

Funeral Home Connection



A newsletter published by Donate Life Arizona

The Force Behind Tissue Donation



Susan Hebert hadn't considered organ, let alone tissue, donation until life forced her to decide. It was the day her only son, Richard Jean "RJ" Lang Jr., passed away back in 2007. In her darkest moment, she gave hope to others on his behalf after he died at 20 years old. Saying goodbye to a "quiet, kind soul" who had a passion for *Star Wars* and LEGOs was the result of diabetes. But, through Hebert's decision, his story didn't end.

She has since spoken to tissue recipients and learned what kind of impact RJ's gifts had in the world. Hebert has also learned, more than a decade after her "gentle giant" passed away, that he has healed the lives of 71 people through his gift. Transplant teams recovered musculoskeletal and skin tissue, which became 20 skin grafts and 51 bone and soft tissue grafts.

The lives Lang forever changed inspired Hebert to volunteer with Donate Life Arizona. Now, she eagerly engages the public at events about registering as an organ, tissue and cornea donor, and she shares his story to encourage people to discuss donation with their family.

"Make the decision before it has to be made for you," Hebert says.

Donated skin, bone and soft tissue grafts can have just as profound of an effect on people in need as donated organs, which is priceless for recipients. Tissue Services Manager Rhiannon Knueven, of Donor Network of Arizona, sees the miracle of tissue donation every day.

"Tissue donation is thought to be only life enhancing, but it can save patients facing life-threatening burns, restore mobility in injured limbs, and allow torn ligaments and tendons to heal," Knueven says.

Herbert says she is grateful for her son's generosity and is comforted knowing her son lives on in other people—teenagers to even a 76-year-old recipient.

"Now, there are 71 more *Star Wars* fans," Hebert proudly says.



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Greetings

From President and CEO, Tim Brown
Donor Network of Arizona

With the excitement of a record-breaking 2017 in organ and tissue donation, we at Donor Network of Arizona (DNA) are aware, more than ever, of just how vital the support of outside organizations is to saving more lives.

We see time and time again how the profound experience of organ and tissue donation gives people a second chance at life. We also witness how it provides a sense of peace to the donor's family, knowing the passing of their loved one was not the end of the story. In fact, it's only the beginning of a whole new legacy—a legacy of generosity and giving that came from a tragic moment in their lives.

We know funeral home professionals work hard every day to comfort families in a tough time, with dignity for the deceased a top priority. Donation is a challenging and complex process, but you incorporate the gift of life and healing into your profession and help DNA to continue to make the most.



In fact, this year alone Arizona donors have saved the lives of over 430 people so far through organ donation—a 12 percent year-to-date increase—and that's undoubtedly a testament to your commitment to donation.

Thank you for your contribution in the realm of saving lives, honoring our heroes, and providing hope in one of the worst moments for these families.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Tim Brown".

Generosity Has No Age Limit



Rose Farabee is proud that her 80-year-old husband, Gary Farabee, gave life through tissue donation.

The medical field constantly evolves, and donation is no exception. Donor Network of Arizona (DNA) now recovers tissue from a wider variety of donors, even those who reach 100 years old.

"This tissue is used primarily for breast reconstruction following mastectomy for women affected by breast cancer," says Ryan

Nelson, tissue recovery supervisor at DNA. "The clinical use of this tissue does not change between someone in their 40s and someone who is 100 years old."

The development comes after a record-breaking 2017 for donation with hopes to continue healing and saving more lives. Now, the phrase "age is just a number" rings especially true. People often rule themselves out and discredit the amazing gift they can give, thus neglecting to register as organ, tissue and cornea donors.

"It's great that there is a larger range of individuals who can help others through tissue donation," says Nelson, adding about a dozen organ procurement organizations throughout the nation accept tissue donations up to 100 years old.

The previous age limit specifically for tissue donation was 80 years old. The change in criteria took effect April 1, 2018, and it has already made a difference. DNA recovered skin tissue from a 99-year-old donor in May. Donors over 100 years old are not eligible to donate tissue at this time, but they can still be candidates for cornea and organ donations.

Innovations such as this show just how limitless tissue donation can become through medical advances, dedication and hard work.

Sending an invoice?

Follow our billing system!

Donor Network of Arizona has a 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 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.

Giving Life After Giving Birth

Valerie Sperduti felt excited to bring life into this world. She was also amazed to learn she could help others in the process.

Mothers can give the gift of life with something typically discarded as waste. In April 2018, Donor Network of Arizona's (DNA) became one of the first organ procurement organizations to start a birth tissue program.

"The collection of my placenta did not interfere with delivery or put me or my baby at risk," says Sperduti about her donation to Unyts, the Donate Life organization in Buffalo, New York.

After a child is born through scheduled caesarian section, transplant teams acquire birth tissue such as the placenta, umbilical cord and amniotic fluid. Doctors use it to stimulate a recipient's healing mechanism for pain, inflammation or scar tissue. Birth tissue can also be used in reconstructive surgeries for recovering breast cancer patients and as skin grafts for neurological procedures.



Valerie Sperduti provided the gift of healing by becoming a birth tissue donor after bringing her newborn into the world.

"The ability to provide this tissue to our partners and continue to improve lives is why we do this work every day," says Rhiannon Knueven, tissue recovery manager with DNA.

The program is still in its early stages, and there have not been any donors through DNA. The program will rely on the generosity of expectant mothers.

"I've learned that life is so unpredictable," Sperduti says. "You never know when someone you love could use the gift of healing."

DNA's participation in such a program is a direct result of the partnership with Banner Thunderbird Medical Center, currently the only hospital that coordinates birth tissue donation with DNA.

Expectant mothers can submit a self-referral at [DNAZ.org](https://dnaz.org). Expectant mothers and physicians may also call DNA Tissue Services at 602-294-2896 for referrals.



GENEROSITY BY THE NUMBERS

January - June 2018



699 tissue donors will restore health and mobility to more than **52,425 recipients.**



The oldest donor was **99 years old.**



76 percent of heart valves have given life to pediatric patients.

life
SAVER

Hillary Adair

Desert Sunset Funeral Home

I am thrilled to highlight one of my favorite women, Hillary Adair, in this quarter's *Funeral Home Connection*! Not only has Hillary been a friend for years, but she's an incredible advocate of donation and always beyond helpful as both our organizations assist families through grief. Hillary, her incredible family and her amazing staff in Tucson always go out of their way to collaborate and make the donation process seamless. As a past president of the Arizona Funeral, Cremation and Cemetery Association, Hillary has been a wonderful

resource for the three years I have worked at Donor Network of Arizona (DNA).

She's not only supportive but involved in the cause. Hillary moderated our main plenary at DNA's 2017 Donation Symposium. She successfully facilitated a group of funeral directors and embalmers from all over the state to brainstorm embalming best practices for donor restoration cases. Having her expertise and leadership was priceless for the attendees and for our organization. Hillary shows her appreciation for our partnership, and she encourages her staff to attend DNA events to expand on their knowledge and to consider ways we can work together better.

Hillary goes above and beyond to ensure each of her locations works effectively with DNA to help support families through the end-of-life process. I have called Hillary and her staff at all hours of the night as we work with families through organ and tissue donation. Hillary and her staff even helped me at 11 p.m. to find an available space for a family needing last-minute services. A true

advocate to all families in Tucson, Hillary is an unbelievable asset to this industry. Hillary, I cannot thank you enough for all you have done for Donor Network of Arizona.

Thank you, Hillary, the Adair family and the amazing staff!

– Tiffany Welton
Partner Relations Coordinator



Hillary Adair (l) makes the most of life through donation by partnering with DNA and Tiffany Welton (r).



A Veteran's Greatest Battle

Matthew Owen shares his story to ADOT MVD employees on April 13, 2018.

A local veteran came back from deployment in the early 1990s to learn the biggest threat to his life was not a war or international conflict. Even with 20 years of active duty service, the real battle was inside his body—a battle with which his military training could not help. Matthew Owen's kidneys, and eventually liver, were failing and that was just the beginning of his fight to stay alive.

The U.S. Air Force veteran's superiors allowed him to continue serving with his illnesses on noncombat duty, but after retirement his health got even worse. By 2014, his weight hit 315 pounds, and doctors gave Owen multiple diagnoses:

Glaucoma, diabetes, stage 3 renal failure and nonalcoholic cirrhosis of the liver.

He had gastric bypass surgery and lost weight. It didn't improve his organ function though. In December 2017, however, he received some news that would help him take steps to restore his quality of life after being placed on the organ transplant waiting list.

"My surgery went exceptionally well," says Owen, only a few months after receiving his new liver, "and after just five days in the hospital, I was home starting a new life."

Owen, a Donate Life Arizona volunteer, now thrives in ways he didn't think possible, because an organ donor had previously registered herself to provide hope for the almost 2,200 people who are currently on the transplant waiting list in Arizona.

It was an experience so profound that the self-described "private person" has opened up about his journey, including at an event for Blue and Green Day—a time to celebrate the national colors of organ and tissue donation during National Donate Life Month.

On April 13, 2018, he spoke at the Donate Life Arizona flag-raising ceremony at Arizona Department of Transportation Motor Vehicle Division (ADOT MVD), where more than 95 percent of new registrations happen, to show his gratitude for his gift of life.

"I may not be alive today if it wasn't for the work [MVD employees] do," he said at the event in between applause for the sacrifices he made for our country as a veteran and his appreciation for being given more time to spend with his 18-year-old son. "I am so thankful for my donor who selflessly made the choice at some time in her life to register."



Veteran and liver recipient, Matthew Owen, is thankful for his second chance at life.



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Contact your DNA liaison, Tiffany Welton:

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(as of Aug. 2, 2018)