

Rain, baseball & second chances: Living donors honored as heroes

The rain arrived at UWM Field, formerly Jimmy John's Field, on Friday, June 5, but it never stood a chance against the warmth already filling the ballpark.

On a night when the Birmingham Bloomfield Beavers faced the Utica Unicorns, the real stars were not in the box score. They were the living organ donors who walked onto the field — some beside the people they saved, some beside family members and some still not knowing the recipients whose lives were changed by their generosity.

The fifth annual Living Donor Awareness Night, presented in partnership with the Living Liver Foundation and Henry Ford Health, turned a summer baseball game into a celebration of courage, medical teamwork and second chances.

The mission of the Living Donor Awareness Games is to “honor, educate and inspire.” On this night, all three were on full display.

“Living donation can feel like a medical topic until you see the people,” said Lynn Galbenski, co-founder of the Living Liver Foundation. “At this game, families saw sons, cousins, strangers, nurses and recipients standing together. You could feel the message in the ballpark: Living donors give someone



COURTESY PHOTOS

People involved in throwing out opening pitches included, from left, Arnie Rodriguez, Jason Rodriguez, Living Liver Foundation co-founder Dave Galbenski, Shannon Venohr and Brian Hassenflug.

else a second chance at life.”

The evening opened with two ceremonial first-pitch moments that told the story better than any statistic.

Jason Rodriguez, who donated a portion of his liver to his father, Arnie Rodriguez, at Henry Ford Health on May 15, 2023, threw one of the final opening pitches to his dad. Shannon Venohr, who donated a kidney to her cousin, Brian Hassenflug, at Henry Ford Health on Oct. 29, 2025, threw another pitch to Brian.

In the few steps between mound and

plate, each pair showed what living donation means inside a family: sacrifice, love, fear, courage and gratitude — all wrapped into one throw of a baseball.

Henry Ford Health's transplant nursing professionals also were honored before the game. The group included nurse practitioners, pre- and post-transplant nurse coordinators and medical assistants whose daily work helps guide patients and families through some of the most important moments of their lives.

“The partnership with Henry Ford Health

means so much because their transplant team makes these miracles possible every day,” Galbenski said. “Together, we are able to bring the human side of transplantation into the community and show people that living donation is possible, powerful and deeply hopeful.”

The night's most rare honorees were three double living donors: Dr. Carl Boehlert, Judith Phillips and Phil Consiglio. A double living donor is someone who donates one kidney and, at a later date, donates a portion of their liver. Event organizers noted that only 100 people in the United States are believed to have done this.

Boehlert, a materials science and engineering professor at Michigan State University, began considering donation after seeing the impact of kidney donation in his own family. He donated a kidney at Henry Ford Health in December 2022, then donated part of his liver in August 2025. Both donations were anonymous, though he hopes to meet his recipients one day.

Phillips' story began with heartbreak. Her sister was hit by a drunken driver and suffered burns



Altruistic living liver donor Anthony Kiczenski hugs liver recipient Lori Parilo.

over most of her body. During that painful chapter, Phillips saw the importance of organ and tissue donation when her sister received skin grafts from deceased donors. Her sister ultimately died from her injuries, but Phillips carried forward the lesson. Years later, she became a living kidney donor at University of Wisconsin Health in 2021, then donated part of her liver in 2023.

Consiglio, a pediatric surgical nurse at University of Michigan's C.S. Mott Children's Hospital, first promised to donate a kidney to a patient he had cared for during COVID. That patient died before a transplant could take place, but Consiglio did not forget the promise. In 2022, he donated a kidney anonymously. After working with pediatric transplant patients, he later donated part of his liver to Quinnlyn Smith, who was 2 years old at the time. Smith and her family joined him at the ballpark.

Then came a moment that hushed the crowd in a different way.

At the end of the third inning, Lori Parilo stood near third base. Anthony Kiczenski stood near

first. Earlier this year, on March 11, Parilo received a living donor liver transplant at Henry Ford Hospital. She did not know her donor. Kiczenski had donated a portion of his liver to a complete stranger.

On this night, the stranger had a name.

Kiczenski, a father of three, grandfather of two and entrepreneur, walked toward Parilo as the crowd looked on. Their first meeting unfolded on the field with a light mist coming down, foreshadowing the tears that accompanied the embrace — part introduction, part reunion, part living testimony to what one person can do for another.

There are moments in sports when the scoreboard stops mattering. This was one of them.

The celebration continued at the end of the fourth inning, when more than 50 living donors were invited onto the field with a recipient or guest. They represented five transplant centers: Henry Ford Health, Michigan Medicine, Trinity Health, Corewell Health and University of Wisconsin Health.

See DONORS, page 4B



More than 50 living donors were honored at UWM Field.



Double donors, from left, Phil Consiglio, Dr. Carl Boehlert and Judith Phillips.

Faith in Film series continues

The Rev. Dr. Jennifer Rike will continue her Faith in Film series at 10 a.m. Saturday, July 11, in the heritage room at Grosse Pointe Woods Presbyterian Church, 19950 Mack, Grosse Pointe Woods. Coffee and bagels will be served.

The film is “Man on Fire,” starring Denzel Washington.

Through the Faith in Film series, guests watch films that seem to simply tell a story about modern life, but often have subplots and Bible references underpinning the storytelling — the presence of which viewers often are completely unaware.

Rike taught a course on this topic at the University of Detroit Mercy and has deep insight into this area of study.

Attending Faith in Film mornings is a creative and new way of considering the influence of faith in today's culture and society, as well as a neat way to enjoy fellowship with the community.

Those who would like to watch the film at home, then join the after-watch discussion should plan to arrive around 12:30 p.m. All are invited.

CAMP:

Continued from page 1B

thing you can do on your lunch.”

Donations should be dropped off to First English by July 12.

Beyond food and water donations, the group is seeking tools and equipment that will make the work easier.

“Because there's so much drywall and painting work, ladder reach is important,” Motley said.

“Any business who can say, ‘We could loan you a 30-foot ladder,’ it will be labeled, returned, locked up when it's not in use. Ladders are tough to come by. If you're a business and you can spare a ladder for a week, we'd be happy to receive those.”

Group Mission Trips anticipated 120 ladders will be needed to handle the scope of work.

“Campers bring their own tools and some ladders, but to transport

everything across the country from Kansas, it's hard to bring ladders,” Motley said.

Other business support also is welcome.

“Any business that can offer discounts for meals or for cookies,” Motley said. “There are lots of options. Anybody who wants to support, there's room for that.”

Businesses interested in partnering, sponsoring or donating goods should call (313) 884-5040 or visit feelc.org.

Worship Service

Christ the King Lutheran Church and Preschool
Mack at Lochmoor • 884-5090
www.christthekinggp.org

SUNDAY
8:30 a.m. - Bible Study
9:30 a.m. - Worship Service
Sunday School - During Service

WEDNESDAY
10 a.m. - Bible Study
6:30 p.m. - Worship Service

Solomon Spangler, Pastor
Making New Disciples - Building Stronger Ones