



## **Leaving the Legacy of a Lifetime: Giving the Gift of Life** *A Community-wide Organ and Tissue Donation Awareness Event*

La Crosse, Wis.— February 19, 2024 — A collaborative effort among community partners aims to raise awareness about the critical need for organ and tissue donations and the profound impact of these life-saving gifts. Spearheaded by the D.B. Reinhart Institute for Ethics in Leadership, the partnership includes Gundersen Health System, Mayo Clinic Health System, Madison’s UW Health, UW-La Crosse, and Viterbo University. The initiative begins with two main events:

- Organ Donation Awareness Flag Raising Ceremonies on Wednesday, **April 10**, at 10:08 a.m. **at both** Mayo Clinic Health System and Gundersen Health System. The time symbolizes that one donor can save the lives of up to eight people and honors the memories of donors and their families and recognizes that more than 100,000 patients waiting for the gift of life.
- On Thursday, **April 18**, from noon to 1 p.m., a complimentary lunch-and-learn event at the Viterbo University Fine Arts Center FSPA Lobby will offer an in-depth look at organ donation and the effect on local families.

At the **April 18** event, Jennifer Livingston, Community Relations Director at Mayo Clinic Health System, will engage in conversations with local individuals who have received, donated, or are awaiting the gift of life. Gain insights from Tracie Cook, UW-Health Organ and Tissue Donation, and Renee Herbst, RN, Gundersen Health System, as they share valuable information about the intricacies of organ and tissue donation, dispel myths, and explain the donation processes.

Why is increasing organ donation important? Despite 95% of Americans viewing organ donation favorably, only 58% take the necessary steps to register as donors. One person registered to be a donor can potentially save the lives of up to eight individuals in need of organ transplants and many more through tissue donations.

“Finding a kidney donor is akin to running for office. You must share your story, seek support from family and friends and hope for a match. It’s a lot to manage for someone with organ failure,” expresses Jennifer Servais, 54, a Rochester resident with deep roots in La Crosse. “I

remain hopeful that someone will selflessly donate their kidney—a tremendous gift of life that would enable me to thrive and be here for my family, friends, and community.”

The decision to donate as a living donor or to donate a family members organ is personal. “When we were confronted with making the decision to donate my husband Karl’s organs in 2011, my children and I did not hesitate,” says Maria Roswall. “It was the only answer to a terrible tragedy. My son’s father-in-law had been a recipient of a kidney just prior to our donation, so we realized the significance of the gift. After meeting two of the recipients and their families, it gave such a feeling of relief that our decision was the right one.”

For those who have received the gift of life, its impact is profound. “It’s a complicated swirl of emotions when you are told there is a heart for you,” shares Beth Erickson, 53, who underwent a heart transplant on December 21, 2019. “You feel a complex mix of grief and gratitude, knowing that someone else had to pass away for you to live. Yet now, my donor is a part of me. This beautiful soul gave me a chance to be with my family again.”

The community-wide event on April 18 is the beginning of an ongoing series of city-wide donor drives and related events. Attendance is free but registration is required by emailing Jenny Water at [jtwaters@viterbo.edu](mailto:jtwaters@viterbo.edu). The lecture will also be livestreamed on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/ethics](http://www.facebook.com/ethics).

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**For more information, press only:**

**ORGANIZER/ORGAN RECIPIENT: Beth M. Erickson**, heart transplant recipient, [bethatjobe@gmail.com](mailto:bethatjobe@gmail.com), 608-769-0824

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**Jennifer Livingston**, Mayo Clinic Health System, Director of Community Relations, [Livingston.jennifer@mayo.edu](mailto:Livingston.jennifer@mayo.edu), 608-304-4373

**Tracie Cook**, UW-Health, Community Outreach Coordinator, [tcook@uwhealth.org](mailto:tcook@uwhealth.org), 608-516-9906

**Renee Herbst**, RN, Gundersen Health System, ICU Nurse and Organ and Tissue Donation Liaison, [ghsmedia@gundersenhealth.org](mailto:ghsmedia@gundersenhealth.org)

**Learn more about the event at:**

Website: <https://www.viterbo.edu/db-reinhart-institute-ethics-leadership/lecture-series>

Website: <https://www.uwhealth.org/services/organ-tissue-donation>

**Live Stream Event for April 18 Event:** [www.facebook.com/viterboethics](http://www.facebook.com/viterboethics)