

Celebrating the Gift of Life

August is National Minority Donor Awareness Month (NMDAM). Ethnic minorities make up nearly 60% of people who are waiting for lifesaving organs in the U.S., but only a third of registered donors. Because transplant success rates are higher when the organ comes from a donor of the same ethnic background, there is a critical need for African Americans, Hispanic Americans and Asian Americans to register as organ and tissue donors, according to the [Gift of Hope Organ & Tissue Donor Network](#) of Illinois.

James Flemming, a 68-year-old Peoria resident, has a newfound appreciation for his life and celebrates it each day after undergoing a kidney transplant through OSF HealthCare in 2013 due to complications caused by diabetes.

“The kidney issues probably had started a while back but I hadn’t talked to anyone about it. So I had the transplant six years ago, say about four years prior to that I discovered that there was a problem because my endocrinologist, or my diabetic doctor, said ‘well we need to check your kidney functions, they don’t look good.’” said James.

After thoughtful consideration, it was decided that James needed a kidney transplant and he was placed on the transplant list where he stayed for a year before receiving the call.

In Illinois, 1,450 African Americans, 800 Hispanic Americans and 240 Asian Americans are on the transplant waiting list. [NMDAM](#) provides the perfect opportunity to spread the word about the need for lifesaving organs and empower minorities to say “yes” to organ and tissue donation by [becoming registered donors](#) and by authorizing donation on a loved one’s behalf.

One message James has for African Americans considering becoming organ donors is to recognize the gift of life you have the ability to give many. James is grateful for his new lease on life and hopes his story inspires others, especially minorities, to become organ donors.

“God created us to help one another and, during the transplantation, that helped me to realize that I needed to be more proactive. To get people to understand what it is to share – not just mentally or monetarily – but to share physically with someone that’s in need,” explained James.

“I’m feeling great. It’s doing what it’s supposed to do – as long as I do what I’m supposed to do. And that’s what I’m doing. And it’s wonderful. I’d hate to think that if this had not been available, where my life would be today,” James continued.

Prior to his life-saving operation, James was an organ donor and still remains one today.

“To think that a person at my age could be able to receive a gift of life like was gifted to me is just phenomenal. And if you can find your way to be a donor, it would be one of the most wonderful things you could ever do,” said James.

During NMDAM, Gift of Hope is encouraging minority groups to make a difference by taking four easy steps to help save lives:

- Register today at bit.ly/GOHRegister to become an organ and tissue donor or text COMMIT to 51555.
- Have the donation conversation with friends and family.
- Become an [Ambassador for Hope](#) volunteer.
- Say “yes” to organ and tissue donation on behalf of a loved one.