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Westport firefighters step up campaign for organ, tissue donors

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Members of the Westport Fire Department show their support for Donate Life Connecticut. Firefighters Joseph Arnson and Peter Janulis recently launched "Firefighters Going Further," a program that encourages people to sign up and become organ and tissue donors. Photo: Contributed Photo / Westport News

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In their line of work, [Westport Firefighters Joseph Arnson](#) and [Peter Janulis](#) help save lives.


Now, they hope to save even more through "Firefighters Going Further," a program launched last year to encourage fellow firefighters to become organ and tissue donors. More than 60 firefighters, and some members of their families, are now registered locally. That was the first step. The next goal is to raise awareness throughout the Westport community about the dividends of becoming a donor.

That effort will be kicked off with a "Donate Life" flag raising at [Fire Department](#) headquarters at 11 a.m. April 4. The flag, said Arnson, has been signed by each member of the department



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member of the department.

Arnson said a post-concert talk by former Grateful Dead bassist Phil Lesh at the Gathering of the Vibes festival last year planted the seed for "Firefighters Going Further." Lesh explained to the crowd how a young man's decision to register allowed him to receive a donated liver. Arnson said while all deaths should be mourned, through organ and tissue donations, "we have an opportunity here to turn it into something positive."

If a donor were killed in an accident on Interstate 95, for example, that person's remains could potentially save up to 75 lives, Arnson said.

It's that kind of statistic that motivated Arnson and Janulis to spread the word.

"It just seemed natural," said Arnson. "Our job is to protect and save lives, so it seemed like a natural progression to have the ability to do so in death."

Over the course of their careers, some firefighters may have no direct role in saving someone. However, as an organ and tissue donor, they can save many lives in a matter of hours or days.

The April 4 flag-raising ceremony will include speeches by Fire Chief Christopher Ackley, Donate Life Connecticut Program Director Kari Mull, and double-lung transplant recipient and Firefighter George Carmen, who will travel from his home state of Maine. "Firefighters Going Further" also plans to reach out to other fire departments in the area.

to promote the campaign for organ and tissue donor registration.

Parents are also encouraged to sign up their under-18 children as donors, since many children also need organ and tissue transplants.

Asked why many people are reluctant to become an organ donor, Arnson said, "I think it's lack of knowledge. They just don't know enough about it."

For more information on how to register to become an organ and tissue donor, log onto <http://www.donatelifenewengland.org>.



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