



# Life Goes On

Secretary of State Jesse White • Spring 2014

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

## “Be a Hero” college campaign off and running

This year we are beginning the month of April — National Donate Life Month — with several new initiatives. The “Be a Hero” Community College Challenge encourages students to use their imagination and talents to increase donor registry numbers by reaching out to fellow students and others in their respective communities. It is an exciting, competitive program that will reap many benefits for those who are waiting for lifesaving organs and life-changing tissue.

National Blue and Green Day is Friday, April 11, and all Driver Services facility personnel will have the opportunity to participate in promoting the donor registry. I look forward to visiting some of the facilities during April to congratulate staff and join in on the festivities.

In 2013, the donor registry increased by more than 200,000 names. That is something to be proud of! I ask that you help us recognize those in your community whose lives have been touched by donation, whether it’s a donor family, fellow employee, recipient or someone waiting for a transplant. We would like to use their stories to promote the lifesaving benefits of donation and encourage others to join the registry.

Secretary of State facility employees are the front-line workers in our donor education efforts. Without your continued support and dedication, many more people would be waiting. Thanks for all your hard work over the past year and during Donate Life Month in April!

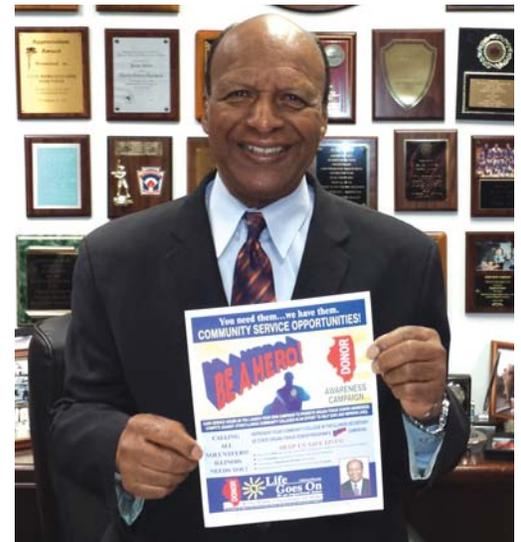
*Jesse White*

Jesse White  
Secretary of State

The most exciting endeavor for the Donor Program this spring is its new “Be a Hero” Community College Challenge. Donor Program staff visited community colleges across the state earlier this spring, clarifying the challenge and encouraging many colleges to enroll in the initiative. Students across the state formed “teams” within their own colleges and are busy creating many innovative and exciting opportunities for their fellow students, faculty and others to join the donor registry.

“This is such an exciting opportunity for my office to partner with community college students across Illinois to increase donors in the registry, strengthen their leadership skills and earn valuable community service hours,” said Secretary of State Jesse White. “They also will serve as humanitarians by giving back to the community and advocating for those desperately in need of transplants.”

Students are encouraged to design their own campaigns, aided by Donor Program staff members who serve as consultants. Staff members have been meeting regularly with their student teams and distributing “Be a Hero” t-shirts and table giveaways sponsored by Donate Life Illinois. Student teams are keeping track of their goals, activities and new donor registrations with the help of a faculty advisor or designated administrator.



Secretary White holds a flyer promoting the new “Be a Hero” donor campaign at Illinois community colleges.

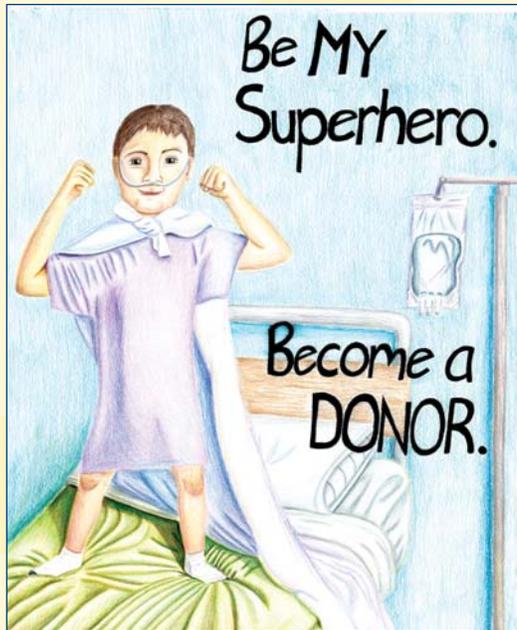
Some ideas the students have incorporated into their campaigns are donor drives around campus; donor messages on electronic billboards at spring sporting events; articles promoting donor awareness and activities in their campus newspapers; promotions in the community; and a variety of other activities such as planting a tree on campus for donor awareness or decorating trees around campus with green ribbons. Students are encouraged to plan one large donor activity on campus in April that Secretary of State Jesse White may attend. Winners of the campus competition will be announced in the next issue of the *Life Goes On* newsletter.



## APRIL IS NATIONAL DONATE LIFE MONTH!



## Donor Poster Contest winners announced



Secretary of State Jesse White has announced the winners of the 2014 Organ/Tissue Donor Poster Contest, sponsored by the Secretary of State and Donate Life Illinois. The contest is open to all Illinois public and non-public school students in grades K-12. Winners were selected from four grade categories: K-2; 3-5; 6-8; and 9-12.

The overall winner was Alexandra Garcia, a senior at Bradley-Bourbonnais Community High School in Bradley. She received a \$100 gift certificate to Barnes and Noble from Donate Life Illinois and her poster (above) will be displayed at Driver Services facilities, hospitals, libraries and other locations throughout the state. Other winners each received \$50 gift certificates from Barnes and Noble.

"I would like to congratulate each of our winners as well as all the students who designed posters for this year's contest," said Secretary White. "These students displayed their artistic talents while also helping raise awareness about a very important, lifesaving program."

Winners of each grade category for the contest were:

**Grades K-2:** Anastasia Radovic, age 7, 1st grade, Hellenic American Academy, Deerfield

**Grades 3-5:** Richa Patel, age 11, 5th grade, Hazel Dell Elementary, Springfield

**Grades 6-8:** Bryce Shumaker, age 12, 7th grade, Our Lady of Lourdes, Decatur

**Grades 9-12:** Alexandra Garcia, age 18, senior, Bradley-Bourbonnais Community High School, Bradley

## Elgin Community College students gear up for "Be a Hero" campaign

For Beverly Felder, RN, BSN, MPA and Health Professions Retention Specialist at Elgin Community College, the "Be a Hero" Community College Challenge is an exciting one for her and her nursing students. As her teams' designated administrator, Beverly will oversee the work of two teams — Associated Nursing Students and Health Career Students — at campus donor drives and other activities aimed at increasing the donor registry.

"I'm always looking for opportunities for students to do community service projects. It benefits not just themselves but the community as well. They encourage each other and enjoy the challenges," said Beverly.

Several of the students are interested in dispelling the many myths associated with donation. Joseph Klee, a second-year nursing student, said he has heard all the myths and actually believed some of them until this program came to his attention. "There are so many misconceptions about organ donation. In this project we are exposed to a topic we are unfamiliar with. As nursing students you can empower others with education and it only takes 30 seconds to do."

Candice Hopman echoed the "education is empowerment" concept by adding that the Internet has lots of false information that many people take as fact. "There are lots of people dying because many (potential donors) believe the misconceptions about donation. Truths can help save lives. If we save just one person's life this semester, it would be amazing."



Elgin Community College "Be a Hero" Campaign designated administrator Beverly Felder (back, second from right) with students (front) Joseph Klee, Candice Hopman, Nicole Cikauskas, (back) Janay Zirk and Crystal Michels, and Donor Program staff member Margaret Pearson.

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## Donation around the state



Donor Program regional coordinator Brian Bush (far right) joined other donor advocates at the Illinois Coroners & Medical Examiners Association Training Course in Mt. Vernon in February. Left to right is Jason Coleman, Gift of Hope; Jonette Strothcamp, Mid-America Transplant Services; Roy Mayfield, Gift of Hope; Randy Dudenbostel, president of the association and Randolph County coroner; and Debbie Lanter, Mid-America Transplant Services.



ABOVE LEFT: Jessica Punkett signs up to be an organ/tissue donor at Lewis and Clark Community College in Godfrey during a joint donor drive with the Be the Match marrow registry.

ABOVE CENTER: Juan C. Bean registers as donor and signs up for the Be the Match bone marrow registry at Southwestern Illinois College in East St. Louis.

ABOVE RIGHT: Frances Robinson of Mt. Vernon registers to be a donor at an event in Mt. Vernon for Maggie Wheeler, who has autoimmune cirrhosis of the liver and is awaiting a new liver.



ABOVE LEFT: Jessica Minott (left) joins the registry at Aurora University in February. Donna Stout (right), a heart recipient, helped engage students with her inspirational story.

ABOVE RIGHT: High school students sign Valentine's Day cards for donor families at a Walgreens registration drive in Chicago.

LOWER LEFT: Morgan D'Organ was a hit at the New Lenox Health and Safety Fair in March at Lincoln-Way West High School in New Lenox.

## Employee Connection



Frederick Geiger and Fatrice Austin-Geiger

Never in her wildest dreams would Fatrice Austin-Geiger have imagined that not one but two kidney transplants would be in her future. Fatrice, 43, who works in Vehicle Services at 17 N. State St. in Chicago, received her first transplant in September 1998 and her most recent one on April 29, 2013.

Fatrice received her first transplant from a living donor – her youngest sister – who was a perfect match. It lasted 11 years until November 2009 when she found herself in kidney failure once again. She suffers from Focal Segmental Glomerulosclerosis (FSGS), the disease that attacked her original kidney, and eventually it returned and attacked her transplanted kidney. She administered home-hemo dialysis five days a week for three hours at a time with the assistance of her husband Frederick.

Fatrice waited 3-and-a-half years for her second transplant, and this time the gift came from a deceased donor. She is now back to work, attending church again and enjoying life to the fullest. Last September, four months after her second transplant, Fatrice and her husband adopted a baby boy, Frederick Elias, who is the joy of their lives. "I thank God that I'm only on two anti-rejection medications now, and our son is such a blessing to us," said Fatrice. "I've always wanted to be a mother and now I feel my life is complete."

**AN ORGAN/TISSUE DONOR.**

# Donate Life “Blue and Green Day” is April 11



Rock your blue and green on Friday, April 11, to show your support of organ/tissue donation! National Blue and Green Day is one of Donate Life America’s initiatives to register new organ, eye and tissue donors. Facility employees are encouraged to sport blue and green work-appropriate shirts that day and to add blue and green touches to their facilities with balloons, banners and other blue and green decorations. When facility patrons ask what the blue and green symbolizes, tell them it’s for donor awareness and ask them to join the registry! Facility employees are encouraged to take pictures of their Blue and Green Day activities.

## Chicago Bears’ Charles Tillman receives Walter Payton award

Chicago Bears’ cornerback Charles Tillman was awarded the prestigious Walter Payton NFL Man of The Year Award on February 1 and honored during a Super Bowl ceremony on February 2.

A two-time All-Pro cornerback for the Bears, Tillman is a fierce competitor on the field, but felt absolutely helpless when he was informed in 2008 that his infant daughter, Tiana, needed a heart transplant. She received the heart she needed and today is a healthy active youngster.

Through his Cornerstone Foundation, Tillman and his wife Jackie are able to help families and children who are facing similar ordeals. Tillman has said that his daughter’s new heart gave him a new outlook on life and that he feels it’s his duty to give back and help others navigate the transplant (and other life threatening) journeys that can be terribly scary for other families as it was for his. He also continues to spread the word about the importance of being an organ/tissue donor through the Secretary of State’s office.



John and Diane Obremski

## Liver transplant almost a Christmas present

For most of us, a Christmas present of a new liver is not on our list. But for John Obremski, 62, director of environmental services at Presence Saint Joseph Medical Center in Joliet, it was pretty much the only thing on his Christmas list back in 1997.

In September 1997, John, then in his mid-40s, was placed on the active waiting list for a liver. He was suffering from primary sclerosing cholangitis (PSC), the same rare liver disease that affected former Chicago Bears running back Walter Payton. John waited for a new liver while doctors kept his disease at bay with medications. In October 1997, he received the call that there was a liver for him, but it turned out not to be a suitable organ for him. So he continued waiting. Finally, two days after Christmas 1997, John received his belated Christmas present.

“I think it’s harder on the family than the person going through it,” John said. “Caregivers and family are awesome people. They are there for you when you’re not quite sure what’s what.” He credits his wife Diane and sons Steven and Brian for helping him keep a positive outlook and taking care of him during his ordeal. Diane and John just celebrated their 39th wedding anniversary, a milestone they would not have reached without the gift of transplantation.

John says it’s been “an interesting ride and that each day is a bonus. No one knows what the future holds for any of us. I never thought this was in my future. But I got to see my sons get married; they were in college at the time of my illness.”

“I was so thankful to be blessed to receive a transplant, but I was also sad, realizing that 17 other people died that same day while waiting for a transplant.” Today, people can help alleviate the shortage of organs, he added, by easily signing up to be donors.

### Organ/Tissue Donor Program Staff:

To contact a Donor Program staff member in your area, please call the Springfield toll-free phone number at 800-210-2106 or email [lgo@ilsos.net](mailto:lgo@ilsos.net).

**Program Manager** . . . . . Connie Boatman – Chicago

**Assistant Program Manager** . . . . . Sitha Hun – Springfield