

# Green Ribbon Campaign encourages organ donation, raises awareness

By **PAULA BROWN**

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Do you know if you're an organ donor?

An Orangeville-based initiative dedicated to organ donation advocacy is raising awareness of donor registration in recognition of Organ Donation Awareness Month and National Organ and Tissue Donation Awareness Week.

The Green Ribbon Campaign was started in 2017 by Orangeville resident Mike Steele, a heart transplant recipient who wanted to pay forward his gift of life by encouraging others to register for organ donation.

In June of 2018, Steele passed away from his battle with cancer and his daughter, Michelle White, chose to continue the campaign in his memory.

"He wanted to do as much with his second life as he possible could, and I felt like I needed to continue what he started. It was extremely important to my dad to reach out and get as many people as possible registered because he wouldn't have had as many milestones that happened in his life. Because someone donated their heart, we got him for eight more years," said White.

Organ Donation Awareness Month and National Organ and Tissue Donation Awareness Week (NOTDAW) both look to advocate the critical need for more donors across the country and also encourage Canadians to register their decision.

Canadian Blood Services reports that 90 per cent of Canadians support organ and tissue donation, but only 32 per cent have registered their decision to be a donor.

By registering, one organ donor is able to save the lives of eight people and up to 75 patients can receive a tissue donation from a single donor.

"You can be a donor for both and be a part of something incredible in someone's life," said White.

In previous years, the Green Ribbons Campaign has held information booths at community events such as the Orangeville Fall Fair and Home Show, to spread the word about organ and tissue donation.

White said it was during these events that she began to wonder how many people she met would go home to register or check their donor status.

In the hopes of increasing the number of people registered as donors in the community, the initiative organized a registration drive at Headwaters Health Care Centre on April 15.

"We wound up having over 20 people check their status and we had two people that were not registered and registered on the spot, which was amazing," said White.

As important as it is to register as a donor, White also wants to highlight the importance of sharing your wishes to be a donor with your family.

"Do you know if they want to be an organ donor is a tough question for a family member to answer in a time of grief," said White.

Trillium Gift of Life Network is part of Ontario Health and responsible for delivering and coordinating organ and tissue donation or transplantation services across the province.

At the time of print, Trillium Gift of Life Network reports that there are 1,531 people waiting for an organ transplant.

“Think about it not in terms of numbers. Those are people,” said White.

According to Be A Donor, there are a total of 61,767 health card holders in Orangeville, of which only 26,334 are registered donors. Meaning that there is about a 43 per cent registration donor rate.

An easy way to find out if you're an organ donor is to check your health card. Those interested in becoming a donor or would like to check their registration status can do so by visiting [www.beadonor.ca](http://www.beadonor.ca).

To learn more about the local Green Ribbon Campaign, visit the “Green Ribbons 4 Mike” Facebook page.