

Obituaries | Marvin E. Reznik: 1944 - 2008

## Marvin E. Reznik, 63, organ donation advocate

Longtime funeral director spoke from experience after '98 transplant

By Trevor Jensen | Tribune reporter  
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Marvin E. Reznik was intimately familiar with the effects of organ donations.

In 1996 his son, Michael, was killed in an automobile accident. His donated organs helped sustain the lives of five people.

Two years later, Mr. Reznik was close to death, suffering from hepatitis C, when a donated liver gave him new life.

Mr. Reznik, a longtime funeral director, became an advocate of organ donation, speaking regularly to colleagues, rabbis and religious officials, Rotary clubs and hospital workers on its benefits.

Mr. Reznik, 63, died Friday, Feb. 8, in a Gainesville, Fla., hospital after suffering a massive infection that led to organ failure, said his wife, Sandy. He had recently moved to Florida to work at a funeral home there but maintained a home in Wheeling.

"He was like a super-volunteer," said Melissa Williams of Gift of Hope Organ and Tissue Donor Network, a federally designated non-profit agency that coordinates donations in the northern three-quarters of Illinois and northwest Indiana. "He didn't have to lay it on thick. He told his own story."

Mr. Reznik grew up in Chicago's Rogers Park neighborhood, where his parents operated a corner store on Devon Avenue. Across the street was Weinstein Funeral Home, where Mr. Reznik parked cars and did other odd jobs while a student at Senn High School.

He took classes at the University of Illinois at Chicago before getting his degree from Worsham College of Mortuary Science and starting his career as a funeral director. He managed Weinstein funeral homes and cemeteries in Florida in the early 1980s and in 1989 began a 10-year stint as a partner in a Tucson, Ariz., funeral home.

His interest in organ donation started when a family he was working with expressed concern that a relative could not receive a traditional Jewish funeral if the deceased donated organs. He assured the family that was not the case and, touched by the desire to save other lives, became an advocate of organ donation.

When his son was put on life-support after the car crash in July 1996, the Reznik family followed through on his wishes to donate his organs. Mr. Reznik later received correspondence from the families of five people who received his son's organs.

Mr. Reznik had already been diagnosed with hepatitis, and by late 1997 the situation was dire. The following August, he received a liver weeks before doctors told him he would have died.

He retold his story countless times in an effort to get more people to sign organ donor cards.

"He was a very witty speaker, very compelling and very compassionate," Williams said. "He didn't have to add embellishment. It was what it was."

Mr. Reznik is also survived by two daughters, Amy Armstrong and Melissa; two brothers, Alvin and Sheldon; and a grandchild.

Services will be held at 11 a.m. Wednesday in Weinstein Funeral Home, 111 Skokie Blvd., Wilmette.