40 YEARS OF SAVING LIVES
1971-2011
To improve and extend the lives of the citizens of the state of Michigan by increasing public and professional participation in organ and tissue donation for transplantation.
In 1971, organ transplantation was a hit-or-miss affair, involving only kidneys in any appreciable numbers, and relying on word of mouth, personal contacts and, frankly, luck for patients in need. Many usable kidneys were wasted, and competition—not cooperation—was the order of the day.

Five transplant surgeons had a different idea. Meeting at a restaurant in Brighton, Mich., on Oct. 27, 1971, they laid the foundation for what would become Gift of Life Michigan. Their plan was visionary: Put differences aside and create a statewide patient-centered system that allocated organs equitably among transplant centers and to those patients most in need. The Transplantation Society of Michigan, as it was then known, set up shop in Ann Arbor, hiring Gerda Lipcaman, a one-time National Kidney Foundation employee, as its first executive director and its staff of one.

Today, Gift of Life Michigan is a $39-million-plus operation that employs nearly 200 people and saves 900 or so lives every year through organ donation and transplantation. Literally tens of thousands more benefit from the tissue transplants the organization facilitates.

In the past year, Gift of Life was among eight organizations receiving the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services’ organ donation gold medal for performing above expected outcome metrics.

Most importantly, Gift of Life continues to save and improve lives; it honors donors and their families by getting the precious gifts to those most in need.

Milestones:
1971 Five transplant surgeons create The Transplantation Society of Michigan, eventually to become Gift of Life Michigan.
1982 Renovates an old dairy farm on Platt Road, creating a then state-of-the-art central office and laboratory.
1984 Becomes the referral and recovery organization for tissue donation in Michigan.
1992 Longtime director Gerda Lipcaman retires, replaced by Tom Beyersdorf, who creates new organizational policies and department structure.
1993 First donor family ceremony held.
2008 Tom Beyersdorf retires, succeeded by Gift of Life veteran Richard Pietroski as CEO.
2008 Moves to 50,000-square-foot, 6.5-acre campus on Research Park Drive, Ann Arbor.
2010 Conducts first organ recovery at the Gift of Life Surgical Center in Southfield.

Gift of Life has become a leader in the organ and tissue donation industry. It regularly ranks among the top two or three organ procurement organizations in donation following circulatory death, and its work has been published and presented internationally. In the past year, Gift of Life was among eight organizations receiving the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services’ organ donation gold medal for performing above expected outcome metrics.

Most importantly, Gift of Life continues to save and improve lives; it honors donors and their families by getting the precious gifts to those most in need.

Constant reminder:
Gift of Life moved to its current site in 2008. Visitors and staff are greeted by a permanent wall tribute to those who gave the gift of life.
A heart recipient once noted that her transplant was not just a gift to her. The new heart was a gift to her children, who now had their mother to help guide and nurture them as they grew.

The mechanisms to facilitate them have changed immensely. In the early days, a perfusion machine was hauled in the back of a van (dubbed “Stanley’s Steamer” after a founding father, Dr. Stanley Dienst); in contrast, Gift of Life these days is exploring ways to use cutting-edge technology that reconditions organs that have been removed from a donor, thus enabling both more transplants and higher-quality transplants.

But whether it’s 1971 or 2011, the dedication and professionalism exhibited in carrying out these life-saving, life-improving efforts has not wavered.

Today, the Gift of Life communication center triages over 36,000 referrals every year 24/7. Gift of Life’s full-service laboratory annually performs over 13,000 compatibility tests and 5,000-plus infectious disease tests to ensure the best possible outcome for people in need of a life-saving transplant.

Donation coordinators stand ready to be dispatched around the clock to the state’s 140-plus hospitals, while hospital services associates provide hundreds of in-services and follow-ups each year to help train hospital nurses and physicians. A record 21 Michigan hospitals earned U.S. organ donation medals in 2010 for exceeding national benchmarks, through their collaboration with Gift of Life.

And since the fall of 2010, roughly a third of Michigan organ recoveries occur at the Gift of Life Surgical Center in Southfield. The standardized, dedicated surgical suites lead to higher consistency and efficiency that benefits donor families, transplant centers and recipients.

The result is felt most by those in need. As one pancreas recipient explained: “People ask if I feel better, and I do. But really, for the first time in decades, I feel normal.”

Matchmaker: Gift of Life’s full-service laboratory is open 24 hours a day to conduct compatibility and infectious disease tests that ensure patient safety.

The Story of Saving Lives

Highest honor: In 2010, Gift of Life received the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services gold medal for excellence in organ donation.

On the front line: Communication center screeners and specialists receive calls on every hospital death in the state, more than 36,000 referrals a year.

<table>
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*As of October 20, 2011
Organ and tissue donation doesn’t necessarily start in a hospital. It begins with a mindset among individuals, families and communities that a person’s final act can be one of helping save and improve lives.

Since 1994, individuals in Michigan have documented their decision by joining the Michigan Organ Donor Registry. The registry has taken a variety of forms – including a major breakthrough starting in 2007 that created a heart insignia for drivers’ licenses and state IDs – and today nearly 2.4 million residents have chosen to be a hero. Gift of Life promotes the registry through more than 2,000 community events every year, ranging from major efforts like LIFE Walk in Detroit to donor drives at health fairs, small-town parades and service clubs. The organization works closely with the Michigan Secretary of State to make sure everyone has the opportunity to join the registry.

In addition, Gift of Life honors those who have given the gifts of life, sight and mobility. The organization recently held its 19th annual Michigan Donor Family Ceremony, in conjunction with the Michigan Eye-Bank, its closest corporate partner. The ceremonies serve as a reminder that life-saving, life-improving transplants begin with someone’s decision to donate.

Since 2007, when the Heart Insignia Law took effect, the Michigan Organ Donor Registry has risen dramatically, to nearly 2.4 million people. Here are the annual increases in the registry:

- 2007: 149,000
- 2008: 165,000
- 2009: 240,000
- 2010: 320,000
- 2011: 306,000*

*Through mid-October 2011
Gift of Life has had a constant partner for much of its four-decade journey: the Gift of Life Foundation, which has provided funding for everything from transplant recipients needing medication to efforts that boost the Michigan Organ Donor Registry and scientific research.

**Supporting the Mission**

The Foundation is its own separate 501(c)3 organization. Two of its primary projects are the Williams Memorial Grant Fund and the Transplant Social Workers Patient Assistance Grant Fund. The former disburses up to $1,000 to recipients who need help for their transplant maintenance medications and insurance co-pays. The latter provides funding to transplant social workers to help candidates and recipients meet unexpected or urgent needs.

“If it had not been for God first and then the Williams Fund, I would not be here today,” one recipient said.

The Foundation’s work has grown far beyond those two funds. In the past five years alone, the Gift of Life Foundation has allocated over half a million dollars to recipients, research and donor registry efforts.

**Outreach:**

A Foundation grant helped support the “I Joined!” campaign.

**Deserving:**

The Foundation annually hands out professional and community service awards.

**Here are some of the myriad projects the Gift of Life Foundation supports:**

- Transplant recipient and social worker assistance
- The Michigan Eye-Bank’s “I Joined!” campaign
- Call-to-action materials at Secretary of State offices
- Research on outcomes of African-American living kidney donors
- A Donate Life parade float
- Community Service and Professional Service Awards

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