

## *Opinions/Editorial*

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### **Never too early to plan the gift of life**

As we discussed on this page Wednesday, early detection and medical advancements have played a significant role in the dropping since 1993 of the annual mortality rate due to cancer.

Also a key factor in fighting cancer, however, is public awareness. More people openly discuss cancer, its effects, its impact.

The same, thankfully, can be said for organ donation.

More people are talking about the benefits of becoming an organ donor, and newspapers will continue to share the details of stories connected to those who have made the decision to make life-saving organs available to others in need.

There's no limit to the examples of how other lives are saved because of decisions people have made to help.

Take Don Smith of Du Quoin for example. Illinois Secretary of State Jesse White - a tireless backer of getting more people signed up to become donors - holds up Smith as a shining example.

The recipient of a kidney in 1994, Smith became a tireless volunteer in the ongoing effort to sign up more donors.

"It gave me my life back," the 73-year-old told us Wednesday after he returned from chopping wood near his house. "I can't begin to tell you how much it's meant."

For starters, three of Smith's five grandchildren wouldn't have met him had he not received his new kidney.

The need for more donors is undeniable. Last year, according to the National Transplant Society, about 7,000 people died while waiting for lifesaving organs.

For perspective, that number is only a little bigger than the population of the town in which Smith resides.

We can never underestimate the value of what one person's decision can mean to countless others.

One organ donor can save the lives of up to eight other people while also providing health benefits in other areas to as many as 50 people.

That bears repeating: One organ donor can directly impact the lives of up to 58 people, according to the society.

There are now roughly 90,000 people awaiting life-saving organs in the U.S.

In Illinois, and in most states, it is easy to become a donor. A total of 40 states, including ours since Jan. 1, 2006, have first-person consent laws on the books.

First-person consent provides the legal, binding OK for donation without requiring additional witnesses or family consent for those over the age of 18. Family or guardian approval is required for organs to be donated from a minor.

Health care providers are working hard, and successfully, at ways to make transplant procedures even more successful and to lessen the amount of time a person in need has to wait.

One example is the growing use of so-called kidney swaps. These occur when a loved one who wishes to donate to a spouse but can't because he or she isn't an appropriate match instead are paired with other couples in similar situations.

It is, in a way, expanding the pool of possible donors, albeit ones who are still alive.

Expanding the pool of donors is key. We encourage people to discuss the issue with family and friends first, and then give serious consideration to becoming a donor.

The larger the pool, the smaller that 7,000 number becomes.

Go to [www.LifeGoesOn.com](http://www.LifeGoesOn.com) for additional information and to sign up.

To do so is heroic, Smith said.

"The donors are the heroes in this whole process. Every one of them is a hero."