



Gift of Life



Mid-South Transplant Foundation, Inc.

Winter 2025

Inside This Issue

Holiday Issue!

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- 2 MSTF Celebrates BRA Day
- 3 Baptist Heart Institute Honors Milestone Anniversary
- 3 DLTN Attends COAT Conference
- 3 MSTF Hosts Speaker Training Workshop
- 3 MSTF Supports Giving
- 4 MSTF Participates in Celebration of Life
- 4 MSTF Honors Ambassadors
- 5 Order Your Donate Life Tennessee License Plate
- 5 Artist Promotes Donation
- 6 DLA Launches Two-Year Pilot Program
- 6 MSTF Ambassador Featured on WLOK Morning Show

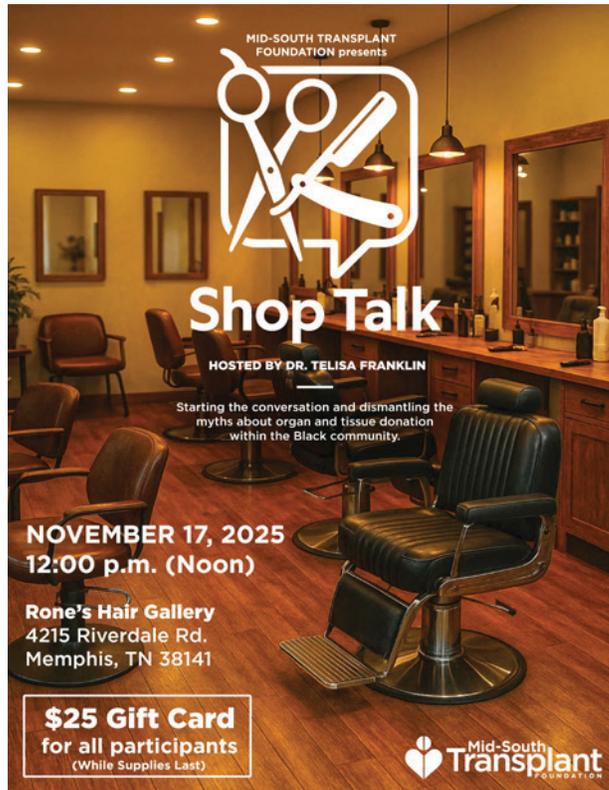
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Dismantling Donation Myths with 'Shop Talk'



Mid-South Transplant Foundation (MSTF) and Dr. Telisa Franklin, MSTF Multicultural Relations Coordinator, introduced "Shop Talk" in November. The "Shop Talk" campaign is designed to eradicate the myths and misunderstandings surrounding organ and tissue donation in the African American community through engaging conversations. The setting for these conversations? Barber shops and beauty salons.

"In our beauty and barber shops across the African American community, we often find ourselves exchanging some of the best local insights," Franklin said, explaining why barber shops and beauty salons were selected for "Shop Talk." "These conversations will continue throughout the Mid-South as long as there's a need to drive awareness about the significance of organ and tissue donation."

Inaugural "Shop Talk" conversations were graciously hosted by Rone's Hair Gallery at 4215 Riverdale Road in Memphis. The public was invited to attend. Franklin's first "Shop

Talk" conversations were with three African American women from the Mid-South community with ties to donation and/or kidney health: Dr. NaShawnda Ballard Thomas with the River City (TN) Chapter of The Links, Incorporated; Zola Burgess, Community Outreach Coordinator and Family Care Advocate with MSTF; and Benjanette Matthews, MSTF Ambassador and kidney recipient.

Ballard Thomas discussed The Links' Black K.A.R.E. initiative. K.A.R.E is Kidney Awareness, Resources and Education. It addresses kidney disease in Black communities. To see the "Shop Talk" conversation with Franklin and Ballard Thomas, visit <https://youtu.be/395MtWTV5Ak>.

Burgess addressed the role of MSTF in the hospitals working with donor hero families. To see her conversation with Franklin, go to <https://youtu.be/5CPfIVjn0Dg>.

Matthews shared her journey as a kidney recipient. Her life changed through the gift of donation in 2018. Visit <https://youtu.be/hTVsdl0aTj0> to see her conversation with Franklin.

The sister and cousin of Rone's Hair Gallery owner, Eddie Rone, were scheduled to be guests at the "Shop Talk" launch. Both were on dialysis and waiting for a kidney, but then something incredible happened. Shortly before the "Shop Talk" launch date, both received a new kidney. They were not yet recovered enough to be part of "Shop Talk" in November, but their lives, like that of Matthews, had changed because someone said **yes** to donation.

"The power of **yes** is a blessing," Franklin said. "The best **yes** I could ever give was the **yes** I gave to God, but I also gave a **yes** to donation. Why? Four of my family members are living today – they are blessed – because someone said **yes** to donation. Mr. Rone's family is blessed because someone said **yes**."

(continued on pg. 2)



'Shop Talk'

(cont'd from pg. 2)

"Shop Talk" will be a regular MSTF program. If you know shop owners who might be interested in hosting a "Shop Talk" segment or providing their clients with information about organ and tissue donation, reach out to Franklin at tfranklin@midsouthdonor.org.

"Donation impacts everyone, including people who look like me and people who look like you," Franklin said. "We're going to talk about that."



Conversations are available on YouTube.

MSTF Celebrates BRA Day



MSTF hosted its second annual Breast Reconstruction Awareness (BRA) Day on Oct. 24. BRA Day is designed to promote public education, patient care and research. It was first launched in 2011 and is now observed every October.

"BRA Day is a beautiful opportunity not only to support breast reconstruction awareness, but also to honor Breast Cancer Awareness Month and highlight the importance of tissue donation," said Mary Beck, MSTF Community Relations Coordinator and event organizer. "We want everyone to understand the value of tissue donation. One tissue donor can impact the lives of 75 or more individuals, and donated tissue can play a vital role in breast reconstruction surgery following a mastectomy."

MSTF's BRA Day featured a bra decorating contest, tissue trivia and food from The Green Beetle and Mempoops. The American Cancer Society's Pink Chair was also part of the event.

Baptist Women's Health Center and West Cancer Foundation set up information tables at BRA Day. West Fraser facilitated its own event alongside MSTF's BRA Day. It hosted the Baptist Women's Health Center's mobile mammography unit. BRA Day was held at the Germantown Park office complex in Cordova, TN. The MSTF office is located within the complex.

First-, second- and third-place bra decorating contest winners, in order, are Emma Smith, Donation Support Coordinator; Wanda Peperone, Director of Clinical Operations, and Tina Ray, Supervisor of the Perfusion Lab (collaborative entry); and Mia TenEyck, Office Assistant.



Members from the River City (TN) Chapter of The Links, Incorporated, presented Franklin with a \$250 check for MSTF in honor of National Donor Sabbath. Also pictured is Rone's Hair Gallery owner and Memphis Fire Services Division Chief Eddie Rone.



Franklin's "Shop Talk" is aimed at addressing misinformation about organ and tissue donation.





Baptist Heart Institute Honors Milestone Anniversary

On Oct. 31, the Baptist Heart Institute celebrated the 40th anniversary of the first adult heart transplant performed in the Mid-South.



The anniversary program, a luncheon, honored heart transplant recipients and advanced heart failure patients who are on the transplant waiting list. The event also marked the 30th anniversary of Baptist offering ventricular assist devices (VADs).

MSTF Executive Director Kim Van Frank spoke at the luncheon. "It was a privilege to have been part of the event," Van Frank said. "Baptist Heart Institute has performed nearly 500 heart transplants since its beginning in 1985. We are fortunate to have the Baptist Heart Institute in Memphis, and we congratulate Baptist on its milestone anniversaries and its lifesaving achievements."

The luncheon was held at the FedEx Event Center in Shelby Farms Park in Memphis.

DLTN Attends COAT Conference

Donate Life Tennessee (DLTN), a collaboration of MSTF and Tennessee Donor Services (TDS), participated in the 57th Annual County Officials Association of Tennessee (COAT) Conference in Dollywood/Pigeon Forge, TN, in November. The COAT organization includes county clerks, registers of deeds, state court clerks and trustees.

The conference gives DLTN an opportunity each year to thank county clerks for all they do to support donation. It also allows DLTN to update county clerks on DLTN initiatives and donation statistics.



Left to right, front row: Melody Ramsey (MSTF), Zola Burgess (MSTF) and Sharon Pakis, Executive Director of the Tennessee County Clerks Organ Donation Awareness Foundation. Back row: Nick Shepherd (TDS), Emily McKinley (TDS) and Marcheta Darnell, DLTN's connect-to-purpose speaker at the event. Darnell shared the story of her son, Sam, a donor hero who saved four lives in 2024.



MSTF Hosts Speaker Training Workshop

Sharing personal stories – giving a face to donation statistics – is one of the most important things MSTF Ambassadors do, but it is not always easy. On Nov. 1, Kevin Shaw, Manager of Family Care - Tissue, facilitated an Ambassador speaker training workshop. In addition to his role at MSTF, Shaw has worked in media, on the stage and in the classroom. He used these experiences to help Ambassadors hone their storytelling skills. More workshops are planned for 2026.

Left to right in the photo above: Angela Gordon, Anissa Swanigan, Liam Haggerty, Kiauna Thompson, Gay Hannah, Latrice McClinton, Ellen Momon, Thomas Garrison, Roenni "Rockie" Smith and Kevin Shaw.

MSTF Supports Giving



Left to right: Melody Ramsey, Marty Jackson, Randa Lipman, Telisa Franklin, Ephie Johnson, President & CEO of the Neighborhood Christian Centers, Inc., Zola Burgess and Mary Beck. Johnson participated in MSTF's "Yes You Should" campaign earlier this year.

MSTF staff delivered non-perishable food items and a \$1,000 check to the Neighborhood Christian Centers' Jackson Avenue location in Memphis on Nov. 24. The donated food will be part of the organization's ongoing food pantry program.

"We are so grateful to have wonderful community partners like the Neighborhood Christian Centers organization," said MSTF Executive Director Kim Van Frank. "We feel it is important to also be a good community partner. I'm happy we had the opportunity to give back."



MSTF Participates in Celebration of Life

Family and friends of donor hero Ashlyn Perritt celebrated her life on Oct. 19, the 10th anniversary of her death. MSTF had the privilege of participating in the event with a registration and information table.

The celebration was held at the Owners Box Sports Grill in Lakeland, TN. The restaurant donated 10% of the day's proceeds to MSTF in honor of Perritt.

Perritt's legacy lives on in those who knew and loved her, as well as in those impacted by her generosity as a donor.



MSTF Honors Ambassadors

Ambassadors play a critical role at MSTF. They share personal stories, manage information/registration tables, encourage donation and educate the public about the impact of donation. They are the face of MSTF in the communities served by the organization. Every year MSTF recognizes individual Ambassadors who go above and beyond in their efforts to support donation.

The prestigious **Dr. Louis G. Britt Award**, named in honor of MSTF's founder, was created in 2023 to recognize the Ambassador who best demonstrates exceptional service and dedication to MSTF and the community. The winner of the 2025 Dr. Louis G. Britt Award is Shirley Branch. Branch is a donor family member, and her cousin, fellow Ambassador Vera Milam Johnson, is a heart recipient.

The **Ambassador of the Year Award (AOTY)** is based largely, though not solely, on volunteer hours. The AOTY winner must exemplify commitment to the donation community. The 2025 AOTY honoree is Shemeka Malone. Malone, like Branch, is a donor family member.

Three Ambassadors received the **Blue & Green Day Mid-South Hero Award** for their efforts to make 2025's Blue & Green Day Mid-South celebration extraordinary. They are Richard Edmondson, Mimi Smith and Sara Beth Silverman.

Edmondson is a powerhouse at registering participants and made sure his Covington, TN, community was well represented for Blue & Green Day Mid-South. Smith worked to turn the Batesville, MS, community blue and green. She also hosted a Blue & Green Day Mid-South event in the Batesville town square. The event featured several speakers and an information/registration table. Silverman organized her East Memphis neighborhood for Blue & Green Day. About 20 of her neighbors displayed Blue & Green Day Mid-South yard signs.

Seven Ambassadors received the **Ambassador Star Award** for their commitment to volunteering. These Ambassadors step up to volunteer repeatedly whenever volunteer assistance is needed. They are Marian Bacon, Shirley Branch, Calvin Burrows, Angela



Left to right: Shemeka Malone is the 2025 Ambassador of the Year. Sara Beth Silverman is one of three Blue & Green Day Mid-South Hero winners. Shirley Branch is the recipient of the 2025 Dr. Louis G. Britt Award. The other winners of the Blue & Green Day Mid-South Hero Award, Richard Edmondson and Mimi Smith, were not able to attend the awards ceremony.

Gordon, Liam Haggerty, Shemeka Malone and Sara Beth Silverman.

Seven Ambassadors received the **Ambassador Service Award** for contributing 50 or more volunteer hours in 2025. They are Shirley Branch, Richard Edmondson, Liam Haggerty, Shemeka Malone, Vera Milam Johnson, Sara Beth Silverman and Mimi Smith.

The Ambassadors who work to build relationships with driver's
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MSTF Honors Ambassadors (cont'd from pg. 4)

licensing partners and, in Tennessee, with county clerk offices, play a vital role in donor registration. More than 90% of individuals who register as donors do so when they get or renew their driver's license. These Ambassadors, called Rounders, are Richard Edmondson, Betty Harris, Shemeka Malone, Vera Milam Johnson, Sara Beth Silverman and Mimi Smith.

It is important to educate teen and adult drivers about donation. When they get or renew their driver's license or



Star Award: Seven Ambassadors earned the Ambassador Star Award in 2025. Left to right: Shirley Branch, Shemeka Malone, Marian Bacon, Sara Beth Silverman and Angela Gordon. Not pictured are Calvin Burrows and Liam Haggerty.



Service Award: Seven individuals received the Ambassador Service Award in 2025. Left to right: Shirley Branch, Shemeka Malone, Liam Haggerty, Sara Beth Silverman and Vera Milam Johnson. Not pictured are Richard Edmondson and Mimi Smith.

receive their driving permit, they will be asked if they wish to save lives as a registered donor. Four Ambassadors have taken on the role of educator for driving school students. They are Henry Greinke, Betty Harris, Sara Beth Silverman and Betty Gay Williams.

MSTF thanks not only these Ambassadors but all MSTF Ambassadors for their significant contributions. "Our Ambassadors," said MSTF Executive Director Kim Van Frank, "are incredible individuals who make a difference in our community. They generously give their time and their hearts to this cause. We are truly grateful."

Order Your Donate Life Tennessee License Plate



Show your support for donation. Donate Life Tennessee (DLTN) needs your help to make the license plate a reality. Once 1,000 plates have been presold, they will go into production and be delivered to your Tennessee county clerk's office.

Order your license plate today at <http://go.dcids.org/DonateLifeTNLicensePlate>.

The specialty plate fee is approximately \$35 per year, in addition to the typical registration fees. A portion of the plate fee will be donated back to DLTN.

Artist Promotes Donation

Ladia Yates has appeared on stage with artists such as Usher and Missy Elliot. She is the founder of L.Y.E Academy, a choreographer, a dancer, a mentor and now an author. Yates recently hosted a multiday book signing for her new project, "The Rise of Ladia Yates: Dancer. Dreamer. CEO." She does it all. She also supports donation.

Yates appeared in MSTF's "Yes You Should" campaign earlier in the year and asked MSTF to be part of her book signing in October.

Digital Communications Coordinator ARTavius Veasey, pictured with Yates (first photo at right), and Community Relations Coordinator Mary Beck, pictured with Shelby County, Tennessee, mayoral candidate JB Smiley, Jr., represented MSTF at the book signing.





DLA Lunches Two-Year Pilot Program to Support Living Kidney Donation

Donate Life America (DLA) has launched a two-year national pilot program – Donate Life Living Donor Pathway – to help reduce barriers and save more lives through living kidney donation. The pilot is in partnership with the National Kidney Registry (NKR).

The Donate Life Living Donor Pathway program gives people aged 18-80 who register their decision to be a deceased donor through DLA's National Donate Life Registry the opportunity to also register as a potential living kidney donor. Living donation, in addition to saving lives, helps to reduce waiting times and improve outcomes for transplant recipients.

If you are on a state registry, you can also join the DLA Registry at <https://RegisterMe.org> and elect to register as a potential living kidney donor.

For more information, visit <https://donatelifenet/news/donate-life-america-launches-two-year-national-pilot-to-support-living-kidney-donation/>.

Spotlight

Emma Smith, Donation Support Coordinator – Tissue, and Tina Hill, Family Donation Coordinator – Organ, have received MSTF Hope and Life Recognition Awards for their exceptional work with donor families during the third quarter of 2025.



Emma Smith



Tina Hill

MSTF Ambassador Featured on WLOK Morning Show



Ambassador Latrice McClinton (at right in the photo), a double-lung recipient, and MSTF Volunteer and Community Outreach Coordinator Melody Ramsey were guests on WLOK Radio's "Let's Talk About It" program on Oct. 14. The morning show featured host Kevin Brooks. McClinton shared her journey as a recipient. She received her transplant in 2022.