

Funeral Home

Connection

A newsletter published by Donate Life Arizona

The Gift of Sight and Healing

"He loved the land and loved the renewal of everything," Suzanne says. "It was natural for him to want to be a part of that renewal process."

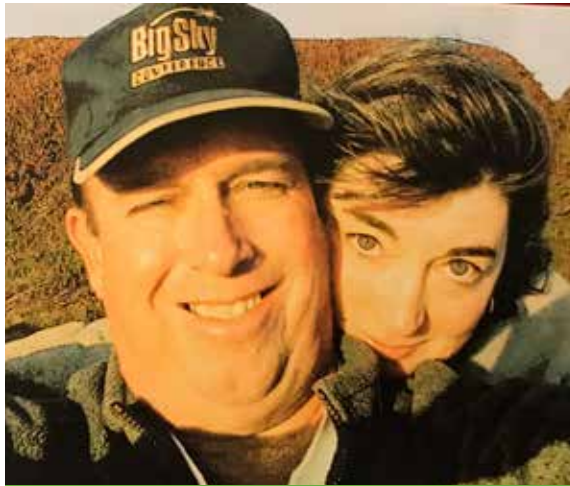
Suzanne had always loved looking into Rick's beautiful blue eyes. Now, his cornea donation is one of the most precious moments she has to hold on to, and she is comforted knowing he is helping others to see.

Rick's corneas helped two people – one recipient in Arizona and the other in Egypt. He also helped 22 other people through tissue donation.

As someone who has worked in senior living for almost 30 years, Suzanne empathizes with the employees who have to comfort patients and their families at the end of their lives. Providing care with dignity is always her priority.

Suzanne says she feels a great sense of pride and humility due to his donation. Many family members have now registered as organ and tissue donors in honor of Rick, including her. She finds herself telling others about the importance of donation whenever she can.

"It is one of the most selfless things someone can do," she says.



Rick Stillion with his wife, Suzanne Stillion, on a vacation driving down the Pacific coast.

As a service-minded, people-oriented farm boy, Rick Stillion was someone who everyone wanted to be around. His wife, Suzanne Stillion, jokes that he couldn't sing a note, but had many more wonderful qualities to make up for it. He lived by the motto "share everything you can," and never hesitated before helping others.

In March 2015, Rick was finishing up a long day of officiating flag football for the Special Olympics when the unimaginable happened. He sat down with some officials to take a break and cool off before heading home, when he suddenly collapsed. He went into cardiac arrest and sadly passed away at 59 years old.

"He died doing what he loved," Suzanne says. "He looked forward to that game more than anything else in the year."

Just the day before, Suzanne and Rick were watching TV when something sparked a conversation about organ and tissue donation. Although the couple had had this conversation before, they spoke again about how important being a donor was for both of them.



Rick's official uniform was displayed at his memorial service where other officials hung their whistles in his memory.



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Greetings

From President and CEO, Tim Brown
Donor Network of Arizona

“Dear friends, thank you for helping us fulfill Jim’s final wishes to help others even after death. Bless you and your work. Thank you.”

This simple and heartfelt handwritten card was given to Donor Network of Arizona by the wife and family of a man who saved lives through donation. These words remind me of the true importance and purpose of organ, eye and tissue donation: providing care and hope for families experiencing loss.

As the cooler weather sets in, the season brings with it a reminder of all we have for which to be grateful. To the families who celebrate their loved ones’ lives and the lives their loved ones saved and healed, thank you. To funeral home professionals who comfort families and help honor their loved one, thank you. To all the people who have registered to give hope through organ donation, thank you.



(l to r: Kelly Mero, Joey Gase, Tim Brown and Ryan Brown) President and CEO Tim Brown thanked NASCAR driver Joey Gase for honoring a young Arizona donor on his racecar at Phoenix International Raceway on Saturday, Nov. 11.

As of November 2017, more than 225 organ donors have already saved more than 600 lives and tissue and eye donors have contributed healing gifts to many more. Our gratitude for these and all donors and their families is immense, and is felt across our entire organization. We are honored to witness the generosity that stems from the gift of donation.

Throughout this season, we join you in remembering the families we have served together throughout this past year. We are grateful for them, and for you.

Allograft vs. Autograft



Tara Thorbin (third from right) returned to playing sports and can keep up with her family thanks to tissue donation.

While not always given the same spotlight as organ donation, tissue donation heals countless lives every year. Understanding the difference between autograft and allograft, two types of tissues used in reconstructive surgery, helps underline the incredible innovations being made in surgical reconstruction procedures and highlights the amazing gift of tissue donation.

Autograft refers to a patient’s own tissue being transplanted from one part of their body to another. For example, tendons from a patient’s hamstring muscle can be removed and used to repair the person’s anterior cruciate ligament (ACL).

Although autograft tissue is safe and fast-healing, it creates a second surgical site from which a patient must then recover. The additional recovery time requires a longer hospital stay, extended down-time and potential discomfort in later years. An allograft is tissue recovered from a deceased tissue donor and transplanted into a surgical patient, which requires no second surgical site.

Allografts are from deceased donors who made the decision to register as a donor before their passing, or whose family made this generous decision on their behalf. Allografts come in many forms and help in many different ways. From skin grafts that help to heal burn victims, bone grafts used in orthopedic surgeries such as spinal fusion, to tendons used to repair a torn ACL, allografts provide healing results that improve the lives of tissue recipients.

“I downplayed the donation that was given to me,” says ACL recipient Tara Thorbin. “It wasn’t an organ, it was only tissue. Now I’ve realized not only did this enhance my life, in the long run it did save my life.”

Sending an invoice?

We have a new billing system!

Donor Network of Arizona is implementing a new reimbursement system for funeral homes as part of the commitment to improve processes for partnering organizations. Funeral home support is crucial to saving and healing lives through donation. With this new invoice submission, reimbursements for services provided above and beyond usual fees will be processed faster and more efficiently. Thank you for your continued support of donation.

Please email all transportation, facility fees and restoration invoices to DNAinvoice@dnaz.org. Call Tiffany Welton at 503-522-5737 with any questions.

Seeing Selflessness

While violence and chaos consumed Los Angeles during the 1992 riots, Detective Stephen Merrin patrolled the streets to protect innocent bystanders. As rioters broke windows and set fires, a flaming ember struck Merrin's eye, burning a hole in his cornea.

Despite damage to his vision, Merrin expected a full recovery. However, a subsequent viral infection permanently impaired his sight.

Merrin struggled with hampered vision for 20 years. Sunny days caused him pain. Routine tasks such as driving became nearly impossible. He decided to retire from the Los Angeles Police Department, and moved to Arizona with his wife.

In Arizona, doctors were able to suppress the virus attacking Merrin's eye. With the virus under control, he became a candidate for corneal transplant. A transplant would mean the world to Merrin, who had almost given up hope on ever seeing clearly again.

Merrin received a cornea transplant in June 2012, a selfless gift from a donor in Seattle.

Filled with gratitude, Merrin wrote to the donor's family to express his appreciation for the gift of sight.

"Thanks to this man and his family, I can see my three grandchildren grow up," says Merrin.

Though Merrin no longer wears a badge, he continues to help others by sharing his story and encouraging people to register as organ, eye and tissue donors.

"I cannot express how grateful I am for the generosity of the person who made this donation. After this experience, my whole family registered as donors."



Retired Los Angeles Detective Steve Merrin received a cornea transplant that fully restored his vision in June 2012.



Chinese Cornea Partnership

Last year, Dr. Mingwu Wang, a surgeon at Cornea Associates in Tucson and an adjunct professor at the University of Arizona, reached out to Donor Network of Arizona (DNA) to initiate a partnership with China. This new international partnership allows for the sharing of knowledge, technique and the gift of sight.

There is currently no waiting list for a corneal transplant in the U.S., so after DNA meets local needs it expands its reach to help others. DNA sends corneal tissue to other domestic regions and then helps with the international need. In 2016 there were 166 corneas transplanted internationally and there have been 179 transplanted internationally in 2017 as of October. Now DNA staff are working with Chinese surgeons to help them understand all of the behind-the-scenes work that goes into eye banking, from authorization to transplant.

This past September, Sharlene Rupp, the ocular services supervisor at DNA, visited China as part of a team to work with surgeons and educate them on the eye banking process.



“We are sharing knowledge so they can create their own program to be approved by their government,” Rupp says.

Wang says China has about 4 million corneal blind patients, but they only perform about 10,000 corneal surgeries a year. Now that younger generations have more avenues to learn the benefits of donation and the great need within their own country, more health care professionals in China hope to put a program in place.

Dr. Xiaonan Sun, the main surgeon from China that Rupp and Wang have been working with, says that patients have to wait for months for a donor due to the lack of corneal tissue. This can lead to people missing their opportunity to receive the gift of sight.

Wang says they wanted to partner with DNA because it is an established, large, local eye bank. They hope surgeons from China will be able to visit and eventually take what they learn back to their country.

“I’d like to see this partnership as a beginning of an international humanitarian endeavor,” Wang says.

Rupp says this whole partnership is about helping others receive the gift of sight. DNA is proud to be a part of such an important mission.

“We appreciate and cherish this partnership very much, and we hope this partnership can be maintained in the future,” Sun says.



(l to r) Dr. Mingwu Wang, Cornea Associates of Tucson; Dr. Guang Qiao, chief of Cataract Service, the Fourth People’s Hospital of China; Sharlene Rupp, ocular services supervisor; Dr. Xiaonan Sun, director of Cornea Service, the Fourth People’s Hospital of China.

GENEROSITY BY THE NUMBERS

January - September 2017

Sight was restored
to more than

834

cornea recipients

805

tissue donors will
restore health and
mobility to more than

40,250

recipients

76%

of transplanted
heart valves gave
life to pediatric
recipients

498

lives were
saved through
organ donation.

**THANK YOU FOR YOUR COMMITMENT
AND SUPPORT FOR DONATION.**

**life
SAVER**

John Perkes

Regency Mortuary

John Perkes, owner of Regency Mortuary, has been an amazing asset in the work I do with funeral homes around the state. Not only does John always take the time to answer questions I have, but I can always count on him to go above and beyond to

support families as they navigate end-of-life decisions and donation. I am constantly looking for more effective recovery techniques and products that would assist embalmers and funeral home staff. We always want to know what Donor Network of Arizona (DNA) can do to better support the funeral homes in our state. John is a constant resource for me and he's proven time and time again that he is an expert in his field.

This year, as we were continuously looking for opportunities to reach more organizations that touch donation, John was my first call to be on our Donation Symposium planning committee. He put in a huge amount of work and effort to ensure we had the most successful event yet. He even made his film debut (with his signature bow tie) in our DNA video

about the entire process of donation. His assistance was invaluable!

Thank you, John, for your ongoing support of DNA!

*- Tiffany Welton
Partner Relations Coordinator*



John Perkes makes the most of life through donation by partnering with DNA.



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Contact your DNA liaison, Tiffany Welton:
Tiffany.Welton@dnaz.org
503.522.5737

(as of Nov. 30, 2017)