Alan Petelinsek, a dedicated athlete and President of Power Test, a successful and benevolent company, was on a business trip in Iraq when he met a man whose son was an organ donor. From that experience, Alan knew he had been called to be a voice for organ donation.

As an athlete, he thought that the hours of training and competition he completed would be an excellent way to raise awareness, so he and another athlete created Team Destination Donation, a group of athletes who are committed to raising awareness for organ, tissue and eye donation. Athletes of any ability who sign up for Destination Donation become visible ambassadors for organ donation by wearing Destination Donation gear when training or participating in sports. Now more than 100 members strong, they proudly wear their orange-dot jerseys to promote the mission.

Beyond the board room, you’ll find Alan training for triathlons, competing with the team or even running in 5Ks in the Dottie Donor Dot costume. “I let that man know how he had inspired me,” said Alan, “And I haven’t looked back. This is a message I won’t fail to deliver.”
When Ken crossed the finish line at the Detroit Marathon, his tears - and race bib, “Transplant Works”-spoke volumes. This was Ken’s second half-marathon, an accomplishment he never imagined.

Ken had lived with Type 1 diabetes for thirty years until he received his pancreas kidney transplant at UW Hospital and Clinics in 2005. When a co-worker encouraged him to do the Detroit Marathon, it was the furthest thing from his mind.

But he began thinking about his donor, Steven, a high school runner. Ken says, “I knew I had to do it for him.” And he did, with Steven as his inspiration every step of the way. This year his son ran with him and both had organ donation messages on their race bibs.

“From running a half marathon, to getting off insulin to having the chance to see my kids grow up, Steven’s gift of life has truly changed everything for me and my family,” says Ken.
Michaela

Michaela Layton was a healthy, athletic high school senior. She rarely got sick, so when she didn’t feel well, she thought she had the flu. Tests soon revealed she had Wilson’s disease, a rare genetic disease that causes a copper build up in the liver. She was admitted to the intensive care unit where she was told she needed a liver within days. Thankfully, she received a liver through the gift of donation and at age 17, got her second chance at life.

Now Michaela is passionate about organ donation. “Organ donation saved my life, and I want to tell as many people as I can,” says Michaela. She is known to get very creative with her messaging. She and her friends made and proudly wear orange organ donation shirts, and she spends time promoting her local blood drive to young people to build the next generation of blood donors and organ donors.

Michaela is currently in college and hopes to become a transplant nurse one day. “I’ve always wanted to be a nurse,” says Michaela, “but now with my personal experience, I can help others who are going through what I have.”
Chuck isn’t one who is used to being in “wait mode.” His “Let’s Do It!” approach to life not only made him a successful furniture salesman but also a beloved great uncle who loved to wrestle and tease. When he got a bad head cold at age 54, he thought he had walking pneumonia. As his illness progressed, he discovered a virus had attacked his heart and he was in Stage 4 heart failure. He received a pacemaker, defibrillator and medication and was put on the wait list for a heart transplant.

He says, “I always had the ‘dot’ on my license, so I could be a donor for someone else, but I never thought I would need a transplant myself.” Because Chuck was never known to sit still, he tries to keep busy even now, giving back to the transplant community in which he waits. He supports the organ donation message by teaching Driver’s Education, talking to nursing classes and church groups and serving as a photographer at organ donation events. His goal is to get 100 percent of the people he speaks with registered as organ donors.
Steve Parsons has been a racing announcer for more than 30 years, and enjoys traveling to race tracks all over Wisconsin. For years he was often accompanied by his daughter, Kim, who loved hanging out at the track and serving as a trophy girl.

Kim loved the excitement of the races. She also loved helping others. When she died unexpectedly at age 21 as a result of injuries from an accident, Kim became an organ donor. Steve takes comfort in the fact that even in her death she was still able to help others.

Steve honors Kim by working to promote the message of organ donation through the Kim Parsons Memorial Trophy Series. During the summer, Steve travels to more than 20 race tracks across Wisconsin to promote organ and tissue donation. He has presented more than 200 memorial trophies, specially designed to honor Kim and the gift of organ, tissue and eye donation.

Steve takes great comfort knowing that Kim lives on in her two beautiful daughters, and in the lives she saved through donation.

uwotd.org
Clinicians and scientists at University of Wisconsin Hospital and Clinics have a long history and deep commitment to research that advances the field of transplantation. Since its creation in 1966, the program has made innovative discoveries that are used throughout the world.

Currently, a team led by Dr. Dixon Kaufman, Chief of Transplantation and Dr. William Burlingham, Professor of Surgery in Transplant Research and Development, is researching new therapies to reduce or eliminate the long-term need for immunosuppression (anti-rejection) drugs in kidney transplant recipients. The new process will ultimately be safer and will improve the quality of life for transplant patients by decreasing their need for medications and the associated costs and side effects.

Other research projects within the department include investigating methods to enhance organ function in recipients of deceased donor organs and the development of new therapies for treating diabetes.
Regina had five small children when she was listed for a liver transplant at UW Health. Biliary cirrhosis, an autoimmune disease that attacks the liver, had taken its toll on her liver and her health. Six months after being listed, she received a liver transplant and embraced her health and gift of life. Through both physical and mental dedication, Regina achieved a Black Belt in karate and has followed her passion to teach karate and self defense.

Now her goal is to use her gift of life to the fullest while teaching others to protect their lives. Through sharing her story she hopes she can encourage others to become organ donors and to provide the lifeline of transplantation that she was able to receive.
Loni Wendt’s daughter, Melissa, became an organ donor at the age of 16 following an automobile accident. It was only months later when Loni made it her personal mission to promote organ, tissue and eye donation.

For more than 10 years, Loni has been a tireless advocate for organ donation. She educates approximately 1,200 students each year about organ and tissue donation as part of their driver’s education curriculum. She worked to build relationships with school systems and driving schools, so she could educate more kids about registering as organ donors when they get their driver’s licenses.

She has logged thousands of miles and hours, but keeps going. “Melissa was proud to be a registered donor,” said Loni. “She would be very proud of the improvements her legacy has created.”
When Kaylin of Iowa was five years old she was diagnosed with atypical hemolytic uremic syndrome, triggered by a virus she had two years earlier. Her family chose to come to UW Hospital and Clinics when she needed a kidney transplant.

Now age 16, Kaylin and her family are all giving back to the transplant community by spreading the message of organ donation through an annual “Green Out Game.”

Each year they turn their high school gym green, Iowa’s Donate Life color, during a basketball game. Kaylin and her friends sell t-shirts, wristbands and hand out donor registration forms to fans.

Because of her illness, Kaylin was not able to participate in sports. Instead, she managed the cross-country team and the basketball team. Organizing the Green Out Game became a way for her to connect her love of sports with her passion for organ donation.
Lisa

The simple act of breathing is taken for granted by many of us, but not by Lisa of Omaha, Nebraska, who has cystic fibrosis.

Lisa loved playing tennis, but as her illness progressed, she couldn’t breathe well enough to play. Even keeping up with her 5-year-old son, Austin, was a struggle. After receiving a double lung transplant, that all changed and Lisa now truly makes each breath count.

She plays with her son and she’s back on the tennis court. She’s even played in the Transplant Games, where she earned a silver medal.

She also works hard to promote donation. She filmed a commercial with Nebraska’s Donate Life program and she and Austin team up to make videos to raise funds and awareness for cystic fibrosis.

Lisa received her transplant at UW Hospital and Clinics and continues to spread hope from here to Nebraska and back.
As a cultural advocate, Dylan strives to promote cultural awareness and help families both on and off the Indian reservation.

But he struggled with diabetes for several years and his kidney function declined. He was tired and felt like a giant burden was resting on his shoulders. Thankfully Dylan received a kidney transplant from his living donor and girlfriend, Jennifer, and feels better in both mind and body.

For generations his family has been participating in POW Wows across the country. Thanks to his transplant, Dylan not only has the energy to do this again, but also a new found sense of purpose – to use his personal skills and gifts as a public speaker to share his story with members of his tribe and community, many who have diabetes.
As a teen, Lindsey suffered from microscopic polyangiitis, a rare disease that causes kidney failure. After spending eight months on dialysis she received a kidney from her father, Robin.

Today her experience has come full circle. As a nurse, a former dialysis patient and kidney transplant recipient, Lindsey provides more than nursing care to her dialysis patients. The extra dose of compassion and understanding she shares go a long way to comfort patients who are also awaiting a kidney transplant.

Thanks to her father’s gift of donation, Lindsey is able to live her life to the fullest. From nursing school to getting married, and now having her first child, Lindsey’s renewed health is a gift her whole family celebrates.
Doug and his family have a deep sense of appreciation for organ donation and the gift of life it brings.

Doug had been very ill with a virus that filled his body with infection. The virus quickly and inexplicably attacked Doug’s liver and, to complicate matters, Doug found out he had an inherited heart arrhythmia that would make surgery very risky.

Physicians at UW Hospital and Clinics treated his arrhythmia and helped him get strong enough to undergo liver transplant surgery. Today Doug and his family are strong advocates for organ donation. Doug appreciates every day – whether he is going off to work, serving as a volunteer firefighter or spending time with his grandchildren – he continues to live his life to the fullest.

Doug uwotd.org
Kimberly celebrated a milestone when she gathered with the UW Health Transplant program staff to celebrate the 20th anniversary of her heart and double lung transplant.

Kimberly had a congenital disease that affected her heart. As she grew, her heart condition weakened her lungs to the point that she was too weak to walk. After years of missing out of activities and events, Kim underwent a double-lung and heart transplant.

Kimberly is thankful for the gift of life, and thankful to the transplant team who keeps her up to date on medical changes and progress that continue to improve her life and health. She is the fifth longest living heart and lung transplant in the United States.

Her wish as she blew out the candles was “for twenty more years.”
Chris is a hero on many fronts. He proudly serves his country in the Air National Guard, serving on missions across the world.

When Chris’ stepfather needed a kidney donation, Chris immediately stepped up. Though he risked the possibility that he would not be able to fly again, it was a risk he was willing to take to help his stepfather.

Chris is back to flying, and is also a mentor to others interested in living donation.

“You can be a living donor and still live a very good life,” said Chris.

Chris received the military award for the American Red Cross’s annual Brave Hearts award. But, like all living donors, even without the award he was already a hero.
Sara managed her Type 1 Diabetes for more than 20 years. But, as a nurse and an outdoor enthusiast, her busy and active lifestyle made it more difficult for her to control the disease.

Little did she know then, but her love for horses would lead her to a pancreas transplant. When she bought her horse Theo from Deb, she learned that Deb had received a kidney and pancreas transplant. Deb inspired Sara to learn more, so Sara contacted the UW Health Transplant Program to learn about pancreas transplant.

After undergoing a pancreas transplant, Sara no longer suffers from diabetes. She is now able to go riding and camping with Theo or for long walks with her dog, outings made easier thanks to her transplant and her friend Deb.
Whether it’s parents helping their children, friends, or even strangers helping each other, living donation allows more children to get back to doing what they do best – simply being kids.

Devin, his mom, Corey, and their family know this firsthand. Today they enjoy going for walks and spending time together, but prior to Devin’s kidney transplant, these simple walks would have not been possible.

Prior to his transplant, Devin tired easily, and needed to nap every day. But today, he is stronger than ever, thanks to his loving family, and the kidney he received from his mother.

Now he’s back to doing what he loves – walking with his mom, playing with his friends, playing baritone in his school’s band and playing video games – simply being a kid.
Miller has a passion for musical theater. He loves to sing and perform. But his passion became a burden as his cystic fibrosis began to take its toll. “I had to push through songs – often losing my voice, or stopping to cough,” he says.

But at age 18 he underwent a bilateral lung transplant, the only option for someone with advanced cystic fibrosis, and found his voice again.

Thanks to a new lease on life, Miller was able to begin a new life at college in New York to pursue his dreams as a performer. He sings with double the passion and gratitude, for a donor who gave him his voice, and life, back.