



*Arizona*

# THE CONNECTION

A YEAR IN REVIEW

WE MAKE THE MOST OF LIFE

JUNE 2022 - MAY 2023

**Cover:** Reggie the Donor Cactus kept an eye on the crowds from above the Fiesta Bowl Parade in Central Phoenix in December 2022.

**Below:** Arizona double-lung recipient, Omar Hashem, holds one of the many medals he won at the Transplant Games of American in August 2022.



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# GREETINGS

FROM TIM BROWN, PRESIDENT AND CEO

We’ve never settled for “good enough” at Donor Network of Arizona (DNA). Our mission—and the patients who rely on the outcome of our work—plays too critical of a role to not constantly improve.

Over the last year, our team’s efforts to continuously improve process and procedure—particularly those surrounding donor and donor family care, partnerships, the number of organ donors and organs transplanted—have taken us down a new path. We’ve partnered with Stratex Solutions, a business management consulting firm. Their team’s work focuses on improving organizational performance through robust organizational analysis and innovative strategic planning approaches.

With a breadth of experience aiding organ procurement organizations (OPOs), Stratex Solutions is helping DNA achieve its mission and vision with the ultimate goal of increasing the number of lives changed by donation. Our strategic plan has an emphasis on feedback and improving collaboration with: Arizona hospitals, organ transplant centers, Arizona Department of Transportation Motor Vehicle Division (ADOT MVD) and authorized third-party offices, volunteers, donor families, local journalists and other OPOs across the country, along with many other key stakeholders.

We hope to continue earning your trust, support and participation in the gift of life.

Thank you,

Tim Brown  
President & CEO, Donor Network of Arizona



Tim Brown, president & CEO of DNA, poses for photos with Debbie Edenhofer, mother of fallen DPS trooper and organ donor Tyler Edenhofer, after she threw the pitch for the Donate Life Day at the Diamondbacks game in July 2022.

**MISSION**

*We make the most of life through the gift of organ and tissue donation.*

**VISION**

*We challenge ourselves and others every day to realize Arizona’s potential to save and improve lives.*



# ADINA AND ANDREA LOPEZ

## ALL IN THE FAMILY

Adolfo Lopez is a heart recipient. His mother is also a heart recipient. One sister is too, and another sister has a heart condition. With the family knowing the transplant process all too well, the last thing Adolfo wanted to hear was that not one, but both of his daughters would also need heart transplants to save their lives at only 11 and 12 years old.

Hearts are one of the most common organ transplants for children and teens with more than 3,300 total patients on the national organ waiting list for a heart right now.

“Everything goes through your mind. Will we get a heart? Who gets the transplant? Will they be OK?” Adolfo says, remembering the fear that set in. “You want to control everything, but you can’t.”

Both sisters—Adina and Andrea Lopez—were diagnosed with cardiomyopathy. In fall 2022, both went to Phoenix Children’s Hospital for routine tests. The results were alarming to their doctor.

“The gist of it is that their hearts [didn’t] relax,” says Dr. Bethany Wizotzkey, pediatric transplant cardiologist at Phoenix Children’s. “So, I pulled their parents aside in the room and said, ‘These numbers are high.’”

Their hearts were failing. In December 2022, both sisters joined the 103,000 people on the national organ waiting list—a stage in Adolfo’s life he remembers all too well. He was saved by an organ donor when he was 16 years old, and his experience wasn’t the easiest.

“I spent three months in the hospital because everything that could go wrong went wrong,” he says. Years later at 34, his own health battles have settled down as he focuses on his family.

In late January 2023, Andrea took her first few steps with a new heart; a couple weeks later Adina received hers too. Gifts from families who chose to save the lives of others while experiencing their own deep grief and loss. But receiving a transplant is just the first step in resuming a healthy life. The road to recovery for these sisters was only beginning.

“It was hard [to watch] because I knew the pain they were going through,” Adolfo says about waking up from the transplant surgery. “I knew how much it hurt to have your chest cracked open. I knew how much it hurt to have all these lines in your neck and arms.”

Both sisters have recovered from their procedures. They plan on resuming dance, volleyball and other interests as soon as their transplant team clears them for such activity.

“Heart disease, scars and sickness will never stop your legacy. We have been given the most amazing gift, the gift of life,” Adolfo says. “[My daughters] make me proud in everything they do.”

“We have  
been given  
the most  
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the gift of life.”

ADOLFO LOPEZ, ANDREA AND ADINA’S FATHER

Andrea (l) and Adina (r) received heart transplants about a month apart after learning they both had cardiomyopathy.



# GROWTH AND COMMUNITY

Look around our main office in Tempe, and you’re sure to see a new face—or several. We’ve expanded our workforce to meet the need as the gift of life grows in Arizona and nationwide.

At Donor Network of Arizona (DNA), we’ve set out to engage a diverse workforce, ensuring applicants from a wide range of sources apply for careers. This includes outreach with high schools and colleges, virtual and in-person job fairs, online recruiting and more, to grow our team to almost 300 skilled, passionate people.

“Our vision for the DNA team is a mission-motivated and talented workforce that is representative of the communities we serve,” says Kelsie McClendon, DNA’s HR director.

## EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE

For the second year in a row, DNA won Top Companies to Work for in Arizona recognition. Making the most of life requires excellent people to keep this 24/7 clinical operation going. DNA proudly offers a robust benefits program that also earned the Healthy Arizona Worksite Gold Award and the American Heart Association Workforce Well-being Award.

**Top left:** ADOT MVD Community Connections committee toured the Donor Network of Arizona office with (from left) Julia Young, partner development specialist, and Ryan Nelson, Tissue Services supervisor.

**Top right:** One of DNA’s goal teams celebrates with our Stratex consultants for completing a step in our five-year plan.

**Bottom:** Teresa Baca, DNA’s HR generalist, smiles to greet job candidates for DNA at a job fair to talk to prospective applicants.



LOOKING FOR A MEANINGFUL CAREER?  
**Visit [DNAZ.org](https://DNAZ.org) and click on the careers tab.**





# CONNECTIONS TO MAKE AN IMPACT

June 2022 -  
May 2023



## COMMUNITY OUTREACH



**213k** ARIZONANS REGISTERED  
*as organ, eye and tissue donors for the first time.*

**87** VOLUNTEERS  
*dedicated to educating others on the lifesaving message of donation.*

**217k** ARIZONANS REACHED  
*across DonateLifeAZ social media platforms.*

**6.09k** MEDIA STORIES  
*mentioned donation in Arizona.*



## THE GIFT OF DONATION

**361** ORGAN DONORS  
*gave a second chance to those waiting for a lifesaving transplant.*

**628** CORNEA DONORS  
*restored sight to others.*

**1,401** TISSUE DONORS  
*gave the gift of healing.*

**450** HEART VALVE DONORS  
*saved lives.*



## SHARING HOPE

**840** LIVES SAVED  
*thanks to the generosity of organ donors and their families.*

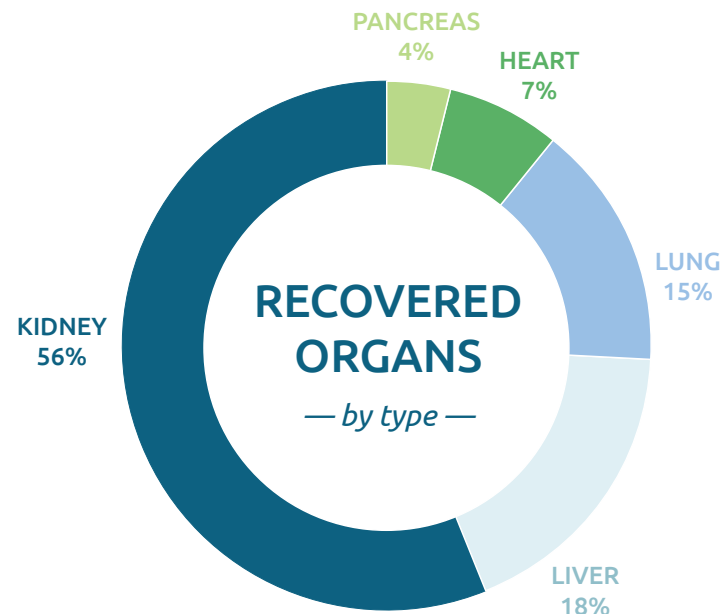
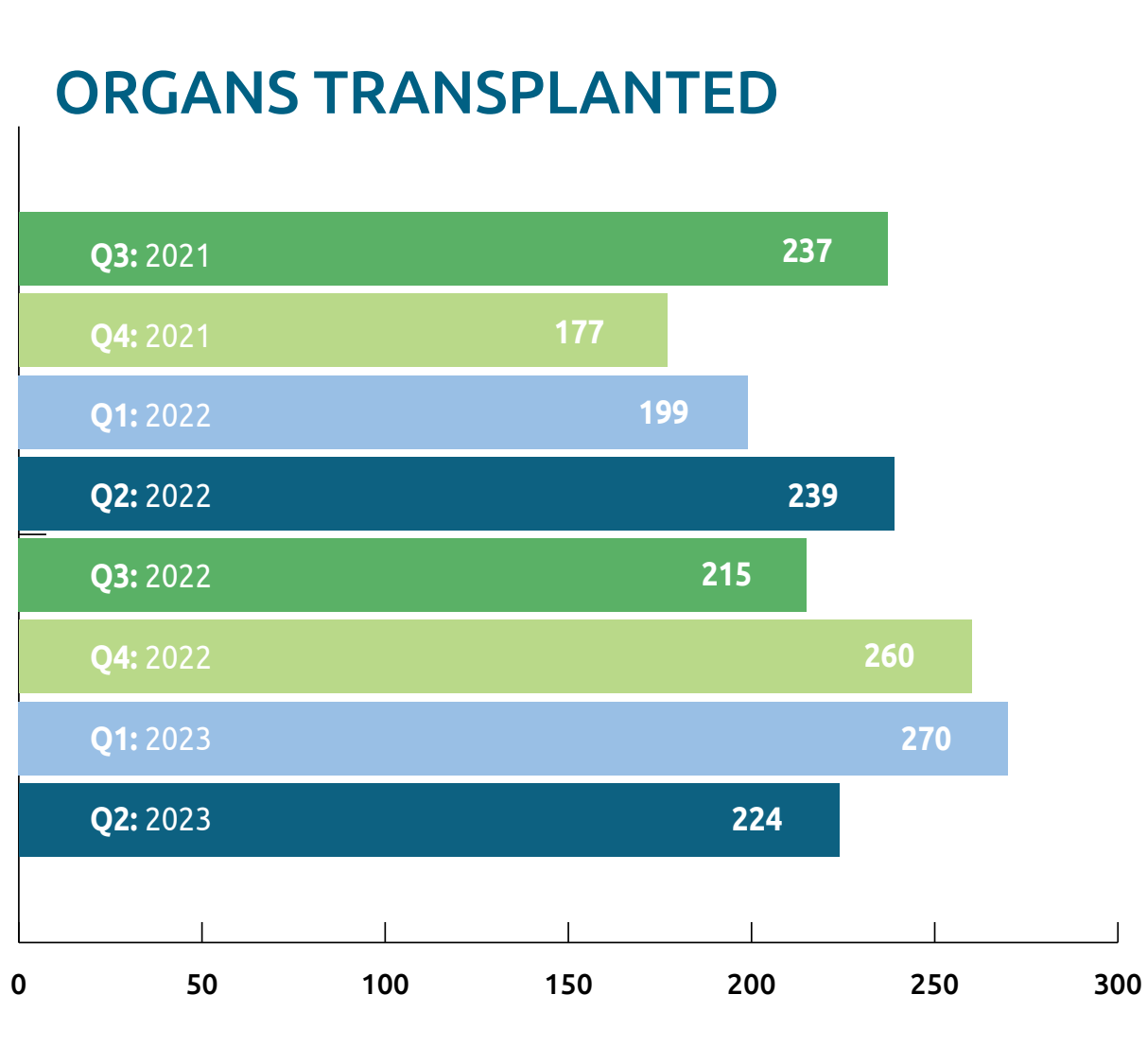
**24,600** LETTERS MAILED  
*to provide comfort and correspondence.*

**212** ORGAN DONORS  
*who gave the gift of life had previously registered their decision.*

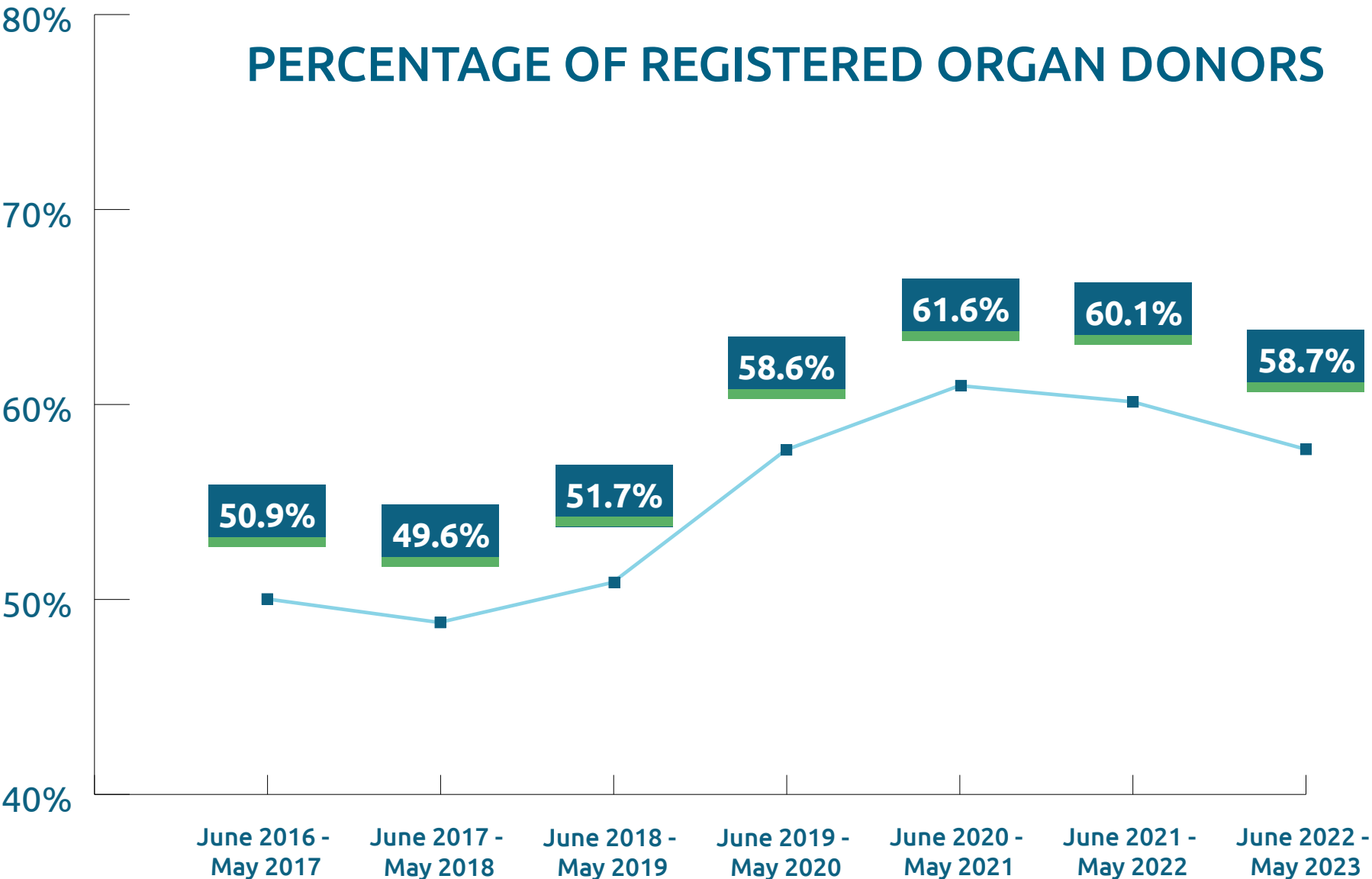
**356** PLACENTA DONORS  
*provided healing to others after giving birth.*

# DONATION BY THE NUMBERS

*\*Reflects data from June 2022 to May 2023*



**67%** OF ORGANS RECOVERED IN ARIZONA WERE TRANSPLANTED IN ARIZONA





# TECHNOLOGY SAVING MORE LIVES

## IN THE CLOUDS: MODERNIZING A TIMELESS GIFT

Sometimes organ transplant centers don't accept donated organs, and those organs never save lives. In fact, the kidney nonuse rate recently increased, often because doctors find abnormalities after recovery. This impacts the chances of the 89,000 people on the national organ waiting list who need a kidney.

"While discussing kidney nonuse rate, we determined there was a lack of standardization in how biopsies are read and reported," says Nicole Barry, organ referral preservation coordinator supervisor at Donor Network of Arizona (DNA). "This impacts the efficiency of the donation process."

So, the race was on to find a solution to save more lives.

First, what's a biopsy? Using cell samples on a glass slide, kidneys go through microscopic evaluation to spot disease to report to potential organ transplant centers that accept them. This process has been difficult to standardize because of inconsistent resources, such as the availability of pathologists for after-hours requests, transplant-specific pathology expertise, or a hospital's location, which may mean biopsy slides must be shipped by mail.

**Left:** The Grundium Ocus microscope slide scanner was designed by ex-Nokia engineers.

Specialist Direct Inc. (SDI) partnered with DNA on a study from November 2022 to April 2023. SDI offers real-time telepathology services 24 hours a day online. In this study, their team evaluated 194 biopsies through digital slides, and their technology rendered a hospital's location irrelevant, as long as it had internet access.

The first benefit quickly revealed itself: It was fast.

"Typically, one of our preservationists prepares the slide. They upload the images to a shared Cloud server," Barry says. "By the time we make the call for results, [SDI is] already in there looking at the images."

Not only did this make for a streamlined process, but outcomes improved.

Kidney biopsies that SDI evaluated transplanted at higher rates (i.e., more utilized). In fact, eight kidneys that would have otherwise been nonutilized were transplanted during the study. Due to the study's success, DNA incorporated this practice into its daily work. And by June 2023, kidneys from Arizona donors that would have gone unutilized under the previous process saved 23 lives.

"In Arizona, we're lucky we've got great relationships with local transplant centers that have been flexible with this change," Barry says. "Better outcomes are better for everyone, ultimately the person whose life is saved."

## UPGRADING IMPERFECT LUNGS

Lung transplants saved the lives of more than 2,600 people in the U.S. in 2022.

It serves as the only medical intervention for people with end-stage lung disease. However, the demand for lung transplants exceeds the number of donated ones. Still, approximately 15,000 people lose their lives annually from lung disease.

Even more challenging, only 20% of available donor lungs are transplanted because of issues discovered after recovery from donors, according to Lung Bioengineering, a biotech company focused on increasing successful lung transplants. However, their team estimates that 40% of unutilized lungs could still save lives, particularly with new technology.

Lung Bioengineering introduced a technology called ex-vivo lung perfusion (EVLP). It mimics the lungs' normal function. Even more groundbreaking, it allows medical professionals to improve lung function outside the body if necessary. EVLP technology is a great option for imperfect lungs that need more time for treatment because it extends acceptable preservation time to 16 hours, up from only six through standard practice.

Lung Bioengineering started a partnership with Donor Network of Arizona (DNA) in April 2023 to eventually implement this EVLP technology and find organ transplant centers familiar with it to increase the number of transplantable lungs.

"This is an attempt to magnify the generosity of Arizonans through literally the breath of life," says Hobby Alsaleh, clinical education supervisor with DNA. Even before using EVLP technology, DNA already worked to maximize this gift, according to Wendy Van Kirk, director of Organ Recovery Services.

"We're getting there," Van Kirk says. "We already work with transplant centers, such as St. Joseph's Hospital and Medical Center. They take high-risk lungs, and our organ recovery coordinators are good at managing them so that we can transplant lungs the old-fashioned way," lungs that may have remained otherwise unutilized.

When every minute counts, DNA looks forward to putting this advancement into practice that has already saved the lives of 320 patients in other parts of the country.



**Above:** This is the first FDA approved EVLP Technology under the brand name XVIVO System (XPS). The XPS machine preserves lungs and supplies them with oxygen to improve damage or injury.

**Below:** Lung Bioengineering clinical staff are available at all times to triage referrals from transplant centers and carry out EVLP procedures. (Source: Lung Bioengineering)





# BUILDING A BETTER COMMUNITY

The hopeful stories of Arizona donors and their families inspire the Donor Network of Arizona (DNA) team to give back with time and their own generosity to the larger community.

In December 2022, DNA's Community Involvement Committee (CIC) organized a Christmas Angel tree drive to support Arizona Children's Association and bring joy to many kids' holiday season. The CIC collected enough toys and clothing for 70 children to enjoy.

During Donate Life Month in April 2023, DNA staff competed in teams to collect the most canned foods and toilet paper to help Justa Center, an organization in downtown Phoenix that helps senior citizens experiencing homelessness. Altogether, the CIC collected 500 cans and boxes of food and 150 rolls of toilet paper to donate.

One of the CIC's frequent partnerships is with Native American Connections (NAC). NAC works to improve the lives of individuals and families through health, housing and community development services. In May 2023, CIC organized a drive and gathered 28 bags and boxes of toiletries and gently used clothes to deliver to NAC and its community.

Because of DNA's Planet Posse committee encouraging staff to recycle plastic, DNA earns benches from Trex, a wood alternative and recycling company, when we hit our recycling goals. The benches, made from recycled plastics, were donated to multiple organizations in the community. One bench was donated to the Foundation for Blind Children, which provides education and tools for blind and visually impaired children and adults. Another bench was donated to NAC for one of their housing sites for seniors in the Native American community.

"Our contact at Native American Connections and his colleagues have been so thankful and said that the donated items give their clients some hope knowing there's someone out there who cares about them," says Cindy Davis, DNA quality systems coordinator. "I like to picture a family coming to NAC and finding DNA's donated clothes, shoes and toiletries, helping them make a new start."

**Top right:** DNA staff gathered presents of toys and clothing to display under the tree for the Arizona Children's Association.

**Bottom right:** A recycled Trex bench gets dropped off at the Foundation for Blind Children campus. NAC Clothing Drive – DNA staff helping to unload boxes of clothing to be donated to Native American Connections' community site.





# BEYOND THE GIFT OF LIFE

## NEW ADMINISTRATION, NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR DONATION

“Son, brother, friend and organ donor hero.” Those are the words donor mom Lynn Daily uses to describe her son, Jacob Daily, who passed away in 2009 after a car crash. Jacob donated his kidneys and liver, alongside tissue and corneas. Jacob avidly fished and hunted and loved his job, family, friends and life.

Donor Network of Arizona (DNA) honored Jacob, among 33 other donors and recipients, at the 15th annual Donate Life Day at the Capitol. DNA hosts this gathering to put a face to donation and to maintain a state government supportive of donation. This allows DNA to connect donor family members, living donors and organ and tissue recipients to their state senator or representative to share their stories of healing, love and generosity.

Whether it was a meeting in their office, a walk through the donation display, or a conversation over a barbecue sandwich, legislators had the opportunity to hear about and see the impact donation has on the communities they serve. These stories even reached the 9th floor of the governor’s tower.

When selecting her staff, Arizona’s new governor, Katie Hobbs, appointed Jennifer Loreda, who now serves as director of Policy, Legislative and Intergovernmental Affairs. Jennifer is Jacob’s sister. She, along with her parents Lynn and Jim Daily,

shared Jacob’s story with Hobbs. The founder of Transplant Families, Melissa McQueen, also shared about her son’s journey of waiting for the gift of life—eventually receiving a heart. And from DNA, Tim Brown, president and CEO, and Sara Pace Jones, vice president of Development and Referral Services, provided the governor an overview of DNA’s lifesaving mission.

Much like in the governor’s tower, connections to donation can be found in all corners of the state legislature.

“I am so proud my mother was a donor,” says Sen. Christine Marsh, whose mother, Hannelore Porter, donated tissue and corneas after she passed away in January 2022. Porter’s story was among the many on display in the Wesley Bolin Plaza where legislators and Capitol staff enjoyed lunch while mingling with DNA attendees and inviting the public to register as organ and tissue donors in honor of the heroes we featured that day.

**Left:** Gov. Katie Hobbs (middle) poses with (from l to r) Greg Harris, Sara Pace Jones, Melissa McQueen, Lynn Daily, Jim Daily and Tim Brown in her office.

**Right:** Sen. Christine Marsh poses with a photo of her mother, Hannelore Porter, among others displayed on the Wesley Bolin Plaza.



## A MONTH OF DONATION CELEBRATIONS

Donor Network of Arizona’s (DNA) calendar filled up throughout April 2023 as we honored donors, their families, recipients and caregivers.

While that’s our mission every month, we observe April as National Donate Life Month. We asked partners to display the Donate Life flag, register Arizonans as organ and tissue donors, and sport our colors on Blue & Green Day.

Leaders from the Arizona Department of Transportation Motor Vehicle Division (ADOT MVD) hosted their first formal flag-raising since August 2019. Staff at a west Phoenix MVD office paused to hear donation stories as a reminder of why asking Arizonans to register is so important.

Eric Jorgensen, ADOT MVD director, delivered heartfelt words about our mission to save lives before Donate Life Arizona volunteer and donor mom, Karen Matulis, melted hearts with the story of her late son, who became a donor at 18, on what would have been his 38th birthday. Bringing the gift of life even closer to home, staff heard from Lizbeth Gallardo Apodaca, MVD training manager, who shared that her Uncle Ramon was still alive after receiving a liver more than 20 years ago.

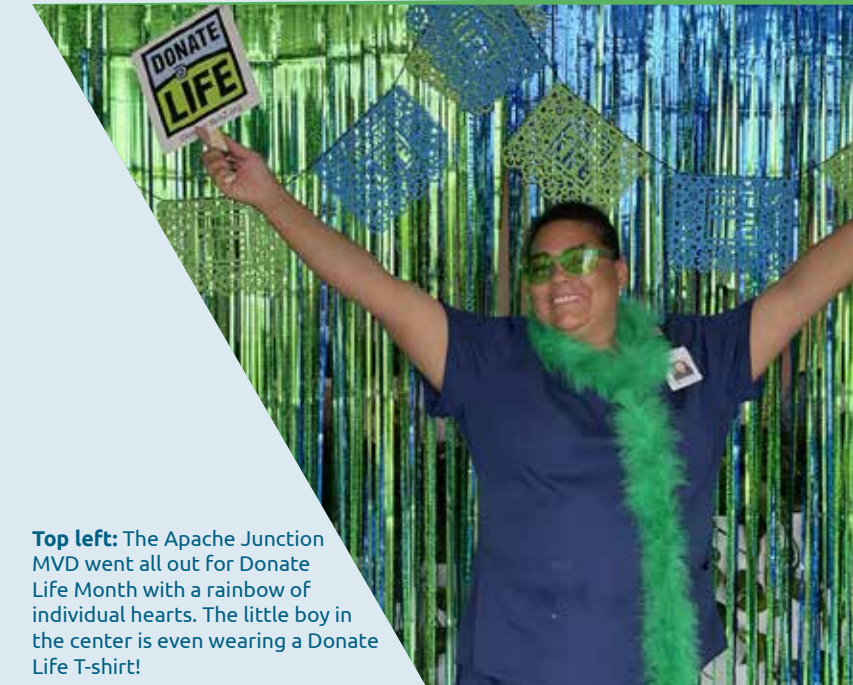
In April, 39 hospitals helped share stories and register donors. Through combined efforts, 1,084

Arizonans registered or reaffirmed their decision in addition to 15,586 Arizonans who registered at an ADOT MVD or another driver’s license partner.

“Receiving a heart transplant has made me a happier person,” says recipient, Claire Filson. “I don’t want to waste a single moment of my life doing things that aren’t authentic or fulfilling.”

We also formed our first non-health-care, multi-state retail partnership during Donate Life Month. Filson spearheaded that outreach through The Money Store, her employer, across the country. They recognized donation champions, encouraged registration, and fundraised as they celebrated. As a heart recipient, she recently celebrated her 9th heart-iversary!

“Organ donation is not only a gift to the recipient but to everyone who loves and cares about them,” Filson says. “My parents, grandparents, siblings, friends [and] boyfriend all are extremely invested in my life and want me to keep living. If I can help other families keep their loved ones alive by sharing the message of organ donation, I am proud to do it.”



**Top left:** The Apache Junction MVD went all out for Donate Life Month with a rainbow of individual hearts. The little boy in the center is even wearing a Donate Life T-shirt!

**Top right:** ADOT MVD leaders and staff celebrated Blue & Green Spirit Week with us by holding a flag-raising ceremony at one of Arizona’s MVD field offices.

**Bottom:** Our staff is always excited to show off our colors on Blue & Green Day.



# JOE J. VARELA IV

## *AN EASY DECISION*

“When they opened the doors to the ambulance, I saw my son,” says Joe Varela III, a donor father. As an ICU nurse for more than 40 years, he never expected to see his son suddenly become an emergency patient right in front of him.

“As a medical professional, I know that look, and was I devastated to see that in my child,” he says, recalling the moment in July 2022 that he thought his son might not make it. Sadly, his prediction came true. Doctors later declared Joe Varela IV brain dead at 32.

When Joe IV was 18, he made a decision that changed how his family would navigate his passing. And he stood by this decision.

“When we first started dating, I noticed he was a donor.” says donor wife, Maryann Varela. “I remember asking him why? He said, ‘I won’t need them when I’m dead.’”

That decision to share life with others saved four people, including one who received the gifts of a kidney and pancreas.

“Joe probably would find it comical that he was able to save other lives,” Maryann says. “He always said, ‘By the time I die, my organs probably won’t be good to use,’” a common misconception when people talk about organ and tissue donation.

“The last five years of his life, Joe struggled with opiate addiction,” his dad says. Joe IV passed away after an accidental fentanyl overdose.

“Someone who dies after an overdose might have some short-term organ injury, for example, but the damage often resolves even before death is declared,” says PJ Geraghty, vice president of DNA’s Clinical Services. “Doctors evaluate donors for organ function, and we share this information with the organ transplant team to make a determination.”

While this is what ended Joe IV’s life, it’s certainly not how his loved ones will remember him. Joe IV’s family will have to learn to move forward without him, including his young son Joe Varela V.

“My world and heart have been shattered, and I miss him so much,” says his father. “I will always have admiration for my son that at the age of 18 he made this decision and that he saved four lives.”

“He would feed the homeless and give his spare change,” Maryann says. “He was so smart. He could converse with anyone about anything. He had a way with words that would make you want to listen to him or have a conversation. He took care of others and was always there for his loved ones. He probably wasn’t for everyone, but he was ours and we loved him.”

“He  
probably  
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everyone, but  
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we loved him.”

MARYANN VARELA, JOE IV’S WIFE





"OUR DONOR'S FAMILY, DNA, AND EVENTUALLY MAKE-A-WISH ARIZONA, HAVE TAKEN OUR LIVES DOWN SUCH A BETTER PATH. WE COULD NEVER SAY THANK YOU ENOUGH, AND WE HOPE OUR FAMILY LIVES LIFE IN A WAY THAT WOULD MAKE OUR DONOR PROUD."

—KELSIE KRASNOV, RECIPIENT MOTHER OF VALEN KRASNOV

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Register as an organ and tissue  
donor at [DonateLifeAZ.org](https://DonateLifeAZ.org)

