

**THE WEATHER TODAY, C2**

8 a.m. 68°  
Noon 78°  
4 p.m. 81°  
8 p.m. 72°

**Buffalo Football Returns to Gridiron**  
Spring season opens with rising seniors hoping to impart their knowledge. Sports, B1

**WORLD NEWS**

**FORMER PRESIDENT BUSH HOSPITALIZED WITH INFECTION**

George H.W. Bush has been hospitalized in Houston with an infection, just after attending the funeral of his wife, Barbara, a spokesman said Monday. Jim McGrath said on Twitter that the 93-year-old Bush is “responding to treatments and appears to be recovering.” **National News, A7**



David J. Phillip | The Associated Press  
Former presidents George W. Bush, left, and George H.W. Bush arrive at St. Martin's Episcopal Church for a funeral service for Barbara Bush in Houston.

**Top of the News**

INSIDE THE ISSUES SHAPING OUR COMMUNITY

**Organ Donation Offers Chance to Save a Life**



Cindy Skop | Daily Sun  
Paula Schwab and Becky Kunkel, both from Stonecrest, had lung replacements one month apart in 2014. Their husbands met while staying in family housing at the hospital and, because of the men's friendship, the women also remained close. Now, due to side effects from anti-rejection drugs, they are both on the waiting list for kidneys.

**As thousands of Americans still wait for an organ donation, area residents share the stories of how that gift changed their lives.**

By **CIARA VARONE**  
Daily Sun Staff Writer

Paula Schwab and Becky Kunkel have a lot in common. They spend winter months in Stonecrest, traveling to Atlantic City for gambling getaways. Before receiving double-lung transplants, each woman dragged oxygen tanks beside them into the casinos. Now, four years later, side effects from the lifesaving surgeries have landed both back on an organ

transplant waiting list. They are among more than 114,000 Americans who need an organ. More people than ever before donate after death, with deceased organ donors in the U.S. exceeding 10,000 for the first time in 2017, according to the United Network for Organ Sharing. It is not enough to meet a growing need. More than 65 percent of the waitlisted are ages 50 and older, so the deficit will rise as baby boomers age. Along with ensuring every person, regardless of age, registers to be a donor, UNOS spokeswoman Anne Paschke said recruiting more living donors is critical. “Only about 2 percent of us die in a way that makes it possible for organ donation,” she said.



**APRIL IS NATIONAL DONATE LIFE MONTH**  
To sign up online for Florida's organ donor registry, or to update an existing profile, visit [donatelife.florida.org/register](http://donatelife.florida.org/register). Call 941-308-1019 for information.

“Deceased donation is never going to get everybody transplanted.” Of those who are waiting, more than 82 percent need a kidney, and could be helped by a living donor. Knowing the critical need organ transplantation fulfills, local donors and recipients shared how donations have changed — and even saved — their lives.

**Dorothy Clarke**  
Village Rio Grande

Clarke's kidney troubles began at birth. Her ureters — the tubes that carry urine from the kidneys to the bladder — were twisted.

Please See **DONATE, A14**

**9 DEAD AFTER VAN CHARGES SIDEWALK IN TORONTO**

A van jumped onto a crowded Toronto sidewalk Monday, killing nine people and injuring 16 before the driver fled and was quickly arrested, authorities said. **World News, A6**

**THAT'S AMAZING**

**ELDERLY MAN CALLS POLICE TO VISIT WIFE IN HOSPITAL**

An elderly Pennsylvania man had no way of visiting his ill wife in the hospital, so he called police to help. Montoursville Police Chief Jeff Gyurina says the 84-year-old man's wife had a medical emergency Thursday and left their home in an ambulance. The frail man told Gyurina, who was at the scene, he had no family in the area to take him to the hospital, and he can't drive anymore. Gyurina gave him the patrol car's cell number and told him to call when he was ready to go. — *The Associated Press*

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**COMMUNITY & CONNECTIONS**

**Only in The Villages**

LIFE IN FLORIDA'S FRIENDLIEST HOMETOWN

**Century Plants Begin To Bloom Despite Inaccurate Name**

By **FRANK ROSS**  
Daily Sun Staff Writer

It's springtime and plants are blooming around The Villages, but one species in particular is causing a lot of excitement: the century plant. The Daily Sun has received several calls in the past few weeks from enthusiastic residents reporting rare blooms they believe happen only once every century. Their excitement is a product of the plant's name, or more accurately, its misnomer. The origin of the century plant's name is a mystery, but according to master gardener Katherine McGowen, of the Village of La Belle, the name and the myth

Please See **CENTURY PLANT, A13**



Max Gersh | Daily Sun  
Carl Calliari, of the Village of Winifred, has two blooming century plants on his property.

**THE DIGIT**

**4** years

The Villages High School softball team will clinch its first regional post-season berth in four years with a victory tonight in the Class 5A-District 6 tournament semifinals at Umatilla High School. Both teams that play in the district final automatically advance to the postseason. VHS last made a playoff appearance in 2014. — *Tyler Breaman, Daily Sun*

**TONIGHT'S EVENTS ON THE SQUARES**

- Entertainment runs from 5 to 9 p.m.*
- Spanish Springs Town Square**  
Cali McCord  
Happy hour, 5-7 p.m.
- Lake Sumter Landing Market Square**  
Rocky & the Rollers  
Happy hour, 5-6 p.m.
- Brownwood Paddock Square**  
American Martian  
Happy hour, 5-6 p.m.



from the front page

DONATE

Continued from A1

At 11 years old, Clarke underwent surgery to fix that problem, but her kidneys already had been damaged beyond repair.

As a young adult, she started dialysis, waiting for the kidney that would change her life.

Clarke's older brother, Robert Shelley, a perfect match, decided to donate his.

"If not, I would have waited years," Clarke said.

Twenty-seven-year-old Shelley saw dialysis take its toll on others as he worked repairing medical equipment.

Knowing 21-year-old Clarke was tethered indefinitely to a machine made donation an easy decision, he said.

"When it's your sister, you want to do anything you can to get her well," said Shelley, of Williston Park, New York.

As the donor, Shelley said he experienced no side effects post-op.

"As a donor, there are no ill effects to you," he said. "If more people knew this, maybe more people would donate."

For Clarke, the surgery transformed her life, making her dream to travel the world a possibility.

It pains her to think about the 95,000 Americans waiting for a kidney today.

"They've come a long way, but it's the supply and demand that's holding people back," Clarke said.

John Waltenberger

Village of Mallory Square

John and Kathie Waltenberger have shared many gifts in their nearly 50 years of marriage.

One of Kathie's proves difficult to top.

"I've been living on her kidney for 18 years," John said.

Before the transplant, John said he lived a relatively normal life and continued to work as a teacher without any kidneys.

But for four to five hours three days a week, he was tethered to a dialysis machine in order to survive.

Kathie decided to donate because at the time, the couple's



Cindy Skop | Daily Sun

Of all the things Kathie and John Waltenberger have shared in 50 years of marriage, one of the most life-changing has to be the kidney Kathie donated to John in 2000. Both are now healthy and spend much time on the golf course, pickleball court and traveling.

children were single.

If anything happened, Kathie wanted to be there for them. But John could not travel.

Since the transplant, the Village of Mallory Square couple has been free to go anywhere, whether spending the summer with grandchildren in Wisconsin or challenging each other to a game of pickleball on the courts at Odell Recreation Center.

"She's been wonderful," John said. "I'm very grateful."

Kathie never regretted her choice to free her husband from dialysis.

"I'm glad I did it," she said. "We've had a really good life. I hope it lasts a little longer."

Beatrice Harris

Village of Springdale

A chronic kidney disease put Beatrice Harris on dialysis for nine hours every day.

Monthly supplies filled an entire room of her house in Imperial, Pennsylvania, where she decided to undergo the treatments as she slept.

Then a potential donor approached her — Harris'

daughter, Belinda Taylor. Harris was not pleased by the offer made by her daughter, a mother with two small children of her own, to undergo surgery on her behalf.

"I begged her not to do it," she said, but Taylor insisted. On May 29, 2013, Harris received her daughter's kidney.

Though the transplant improved her life, she is scared the kidney's function will continue to decline.

"My big fear is losing what my daughter gave me," Harris said.

She tries to move forward one day at a time.

"As much control as you think you have, you really don't," she said. "I learned to appreciate each day because you're just not guaranteed the next."

Chris Tomashunas

Village of Charlotte

A near stranger volunteered to go under the knife for Chris Tomashunas.

She began experiencing symptoms from a hereditary kidney disease about 30 years ago.

Tomashunas' doctor suggested she go out and find a

kidney donor.

"I laughed and said, 'Yeah, OK, I'll put an ad in the paper,'" she recalled.

While waiting in the cafeteria line at the small liberal arts college where she worked in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, Tomashunas chatted with a co-worker who ran the employee newsletter. Tomashunas explained her predicament.

The editor typed up a story and, a day after the newsletter

printed, Annalisa Crannell, a co-worker Tomashunas barely knew, said she wanted to be her donor. Four others volunteered soon after.

Since receiving Crannell's organ, Tomashunas has lived without health complications.

In exchange for the kidney, Crannell asked only for chocolates, which Tomashunas sends every year on the anniversary of their surgeries.

"Even after 16 years, it's overwhelming to think how generous people can be," Tomashunas said.

Dorothy Mills

Village of Poinciana

Don Mills gained 16 years of life thanks to a kidney donation from his wife, Dorothy.

Just as it was easy to fall in love with Don, Dorothy said, deciding to go through with the 1992 donation was simple.

"To make Don feel better, it was a no-brainer," she said. "It was easy to do because you want to see the person you love not sick."

Before the surgery, Don was on dialysis for 18 months.

June marks 10 years since Don's death, but Dorothy remains grateful for their 46 years together.

Knowing others are stuck on waiting lists hurts, she said.

"It's really heartbreaking," Dorothy said. "I feel really bad so many lives are lost."

She is glad she could be her

husband's living donor.

"And he would have done it for me if it had been reversed," Dorothy said.

Joy Kowalski

Village of Silver Lake

Joy Kowalski did not initially jump at the chance to become a donor.

Though she knew her friend needed a kidney, she did not know if she would be able to handle the experience.

"At first I wondered how anyone could do that," Kowalski said. "It was a progression to, 'Yes, I can do this.'"

Her friend, who never had asked Kowalski to consider becoming his donor, was less enthused.

He struggled to accept her gift, Kowalski said, but eventually gave in and has been in good health ever since.

Her own health never was affected.

"I felt so blessed that I was able to do it," she said.

Armand Niccolai

Village of Sunset Pointe

After six months on a waiting list for a liver, Armand Niccolai thought he was waiting at death's door.

"I was worried," he said.

Please See NEXT PAGE

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**...Consider It Done!**

Continued from Previous Page

“I never thought I’d make it, to tell you the truth.”

That wariness continued when he got the call that an organ was available.

“I didn’t expect the outcome to be as good as it was,” Niccolai said.

Seven years later, he still is standing. The deceased donor’s liver has meant everything to him.

“It meant I could keep on living and seeing my children grow up and my grandchildren grow up,” he said. “Everybody should be open to the possibility that they could be a donor.”

David Souders

Village of Buttonwood

Doctors told David Souders he was too old for a lung transplant.

Not content with her husband’s death sentence, Holly Souders contacted another hospital.

“She called and begged,” he said.

The University of Florida Shands Hospital eventually placed him on a waiting list.

Four months later, David got the call.

During a seven-hour surgery, he received a lung from a deceased donor on Aug. 29, 2016.

“It’s a tragedy somebody had to die to get the organ, but it’s an absolute blessing that something comes out of their death,” David said. “Without that gift, I wouldn’t be here.”

But his health troubles did not end with the transplant. Doctors detected cancer shortly afterward. If they had caught it before the transplant, he would have been disqualified from surgery.

David is doing well now, but said he is living with some tradeoffs.

The lifesaving surgery forever compromised his immune system, so he must wear a surgical mask whenever out in public as protection.

“Any time I feel sorry for myself, I look back and say, hey, 2017 and 2018 so far are a bonus,” David said.

As a registered donor, Holly said she hopes others can one day be helped by her organs.

“The best thing that a human being can actually do is to be an organ donor,” she said. “Two years ago, I could be a widow. Here we are enjoying life, and I’m enjoying him being in my life.”

Jerry Mirocke

Village of Briar Meadow

Jerry and Sally Mirocke both were registered to be organ

donors, but neither grasped the importance of the program until they were thrown into it.

After two months on a waiting list, Jerry received a liver from a deceased donor in 2010.

The discovery of a leaky heart valve had played in his favor.

Doctors at Emory University Hospital decided they would perform both the liver transplant and open-heart surgery to replace the valve on the same day.

They never had done this type of surgery before, Jerry said, which he thinks moved him up on the list.

Upon getting the final go-ahead, Jerry spent 12 hours in surgery.

“It wasn’t a long day for me — I was asleep,” he said. “It was a tough day for my wife and my family.”

Jerry emerged without complications. He knows only two things about his deceased donor: He once was incarcerated and he saved Jerry’s life.

Never one to advocate, Jerry said he now will talk about organ donation with anyone who will listen.

“I can’t say enough about the organ donation program, because it’s so critical,” he said.

Becky Kunkel and Paula Schwab

Stonecrest

Kunkel and Schwab did not meet until long after the surgeries that brought them together.

Increasingly finding herself unable to breathe from the effects of COPD, Kunkel carried an oxygen tank around for five years before her transplant.

“My lung doctor said, ‘You don’t have much longer.’” she recalled.

The first hospital Kunkel applied to denied her admission to their program, saying she was “socially unprepared” for a double-lung transplant.

“I still don’t know what that means,” her husband, John, said, shaking his head.

They tried again at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center. In November 2013, they put her on their list.

On New Year’s Day 2014, she was called as the backup candidate for a transplant.

“She went into surgery at 10:30 that night,” John said. “I didn’t talk to the surgeon until 10:30 the next morning — longest night of my life.”

Kunkel’s pain was far from over. She spent 100 days post-op in the intensive care unit struggling to pull through.

Before her transplant, Schwab already knew what it was like to almost die.

A bout with pneumonia left

her on life support for 10 days. Last rites were given. But somehow she came to.

Alpha-1, a genetic disorder, caused Schwab’s lungs to weaken. She had not known she was at risk, Schwab said, because her parents gave her and her siblings away when they were children.

On Feb. 6, 2014, Schwab was placed on the lung transplant list at UPMC.

Two days later, she got the call to come in, but the lungs they had hoped to transplant were tainted.

Twelve days later, she got her transplant.

“It was like someone ran you over with a truck and then turned around and backed over you again,” Schwab said.

She was released after eight days, heading back to the hospital for rehab.

As their wives strove to heal, John and Rich Schwab became friends while staying in the same house for patients’ families, and stayed in touch after both women were released.

Then, three years ago, the Kunkels invited the Schwabs to visit their Florida home.

It was the first time their wives got the chance to really talk. They hit it off right away.

In each other, the women have found someone who truly understands the most difficult

parts of their ordeals, like the necessary but daunting task of writing to the families of their donors.

“That’s the hardest thing I’ve ever had to do,” Kunkel said. “I mean how do you write to someone and thank them for giving you life, and their loved one died?”

Schwab keeps the response she received from the mother of her 26-year-old donor in her purse at all times.

“When you do get these lungs, you’re happy but you cry,” she said. “You cry a lot. When you go to bed at night, you cry.”

When you wake up in the morning, that person is always on your mind, Kunkel said.

And their gift drives you to live to the fullest, she said.

“You look at life differently now,” Schwab agreed. “You smile at people and say hi whether they say it or not, because you realize what it’s like to basically die and come back.”

It is a positivity they try to hold onto while waiting for another organ transplant.

Both need kidneys, thanks to the surgeries that saved their lives.

Following a transplant, your own body becomes your worst enemy, as it fights to remove the foreign object.

To combat this, patients

take anti-rejection medications for the rest of their lives.

“You have to trick the body,” John said.

Unfortunately, these meds can take a toll on other parts of your body, and in the cases of Kunkel and Schwab, they have chipped away at once functioning kidneys.

Each was told she would spend four to seven years on a waiting list last year.

So both women were devastated to receive calls in the last few months offering a kidney they could not get to in time because they had traveled to Florida for the winter.

“Had we known that, we never would have come down here this year,” Kunkel said. “It’s awful. That’s all we want, and we’ve been offered one and it’s not feasible.”

“It was really heartbreaking,” Schwab said. “We’re both struggling because we don’t want to go on dialysis.”

When you do not know how much longer you have — a little more than half of lung transplant recipients survive five years — you cannot put your life on hold, Kunkel said.

As the most in-demand organ, kidneys are hard to come by.

Kunkel and Schwab have been told the kidney transplants will seem like a piece of cake after their lung surgeries.

Recipients are typically out of the hospital in five to 10 days.

Kunkel described her lung transplant recovery as “pure hell.” She had to learn how to eat on her own and to walk again.

“But I didn’t give up,” she said. She is attempting to stay strong through the waiting process for a kidney.

“I try to block it out,” Kunkel said. “You try to block it out for as long as you can.”

Sitting in Kunkel’s living room, Kunkel and Schwab compared the lingering effects of the last time they went through this process, like the tray full of prescriptions they take daily.

Kunkel’s ankles are swollen because she gained 38 pounds of fluids after the lung transplant. Schwab holds her hands together to ease the shaking that has started.

They are scared to find out if dialysis is in their future, or if kidneys will become available.

With support from their husbands and each other, Kunkel assured her friend they would power through.

“We can take a lot, kid,” she said.

Ciara Varone is a staff writer with *The Villages Daily Sun*. She can be reached at 352-753-1119, ext. 5395, or ciara.varone@thevillagesmedia.com.



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