



SHARING THE

gift
gift of life

Bethany Krom
Donor. Caregiver. Champion.

Mateo Franco
New lungs. New wife. New life.



705

NATIONALLY DONATED
TRAILS 4
TRANSPLANT

Letter from Leadership

As I reflect on my first year as Executive Director of Gift of Life Transplant House, I am filled with gratitude for our incredible staff, patients, caregivers, volunteers, donors, and community supporters. It is hard to believe how quickly this first year has gone. Stepping into this role on March 31, 2025, was truly life changing and has given me the opportunity to make a meaningful difference every single day.

This year has been filled with new experiences, inspiring stories from our guests, and an overwhelming sense of connection and support from everyone involved with Gift of Life Transplant House. One thing has become very clear to me — this organization is truly a special place. It provides transplant patients and their caregivers with more than just affordable lodging; it offers comfort, hope, compassion, and a true “home away from home” during some of life’s most challenging moments.

Communication, connection, and collaboration have been major areas of focus for us this year. We want to continue sharing our mission with as many people as possible and strengthen relationships throughout our community. Every partnership, volunteer, donor, and advocate helps us continue providing exceptional care and support to the families who stay with us.

One of my favorite parts of this year has been creating meaningful experiences for our guests and caregivers through holiday activities and special events. From decorating each house with holiday lights, to taking Christmas photos families could send home to loved ones, to Halloween activities and costume contests, these moments brought so much joy to our houses. The smiles, laughter, and memories created during these events have been truly unforgettable.



We are also deeply thankful for our strong partnership with Mayo Clinic and the continued support we receive from their teams. This partnership has allowed me to present to many departments, provide tours for employees, and even observe both a kidney donor surgery and transplant recipient surgery first-hand. Witnessing the transplant journey up close gave me an even deeper appreciation for the courage and resilience of our guests and the incredible care teams that support them.

As we look ahead, I would love the opportunity to connect with more individuals, businesses, and organizations who are interested in becoming involved with Gift of Life Transplant House — whether through volunteering, donating, sponsoring, or simply helping us spread awareness of our mission.

Together, we can continue providing transplant patients and caregivers with high-quality, affordable accommodations in a compassionate, home-like environment.

Thank you for being part of our Gift of Life family.
Stephanie

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Breathing in a Brand-New Life

Mateo Franco's life has been defined by resilience. He survived leukemia at just seven years old, but 2 decades later he faced another life-threatening diagnosis that would ultimately lead him to a double lung transplant.

In April 2024, Mateo visited the emergency room after experiencing increased shortness of breath. After extensive testing, he was diagnosed with pleuroparenchymal fibroelastosis (PPFE), a rare and serious lung disease. A year later, his shortness of breath and fatigue were at an all time high, leading him to return to the hospital. With limited treatment options, a double lung transplant became his only path forward.

Mateo was airlifted to Mayo Clinic Rochester to get the care he needed. Before Mateo underwent his transplant surgery, he decided to check off a major life milestone. Mateo and his long time girlfriend, Isabella, decided they wanted to go through this as husband and wife. Thanks to the hospital chaplain and compassionate nurses, Mateo and Isabella were married in the ICU on July 26, 2025.

Mateo underwent a double lung transplant on July 31, 2025. Following his transplant, Mateo faced a challenging recovery. He had to stay in the hospital longer than expected because of some post-op complications. While Mateo was focused on his health, having his support system close by made all the difference.

"Knowing Gift of Life was there for my wife and mother was everything for us," Mateo shared. "They didn't want to leave my side for a single second, and being able to stay there was a game changer."

Mateo eventually joined his wife and mother at the Gift of Life Transplant House.

"The Gift of Life was the perfect place to stay post-transplant," he said. "You're surrounded by people who are in similar situations, so there's a sense of community and comfortability."

Today, Mateo is thriving. The contrast between life before and after transplant is something he feels every day. Once limited by his breathing, he now looks forward to experiences that once felt out of reach—hiking, exploring new restaurants, and building a life with his new wife.





Donation Funds

At Gift of Life, we understand that many donors feel a special connection to certain causes and programs. If there is a fund or initiative that is especially meaningful to you, you can choose to direct your donation toward that specific area of support. Below are the different funds and giving clubs available at Gift of Life. While designated gifts are always appreciated, general donations are equally valuable and help us meet the greatest needs of the families and guests we serve every day.

Katie Hickman Fund

The Katie Hickman Fund provides support for furnishings, equipment, and campus maintenance needs at Gift of Life. The fund was created by the Hickman family in memory of Katie, helping ensure guests and families have a welcoming, comfortable, and well-maintained place to stay during difficult times.

Welcome Home Club

The Welcome Home Club is Gift of Life's monthly giving program, allowing supporters to make an ongoing impact through recurring monthly donations. Members of the club provide dependable support that helps sustain daily operations and ensures families continue to receive compassionate care and lodging when they need it most.

Susan Powers Helping Hand Fund

The Susan Powers Helping Hand Fund assists guests who are struggling to pay for their lodging expenses while staying at Gift of Life. Established in 2003 in memory of Susan Powers, the fund helps ease financial burdens for families facing medical hardships, offering support and peace of mind during challenging circumstances.

WAYS TO GIVE

DONATE



VOLUNTEER



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TO SCAN QR CODE: Open your phone's camera app, aim the camera

2025 Impact

80.34%

Average
Occupancy

2,839

Volunteer Hours

25,016

Total Room
Nights

Over
2,000

Donors

New Staff



Glenna Kalahar
Front Desk Receptionist



Martina Simon
Housekeeper

Donate Life Month

April was a meaningful and impactful month as we recognized Donate Life Month, honoring organ donors and raising awareness about the life-saving power of organ donation. This year's theme, "Leave a Legacy," was beautifully reflected in moments of remembrance, storytelling, and community connection.

On April 10, we gathered for a Day of Remembrance hosted at Mayo Clinic. Transplant physicians shared their expertise, while organ donor families and transplant recipients offered heartfelt stories that highlighted both loss and hope. Together, we raised the Donate Life flag as a symbol of unity and gratitude. Attendees were also invited to write messages on commemorative rocks—each one representing a life, a legacy, and a story. These rocks will soon surround a tree to be planted at the pediatric transplant house, creating a lasting tribute rooted in love and remembrance.

Later in the month, we were grateful to be part of the Timmay 5K, hosted by the Tim Rasmussen Foundation. It was a beautiful day filled with community spirit as we honored Tim's legacy, raised awareness for organ donation, and supported families staying at Gift of Life Transplant House.

Throughout the month, we were reminded that organ donation is not only a gift—it is a lasting legacy that continues to grow and give life to others.



Nashville Night for Gift of Life

Gift of Life Transplant House hosted its inaugural Nashville Night for Gift of Life on February 27, 2026, marking a memorable new tradition for the Rochester community. The event welcomed nearly 300 attendees for an evening filled with music, entertainment, and community, all in support of Gift of Life.

The first-time fundraiser was a resounding success, bringing together supporters, patients, families, and community members for a shared night of celebration and giving. The strong turnout and enthusiastic response highlighted both the need for and the impact of Gift of Life Transplant House's services for transplant patients and their caregivers.

Following the success of its debut, Nashville Night for Gift of Life will now become an annual event. Each year, it will continue to bring a lively Nashville-inspired experience to Rochester while raising vital support for Gift of Life Transplant House and the families it serves.

Thank you to our sponsors



Putting for a Purpose

On May 9, 2026, Gift of Life Transplant House hosted another inaugural fundraising event, "Putting for a Purpose," bringing a new and family-friendly tradition to the Rochester community.

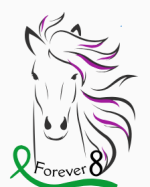
Designed with inclusivity and fun in mind, the event reflected Gift of Life's continued commitment to supporting transplant patients of all ages. With the addition of the Pediatric Transplant House last summer, it was especially meaningful to create an event where children and families could participate together in a relaxed, engaging environment.

Attendees enjoyed a wide variety of activities throughout the day, including mini golf, a visit from Sustainable Safari, and classic carnival games. One of the highlights of the event was a unique animal encounter provided by Sustainable Safari, where guests had the opportunity to meet and pet a kangaroo, creating memorable experiences for both children and adults.

Thank you to our sponsors

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Climbing Higher After Organ Donation

Many people assume that living organ donation leads to a slower, more limited life. Bethany Krom is living proof that this is far from the truth.

Bethany's transplant journey began in 2020. While scrolling through Facebook, she came across a post from a former coworker sharing that her husband, John, needed a kidney transplant. Without hesitation, Bethany volunteered to be tested as a potential donor. At one of her first appointments, she unexpectedly ran into John himself, a chance encounter that became one of many meaningful moments along the way.

Although Bethany and John were not a direct match due to a size mismatch, their story did not end there. Instead, they became part of a four-person kidney exchange. Bethany donated her kidney to a man in New York City, and in turn, John received a life-saving transplant from another donor.



Bethany's recovery went smoothly. An active person by nature, she was supported closely by her husband, Robin Krom, who helped her through the healing process.

After donating her kidney in the fall of 2021, Bethany has continued to live an active and inspiring life. In November 2024, Bethany took her passion even further by joining Team MN-DAK at the Transplant Games of America. The event, held every two years, brings together organ, eye, and tissue recipients, living donors, donor families, patients waiting for transplant, and professionals from the transplant world. Bethany not only volunteered but also competed, earning first place in the one-mile run and third place in the 500-meter freestyle. Today, she continues to dedicate her time to the Games, becoming a co-manager and helping raise awareness and build community.

Shortly after returning home from the 2024 Games, Bethany and Robin faced an unexpect-

ed challenge. After Robin experienced chest pains, the couple went to the hospital and received difficult news. He was diagnosed with High Risk Multiple Myeloma and would require an autologous stem cell transplant. During this time, they moved into the Gift of Life Transplant House, finding support during an uncertain period. Bethany now became the caregiver, supporting Robin through his treatments. She was able to find a community at Gift of Life.

Even in the face of hardship, Bethany has continued to push forward. Among her many accomplishments since donation is climbing Mount Kilimanjaro alongside a group of fellow living kidney donors, showing what is possible after giving such a profound gift.

Bethany's story is a powerful reminder that living donation does not limit a life. In many ways, it can expand it, creating new purpose, deeper connections, and new experiences along the way.



The 2028 Transplant Games of America will bring thousands of transplant recipients, living donors, donor families and supporters to Saint Paul for a national celebration of life, hope and the power of organ donation. The Games will feature more than 20 athletic and recreational events, along with ceremonies and community activities designed to honor donors and raise awareness about the lifesaving impact of transplantation.

What organs can be donated by living donors?

While living, a person may be able to donate one kidney, part of the liver, one lobe of a lung, part of the pancreas, or part of the intestine. In addition to organ donation, living donors may also donate blood, platelets, and bone marrow.

Who can be a living donor?

To become a living donor, you must be at least 18 years old and in good physical and mental health. It is important to understand the potential risks and benefits of living donation so you can make a fully informed decision about whether living donation is right for you.

What is the process of becoming a living donor?

Hospital staff will gather information about your overall health and readiness for living donation. This process may include a physical exam, laboratory testing, and health screenings. You will be asked about your medical history and undergo a mental health evaluation. Discussions will also cover your support system and financial considerations. In addition, you will learn about the potential risks and benefits associated with living donation.

SAVE THE DATE

42ND ANNUAL GIFT OF LIFE GOLF TOURNAMENT

MONDAY, JULY 20, 2026
10:30 AM SHOTGUN START
ROCHESTER GOLF & COUNTRY CLUB
TROPICAL THEME

Offering Hope & Healing
Gift of Life
TRANSPLANT HOUSE
Rochester, MN

Tribute Signs

One of our unique traditions is placing “tribute signs” around the golf course. Each sign reflects a personalized message honoring a loved one, transplant recipient, donor or even a special event. We would like to offer you an opportunity to share in this tradition by purchasing a tribute sign.

Each sign measures 15” x 24” and prominently displays your message. Your message can be up to 15 words and include a photo. Each tribute sign is \$100.00.

To purchase a tribute sign, please reach out to mgrove@gift-of-life.org or visit the event page on our website.

Dinner Tickets

Not golfing but still want to be part of the celebration? Dinner-only tickets are available for \$65 and include an evening of great food, tropical fun, and meaningful support for Gift of Life Transplant House. Guests will enjoy our awards presentation, silent auction, and the opportunity to hear from our special guest speaker as we celebrate a wonderful day on the course.

Put on your favorite tropical attire and join us for a memorable island-themed evening filled with community and generosity. Every ticket helps support the mission of Gift of Life Transplant House and the transplant patients and families we serve.

To purchase dinner tickets, please reach out to mgrove@gift-of-life.org or visit the event page on our website.

GOLF INFORMATION

TRIBUTE SIGNS



DINNER REGISTRATION



SPONSORSHIPS



TO SCAN QR CODE: Open your phone's camera app, aim the camera

SAVE *the* DATE



Annual Transplant Patient Picnic

Cascade Lake Park |

07.26.26

| 11 AM - 2 PM

Voices of Gift of Life



"I always felt safe, comfortable, and part of a 'family' of transplant recipients and their caregivers. I met so many interesting people and will certainly cherish all of those friendships."

-Anonymous

Every guest who walks through our doors brings a unique journey, yet many describe the same sense of comfort, support, and community they find at Gift of Life Transplant House.



"It brought us comfort to meet guests and hear their success stories, which gives others hope when experiencing similar medical procedures."

-Anonymous



"I so appreciate the help I received at the Gift of Life Home. It changed my life for the better."

-Anonymous



"It's really a blessing. They've got everything you could possibly need. I couldn't ask for a better place to stay."

-Betty Tomes



"The Gift of Life was the perfect place to stay post-transplant. You're surrounded by people who are in similar situations, so there's a sense of community and comfortability."

-Mateo Franco

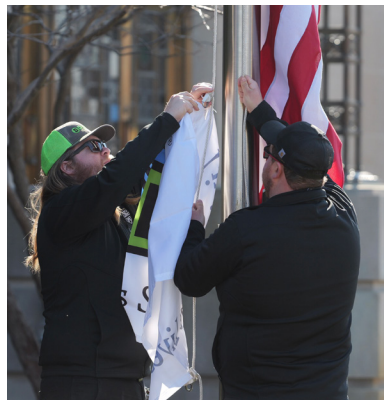


2026 Events

Nashville Night for Gift of Life



Day of Remembrance



Timmay 5K



Putting for a Purpose





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Housekeeping Staff: Mindy Hay, Kaylee Lewno, Martina Simon, Kathy Stiehl





OUR MISSION

The mission of Gift of Life Transplant House is to provide transplant patients and their caregivers with high quality, affordable accommodations in a supportive, home-like environment.

CONTACT

office@gift-of-life.org
gift-of-life.org
507-288-7470



Gift of Life Inc.
705 Second Street, Southwest
Rochester, Minnesota 55902

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"People stay connected long after they've left the walls of the Gift of Life Transplant House. The community is worldwide, consisting of a fraternity of those who have experienced something that is unique, encompassing all the sorrows and joys that life has to offer."

-Ed Pompeian
Founder of Gift of Life Transplant House

