharat.

However, during her stay in the COVID ICU at Northwestern Memorial Hospital, while her body cleared the virus, her lungs were damaged beyond repair.

"COVID-19 results in significant damage to the lungs of patients," adds Michael Ison, MD, infectious diseases and organ transplantation specialist at Northwestern Medicine. "Opening the door to patients who have recovered from the infection to lung transplantation offers a potential path to recovery."

Northwestern Medicine has one of the shortest wait-times in the United States for new lungs, according to Dr. Tomic. Once a patient's name is added to the transplant waiting list, it typically takes 30 days to find a match – much shorter than the national average of three months.

"The fact that we were able to transplant this patient quickly and safely is a testament to the infrastructure and expertise of our clinical care and research teams," says Dr. Tomic. "While this young woman still has a long and potentially risky road to recovery given how sick she was with multi-organ dysfunction for weeks preceding the transplant, we hope she will make a full recovery."

Most patients eligible for lung transplants are dependent on oxygen to get through the day and suffer from pulmonary fibrosis, cystic fibrosis, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), other advanced lung diseases, or are on a ventilator or ECMO. Following lung transplantation, more than 85-90% of patients survive one year, and report complete independence in day-to-day life.



The hospital ECMO team who gave the patient time to clear the virus from her body, allowing the consideration of transplantation.



An X-ray image of the COVID-19 patient's diseased and damaged lung before transplant surgery.

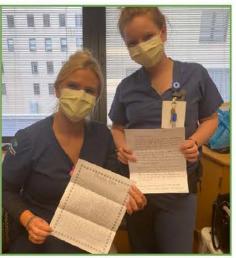


A photo of the COVID-19 patient's diseased and damaged lung post-transplant surgery.

#### CORE STAFF, VOLUNTEERS SEND WORDS OF THANKS TO COVID'S LOCAL FRONTLINE HEALTHCARE HEROES



Transplant recipients from Allegheny General Hospital as well as CORE Advocates wrote heartfelt letters of thanks to the hospital's frontline workers during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. In those letters, they shared their stories and connections to donation, and thanked staff for their dedication during such an uncertain time.



#### **BLANKETS FOR A CAUSE**

Little Mr. Mason County Bryson Sweeney and his mother, Brandy, who's a heart recipient and long-time CORE Advocate, found a way to stay busy during the COVID-19 stay-at-home period. They are among an army of CORE staff and volunteers who are honoring the lives of organ donors by making no-sew blankets for donor families. Bryson and Brandy said they made each blanket with love, knowing organ procurement coordinators will give each blanket to a donor family. From: Point Pleasant Register



## CORE MARKS VOLUNTEER APPRECIATION WEEK

During Volunteer Appreciation Week, CORE sent well wishes and heartfelt appreciation to all of our CORE Advocates! Disappointed that, because of the COVID-19 pandemic, we weren't able to celebrate their passion and commitment in person, the locally made baskets thanked active volunteers for the hope their service offers the thousands of people in western Pennsylvania and West Virginia who are waiting for a life-saving organ transplant.



#### DONATE LIFE FACE MASKS AVAILABLE



Stay safe and show your support for the Donate Life cause by wearing officially licensed Donate Life face masks. Available online at:

www.donationmerchandise.com

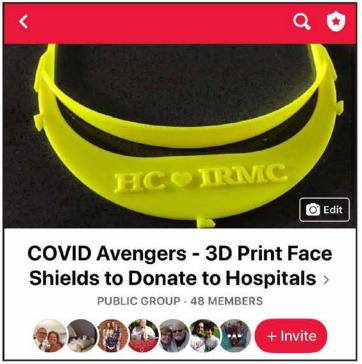
## ADVOCATE SENDS STAFF HOPEFUL UPDATE

Julie Logue, who recently received a second heart transplant at Allegheny General Hospital, and who spearheaded the "Jump for Julie" awareness campaign, recently shared this update with CORE.

"I wanted to share some thankfulness with you thru this time. Tom and I were able to golf the other day BUT it was walking only at the club we belong to. As we were going thru the day we were talking about how two years ago my connection was not a golf cart BUT a pic line and LifeVest. Now here I am walking a golf course and golfing. Who would have thought? I want to say thank you for never giving up and giving 110% of yourself and time into figuring out what would and will continue to work for me and to continue to enjoy life."







#### WESTERN PENNSYLVANIA HIGH SCHOOL STEM CLUB MAKES PPE FOR CORE STAFF

Brad Adams and his COVID Avengers — the STEAM Team students from Homer-Center — wanted to make a difference in Indiana County. The gracious community of teachers from local districts are joining forces to help their beloved healthcare workers in Indiana County and abroad. Adams said that the idea came as students expressed their desire to use their skills to make an impact. Help us give these students and teachers a huge virtual round of applause for the difference-making work they're doing during these uncertain and scary times.



### UNOS MARKS MEMORIAL DAY AT FALLEN SOLDIER DONOR MEMORIAL

On Memorial Day, the donation and transplantation community paused to recognize the brave women and men who served our country, sacrificing their lives to save others. Corporal Benjamin S. Kopp, a member of the 75th Army Ranger Regiment, saved six of his comrades when his unit came under attack in Afghanistan. He was mortally wounded and saved four more lives back in the United States through his selfless gift of organ donation. To honor Corporal Kopp and all other brave soldiers who became organ, eye and tissue donors, a Fallen Soldier Donor Memorial now stands in the National Donor Memorial at the United Network for Organ Sharing. The Fallen Soldier Donor Memorial honors members of our military, both present and past, who have made organ and tissue donation their last courageous act of service.



## BY DLA FOR NATIONAL WOMEN'S HEALTH WEEK



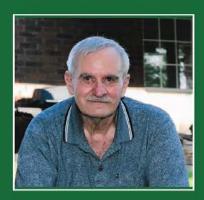
Two years after she donated a portion of her liver, Altoona native and CORE volunteer Rachelle Jeffers remains dedicated to fitness and to spreading the word about living donation. She found a way to celebrate both of those interests at the same time last year, running in the Pittsburgh, PA marathon while decked out in Donate Life gear! Her story was highlighted by Donate Life America in celebraton of Women's Health Week.

## CORE SAYS GOODBYE TO THREE LONGTIME & TREASURED ADVOCATES



#### **Jack Silverstein**

Jack, 73, of Monroeville was the beloved and devoted son of the late Pearl and Moses Silverstein, who were Holocaust survivors. Jack was born in Feldafing, Germany, a displaced persons camp following the end of WW II. He was preceded in death by a sister, 8-yearold Leah Lerman who perished in the Kovno Concentration Camp. Growing up in Utica, NY, he and his parents were among the last immigrants to arrive via Ellis Island. Loving and devoted husband of Donna Levenson Wolfson; loving step-father of Lynne and Shmulik, adored and cherished Zayde of Yael Chaya and Asaf David, beloved father of Craig and Scott, beloved grandfather of Nora, Evan, Emma and Sidney. After receiving a life-saving kidney/ pancreas transplant in 2002, Jack made it his mission to promote organ donation. He was co-founder of the Western PA Kidney Support Groups; he was an active volunteer with CORE and Team Alleghenies Transplant. Jack was recognized by the National Kidney Foundation at the 2010 Transplant Games in Madison, WI with the "Making Lives Better" award and in 2019 in Pittsburgh with the "Small Hands, Bia Heart" award. He was the recipient of the President's Volunteer Service Award and the Allegheny County Medical Society's Benjamin Rush Community Organization award. The family wants to express its extreme love and gratitude to Don and Lynette Fitzwater and their daughters Kelsey Weed and Haley Seeley whose selfless gift of love of donating their son and brother Jordan's organs gave Jack an additional 17 3/4 years of life. Jack continues to enhance the lives of others by being a tissue, bone, skin and cornea donor.



#### John Polczynski

John, 85, of Lower Burrell, was a loving husband, father and grandfather. He was a graduate of Har-Brack High School and studied Metallurgy at Penn State University. He served his country in active duty and reserve duty in the US Army from 1957-1962. John worked for Mobil Chemical in Pittsburgh and retired in 1996 from PPG Industries, Springdale Plant after 43 years of service as a Technical Service Manager in the Coatings and Resins Department. He attended Christ Our Hope Anglican Church in Natrona coached Tar-Brack Little League, Lower Burrell Girl's Softball Team and youth bowling at the former Heights Plaza Lanes. John served on the Har-Brack class of 53 reunion committee, was a CORE volunteer, Team Alleghenies Transplant member and bowled in the U.S. Transplant Games in 2006, 2008, 2010, 2014 and 2016. John received his heart transplant in 2006. John is survived by his wife of 37 years, Julia, who's also a loyal CORE volunteer, a step-daughter, Kristen, a step-son, grandchildren Daniel, Angel, Melissa, Raegan Dobbins, Lindsey and Andrew; a great-granddaughter, Mia as well as nephews, Gregory, Walter and Kevin and many great nieces and nephews and greatgreat nieces and nephews. In addition to his parents, John was preceded in death by his son Jeffrey Polczynski in 2012; infant daughter, Catharine Lynn Polczynski in 1965 and by his sister, Anne Lese Smith in 2002. John recently became an organ donor and through this act of kindness his donation is helping others.



#### Joy Jewell

Joy, 74, of Erie, was a longtime CORE advocate. Joy's service to CORE was remarkable and her passion drew from not only being a supporter of her husband, Paul's, heart transplant but also from being a donor family hero. Joy and Paul were recognized for their 25 years of service to CORE in 2018 and last December were honored as Volunteers of the Year by the UPMC Hamot Aid Society. Joy met Paul, the love of her life, husband and best friend of 52 years during her time as a student at Geneva College. She and Paul moved to Erie for their retirement years to be close to their children and grandchildren. In addition to her beloved husband Paul of 52 years, Joy is survived by her daughter and son Jonathan and seven grandchildren. Joy's career in education spanned over 37 years including at her alma mater Geneva College where she advanced from assistant professor, to Vice President of Student Affairs, and then retired as Dean of Students Emeritus. She was awarded the College of Forensic Association's Coach of the Year, and she was the recipient of Geneva College's Servant Leader Award. In addition, Joy's church memberships included from birth to 2008 Freedom Presbyterian Church in Freedom, PA and presently with Wayside Presbyterian Church in Erie. She was an Elder and Junior Church Teacher while at the Freedom Church. Since moving to Erie, she was a member of the Elizabeth Circle at Wayside Presbyterian. She also volunteered with the UPMC Hamot Aid Society, Geneva College Faculty wives, and the Beaver County March of Dimes Board. She was both a Joy and a Jewell.





## NATIONAL DONATE LIFE MONTH RECOGNIZED IN APRIL

With the ongoing spread of COVID-19 and the incredible speed at which things are changing around us, Donate Life America encouraged the public and the donation and transplantation community to cancel all in-person events for National Donate Life Month (April), instead encouraging online observances and events that could take place at safe distances. In CORE's service region, UPMC Hamot marked the national observance with their annual tradition of lighting the Erie Bicentennial Tower throughout the month of April, in the colors of donation, blue and green. (A special thank you to Paul Gibbens, Gibbens Creative, Erie, PA, for the beautiful photo on the right.)

Also, the Association of Organ Procurement Organizations (AOPO) held its first-ever Donor Remembrance Day, a virtual celebration of the donor heroes who have given the gift of life through organ, tissue and cornea donation. In that event, an online garden of forget-me-not flowers, AOPO received over 1,900 dedications from across the country honoring and celebrating our Donor Heroes. You can see the virtual garden all year long at www.aopo.org/donor-remembrance-day.



# Minority Nonor WARENESS MONTH

National Minority Donor Awareness Month is a collaborative effort by national organizations to save and improve the quality of life of diverse communities by creating a positive culture for organ, eye, and tissue donation. The observance stems from National Minority Donor Awareness Week, founded in 1996 by the National Minority Organ Tissue Transplant Education Program (MOTTEP) to bring heightened awareness of donation and transplantation in multicultural communities.

Now extended to the entire month of August, outreach activities will

## FIRST-EVER NATIONAL MINORITY DONOR AWARENESS MONTH COMING IN AUGUST

highlight the need within multicultural communities, provide donation education, encourage donor registration, and promote healthy living and disease prevention to decrease the need for transplantation.

This is especially important because some diseases of the kidney, heart, lung, pancreas, and liver are found more frequently among minorities than in the general population. For this reason, people in minority groups have a particularly high need for organ transplants. For example, African-Americans comprise just 13% of the U.S. population, yet represent 32% of all U.S. patients receiving dialysis due to kidney failure. Compounding this problem is the fact

that the number of African-Americans who are in need of transplantation is significantly disproportionate to the number who are registered organ donors.

Although organs are not matched according to race/ethnicity, and people of different races frequently match one another, all individuals waiting for an organ transplant will have a better chance of receiving one if there are large numbers of donors from their racial/ethnic background. This is because compatible blood types and tissue markers - critical aualities for donor/recipient matching - are more likely to be found among members of the same ethnicity. A greater diversity of



donors may potentially increase access to transplantation for everyone. Stay tuned for exciting updates from CORE about this national observance.

## **EVENTS CALENDAR**



#### KIDNEY TRANSPLANT SUPPORT GROUP

Visit wpakidneysupport. org/ for more information.



#### HEART TRANSPLANT SUPPORT GROUP

Please contact Tom Meshanko at t.meshanko@verizon.net for more information.



#### WV DONOR DAY 2020

CORE's first-ever WV Donor Day will be held on August 1. Please be on the lookout for more ways you can participate.



#### WIN FREE ICE CREAM FOR A WHOLE YEAR

Support donation group Second Chance Fundraising tool Tickets: www.second chancefundraising. org/icecream

more than **110,000** 

the number of people awaiting an organ transplant nationally

250,000

the number of people awaiting tissue and cornea transplants each day

10 minutes

the rate at which someone new is added to the organ transplant waiting list

20

the number of people who will die each day without receiving a transplant

on average 11,000

the number of people who die annually who are considered medically suitable to donate organs, tissue and corneas

2,500+

the approximate number of people awaiting transplantation in western Pennsylvania and West Virginia 8

the number of lives one individual can save as an organ donor **75** 

the number of lives one individual can heal through tissue donation