

## Honoring the gift of life at flag-raising ceremony

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**Leonardtown, MD** - In celebration of National Donate Life Month, MedStar St. Mary's Hospital recently held its first flag-raising ceremony as part of The Living Legacy Foundation's "Flags Across Maryland" initiative. The April 8 gathering honored past, present, and future organ, eye, and tissue donors, as well as donors in spirit.

"'Flags Across Maryland' is an opportunity to publicly recognize the generosity of families who have offered this gift to others while experiencing a profound personal loss," said Stephen Michaels, MD, chief operating officer and chief medical officer at MedStar St. Mary's. "Whenever a donor's family chooses, we raise this flag to honor those who have given one of the greatest gifts there is: the gift of life."

Organ donors, recipients, and their families joined hospital administrators, nurses, and associates at the event, which was spearheaded by hospital associates and coordinated with The Living Legacy Foundation (LLF), a nonprofit organization that facilitates organ and tissue donation for Maryland hospitals.

Approximately 3,300 people are waiting on a life-saving organ in Maryland — a number that grows to 113,000 people on the national list, according to the LLF. In 2018, 159 Marylanders donated a total of 520 organs while 942 residents received a transplant.

Two patients at MedStar St. Mary's became organ donors last year, while 19 individuals donated tissue. One patient was a tissue donor in spirit, meaning the patient or family authorized a donation, but recovery was not ultimately possible.

"We do not forget a single patient," said Jennifer Alvey, director of the hospital's Intensive Care Center. "I will never forget my first [experience caring for an individual who became a donor], and I will not forget my last."

Edd Cathey, a volunteer chaplain at the hospital, read a dedication to donors, recipients, and their loved ones, as well as all assembled on that sunny April morning. "This flag is a symbol — a reminder that despair does not win the day," Cathey said. "Every time the flag is raised, may we know that love lives on."

To register as an organ donor, express your wishes through the Motor Vehicle Administration or sign up on the Maryland Donor Registry at [donatelifemaryland.org](http://donatelifemaryland.org).

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