

The Ultimate Tribute for the Ultimate Gift

OSF HealthCare Newsroom

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It took 20 years for Terry and his wife to find each other, even though they knew each other for decades. They had been married less than two years when a brain aneurysm took him from her. As a lasting gift, Terry made the decision to donate his organs, giving others the gift of life. His wife said that's the kind of man Terry was – selfless and generous, her hero.

As a final send-off, the staff at [OSF HealthCare Saint Francis Medical Center](#) in Peoria, Ill., lined the halls around the neuro intensive care unit. A team of caregivers wheeled Terry's bed past those gathered for a final honor walk on his way to the operating room.

"The honor walks really provide our hospital staff, as well as the family, to offer a moment of silence to honor the life of that patient and the generous gifts that they're giving her organs and tissue donation," explained Jill Arnold, patient care manager for the neuro intensive care unit at OSF Saint Francis Medical Center.

"Once everything is in place a tribute is read at the bedside for the hospital staff to hear. Pastoral care will offer a prayer and then at that time an Honor Walk would begin," added Ruth Keith, donation liaison for the Gift of Hope Organ and Tissue Donor Network.

OSF Saint Francis is the leading organ donation hospital in downstate Illinois. It began offering the option of an honor walk for families this spring. Family members can accompany their loved one for the honor walk if able.

Staff throughout the hospital is given a 30-minute warning that an honor walk will be taking place. An additional alert comes 10 minutes prior. This gives time for those across the campus to gather on the unit where the patient has been cared for. The walks attract not just nurses and doctors who have cared for a patient, but everyone - from maintenance, food services, housekeeping, and others – who say a silent, final goodbye.

"It really makes the families feel very supported and comforted in what is a tragic time for them. But I also feel like it provides a sense of purpose for our staff and what they do on a daily basis," said Arnold. "I think it really gives our Mission Partners the opportunity to give them the true respect that a hero deserves."

OSF Saint Francis has been asked by the [Gift of Hope Network](#) to serve as the benchmarking hospital in the state of Illinois for honor walks, helping to establish guidelines for other hospitals to learn from. The Gift of Hope team hopes to establish honor walks at all of the hospitals it works with.