

# Doug Zimmerman's gift of life

Doug Zimmerman, of Woodstock, passed away from a sudden cardiac event while jogging June 8. Afterwards, he gave the promise of health, hope and a better life to people he did not even know. He accomplished this through tissue donation.

Doug already had "active hero" status with the Red Cross. He donated more than 65 units of blood during his lifetime. Doug and his wife Bet had also discussed organ and tissue donation. They both registered as donors when they got their driver's licenses.

They were inspired by a poem by Robert Test, called "To Remember Me." Test wrote of his hope that his lifeless body might help others lead fuller lives. He realized that organ and tissue donation could enable another person to experience the beauty of a sunrise, walk again and heal from devastating injuries. Doug believed that donation was a good way to give back to others. After all, that is how he lived his life.

Just about everyone who knew Doug thought he was a great guy. He and Bet were truly happy together. The couple enjoyed life, laughter and the outdoors. They hiked, camped, took the time to enjoy the vibrancy of a rainbow, and set up bluebird boxes. One day, after learning that an entire clutch of bluebird eggs had been destroyed in a House Wren attack, Doug tried to cheer up Bet. He belted out a loving and creative rendition of "The Sun Will Come Up Tomorrow" for his wife and the camera. (You can watch the video at [www.cragman.com](http://www.cragman.com).)

When Bet was notified by Hartford Hospital that Doug was at the Emergency Room, she wished it was just another athletic injury. Doug was a frequent visitor at the ER. He had sustained dislocated shoulders and broken ribs associated with reckless abandon on the softball field, dislocated knees from playing with rope swings and Hackensack, and countless injuries while hiking, running climbing, fixing cars and restoring their old farmhouse.

After Bet arrived at the hospital, she learned that Doug had not survived, despite heroic efforts to help him. When Doug collapsed, a



Photo courtesy of Hartford Hospital

Bet, Larry and Joan Zimmerman at the flag raising ceremony at Hartford Hospital, hours after Doug passed away. The hospital flies the flag for two days to let people know of the donor's gift. Sadly, thousands of people suffer or die each year while waiting for an organ transplant.

bystander immediately alerted Aetna Ambulance Service professionals parked nearby. These trained professionals reached Doug within minutes of his collapse. They did all they could to try to resuscitate him, followed by additional attempts by Hartford Hospital staff.

The attending physician and Social Services point of contact met Bet and his parents when they arrived at the hospital. After hearing what happened, Bet informed them that Doug had signed up as an organ and tissue donor. Knowing that time could be of the essence, she asked whether Doug was eligible to give.

The hospital contacted LifeChoice Donor Services, the local organ procurement organization. Sheila Murphy, tissue coordinator for LifeChoice, joined Bet at the hospital. She discussed the options, answered Bet's questions and offered the family support through the process.

Because his heart had stopped

out in the field, Doug was unable to donate organs. However, Doug could still be a tissue donor. Sheila explained the tissue recovery process and how Doug would be cared for by Life Choice staff. She also told Bet that, if the family desired, it would still be possible to have a funeral with a viewing. Sheila explained how cornea donation can restore sight, bones can prevent amputations, veins can restore blood circulation, tissues can be used to rebuild torn ligaments and bring back mobility, and skin can save the lives of burn victims.

Through donation, Doug will help countless people throughout the United States. "The thought that his gift might be helping others is one of the only things that gives me solace right now," said Bet. "It helps to know that someone else might be looking through the lenses of his eyes, flexing his muscles or walking on his bones. He didn't need them anymore. Someone else out there desperately



Courtesy photo

Doug was active throughout his life. Here he is pictured playing softball.

does."

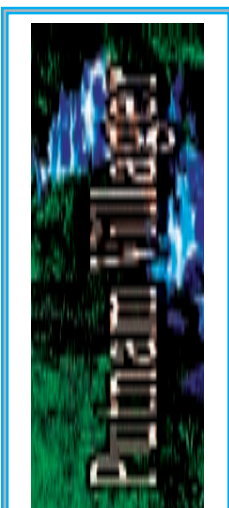
Doug left his family and friends with wonderful memories of a life well lived. His generosity of spirit and zest for life did not end with his last breath. Through the gift of tissue donation, Doug will continue to impact the lives of people in the community. He has offered them the chance to experience and enjoy life, hopefully as well as Doug did.

Bet commented, "Immediately after we lost Doug, my brother signed up as an organ donor. I think would be Doug proud. I know I am. I hope others will learn more about organ and tissue donation and seriously consider leaving such a legacy."

Right now, more than 100,000 people await an organ transplant. Each year, tissue donors like Doug

help over 1,000,000 people. The need for more people to register as organ and tissue donors is very real. To learn more and register today, visit [www.DonateLifeNewEngland.org](http://www.DonateLifeNewEngland.org).

Caitlyn Bernabucci is the public education specialist for LifeChoice Donor Services. LifeChoice Donor Services is the nonprofit, federally designated organ procurement organization serving six counties in Connecticut and three counties in Massachusetts. LifeChoice is dedicated to fostering community and professional support of organ and tissue donation, providing compassionate care to families, and saving and improving lives. For more information, please visit [www.lifechoicepo.org](http://www.lifechoicepo.org). For more about Doug, see [www.cragman.com](http://www.cragman.com).



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