

SEMO man becomes nation's oldest organ donor

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By SAMANTHA TUCKER Assistant Editor



Saint Francis Medical Center and Mid-America Transplant personnel load Orville Duane Allen onto a plane bound for St. Louis. The 98-year-old veteran and former teacher passed away May 29 but continued his legacy of generosity by becoming the oldest organ donor in U.S. history.

Photo provided

Orville Duane Allen died May 29, 2024. By all accounts, he lived a long and meaningful life dedicated to family, community and country, but death was not the end of his story. At age 98, Allen is currently the oldest organ donor in recorded United States history.

“I was hoping he’d live to 100. This may be the way he does that,” said his son, Kevin Allen.

Allen fell outside his Neelyville home last Wednesday and struck his head while cleaning up his property after Memorial Day’s severe weather. He was rushed to Saint Francis Medical Center in Cape Girardeau, where his family learned two things: their patriarch was already gone, but he could perform one last act of service. Despite his age, Duane Allen’s excellent health meant he was likely eligible to be an organ donor.



Allen embraces one of his grandsons. His decision to become an organ donor has saved the life of a stranger and is helping his family come to terms with their loss.

Photo provided

Still on life support, his body was flown to St. Louis, where tests confirmed he was an eligible donor. His liver was successfully transplanted into a 72-year-old woman on Friday, according to a press release from Mid-America Transplant, saving her life and cementing his place in donor history.

“We’re really proud of the legacy he left behind,” said daughter Linda Mitchell.

Her husband Randy Mitchell said Mid-America Transplant told them right away her father was a special case. He was older than the oldest Midwest donor on record, and as it turned out, he also beat the previous national record of 95 years old.

Kevin Lee, president and CEO at Mid-America Transplant, said Allen was “truly a hero.”

“We hope his final act of kindness as a donor hero inspires others, regardless of age, to say yes to lifesaving organ and tissue donation,” he said in a statement.

Kevin Allen agreed and urged people to check the donor status on their driver’s license.

“Turn your driver’s license over and take a look at it,” he said.

“I’m 73... I’m an organ donor on my driver’s license, but I was thinking at some point, it won’t matter because all this stuff’s pretty well used up,” Randy Mitchell added. “And I think it tells people that there could be an option for somebody who’s older.”

Allen’s donation has also helped his family find peace amidst their sudden loss. His daughter thanked Mid-America Transplant and Saint Francis Medical Center “for

the opportunity to continue his impact through organ donation — a decision I know he would have made without hesitation.”

The elder Allen was someone who had already left his mark, both in the military where he served in two wars, and in his community, where he touched lives as an educator and proponent of preserving history.

Allen was a veteran of WWII and the Korean War. He retired as a lieutenant colonel and lived in Poplar Bluff, teaching vocational ag classes at Neelyville High School for decades. He also co-founded the Neelyville Historical Society.

Allen also traveled internationally with his late wife Geraldine.

Before the transplant, Randy Mitchelle told his sons their grandfather’s generosity would continue beyond his life.

“They thought it was just a perfect way for somebody who’s generous, always giving, to keep giving,” he recalled.

His family said he was in excellent health and took good care of his body, living independently after his wife’s passing and staying active in the lives of his children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

Anyone regardless of age or medical history can register to be an organ and tissue donor. More information is available at midamericatransplant.org

A complete obituary for Allen appeared in the Daily American Republic’s Friday and Saturday editions.