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Westmoreland County Coroner Tim Carson: Turning Tragedy into Hope Through Tissue Donation

In an office focused on investigating death, Coroner Tim Carson is giving the gift of life.

Westmoreland County, PA — December 10, 2024 — Since taking office in 2023, Westmoreland County Coroner Tim Carson has significantly expanded the number of non-hospital referrals to CORE, the Center for Organ Recovery & Education. This effort has led to an increase in tissue donors whose final gifts are providing healing for people in need and comfort to the donors' own grieving families.

Tissue donation can have a powerful impact, providing life-saving treatments like skin grafts for burn victims, corneal transplants to restore sight, and tendons or heart valves for those in need of reconstructive surgeries. A single tissue donor can heal as many as 75 lives.

In 2022, before Carson took office, CORE received no referrals from the Westmoreland County Coroner's Office. However, under Carson's leadership, 27 individuals were referred after their deaths in 2023, with 10 becoming tissue donors. These donations have helped heal as many as 750 lives. So far in 2024, Carson's office has already referred 53 individuals, with 14 becoming tissue donors, restoring sight and mobility for more than 1,000 people.

Non-hospital referrals, which are not required for coroners' offices unlike hospital-based referrals, are the first step in the tissue and cornea donation process, making possible donation from individuals who have passed away outside of a hospital setting, such as those who die at home or in hospice care. This makes Carson's voluntary commitment to donation even more commendable.

"Coroner Carson's efforts go far beyond the standard role of a coroner," said Susan Stuart, CEO of CORE. "His commitment to proactively increasing referrals has directly resulted in more lives being healed. By choosing to take these extra steps, he is turning death into life—offering recipients a second chance while giving donor families a lasting legacy of generosity and healing."

In 2023, CORE facilitated tissue donations from 1,481 individuals and cornea donations from 840 others across its service area in western Pennsylvania and West Virginia. As a result, 1,003 people regained their sight, while more than 110,000 individuals experienced healing through tissue transplants. According to CORE, for many donor families, knowing their loved one's final act brought healing to others provides comfort, a sense of purpose, and a lasting legacy. The gift of tissue not only restores sight or mobility—it restores hope.

In Pennsylvania, coroners have traditionally held significant influence over decisions regarding organ, tissue, and cornea donation, sometimes blocking donations during criminal or death investigations. In 2014, Pennsylvania coroners blocked organ donations 28 times—more than the combined total of 36 other states. This prompted CORE to advocate for legislation that would provide clearer guidelines for coroner denials of donations. Since the passage of that legislation in 2017, the number of denials has decreased. However, Coroner Carson's proactive leadership in increasing referrals for tissue donation stands as a powerful example of how, with careful coordination, coroners can balance the investigative process with the life-saving potential of donation—becoming the greatest champions of life.

“Justice is always paramount in Coroner Carson's work, but as an expert in his field, he knows that the donation process can be seamlessly integrated without interfering with the investigation. By balancing his commitment to both justice and donation, he ensures that more lives are healed while offering donor families the comfort of knowing their loved one's final act will help others,” said TJ Roser, CORE's Funeral Home/Medical Examiner Liaison. “The people of Westmoreland County are truly lucky to have him—a leader who is creating a powerful legacy through kindness, compassion, and a steadfast dedication to justice.”

Important facts about organ, tissue and cornea donation:

- Anyone can register to be an organ donor regardless of age, race or medical history.
- Only 50% of Pennsylvanians are registered organ donors.
- One organ donor can save up to eight lives and a tissue donor can improve the lives of more than 75 others.
- Individuals are encouraged to talk with family members and friends about registering as a donor.
- To sign up, visit [core.org/register](https://www.core.org/register).

About CORE

The Center for Organ Recovery & Education (CORE) is one of more than 50 federally designated not-for-profit organ procurement organizations (OPOs) in the United States, serving more than five million people in western Pennsylvania, West Virginia and Chemung County, New York. CORE coordinates the recovery and matching of organs, tissues and corneas for transplant within our service region, and works tirelessly to create a culture of donation within the hospitals and communities we serve. CORE's mission is to *Save* and *Heal* lives through donation, ultimately ending the deaths of those on the transplant waiting list, while maintaining integrity for the donation process, dignity for the donors, and compassion for their families. CORE is a winner of the 2019 Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award, a presidential award that recognizes nonprofits for their innovation and excellence. For more information, visit www.core.org or call 1-800-DONORS-7.