

**O**n what was perhaps the worst day of her life – the day she learned her husband of 31 years would not survive a heart trauma – Dianne Pallo of Willington found herself feeling ill-prepared to make an emotional decision. Would she consent to donating her husband’s bone and tissue?

“Michael and I had never discussed donation, so I had no idea what to say,” she recalled. “It was a very difficult decision for me.”

She ultimately consented and today, 12 years later, it’s a choice she’s glad she made. “More than 50 people benefited from that gift – including someone who needed a spinal fusion,” Dianne said. But in the early days, she was wracked with uncertainty. “I wasn’t sure I did the right thing. After many months of grief counseling and help from LifeChoice, I decided to learn as much as I could about donation and the importance of raising awareness.”

In 2003, Dianne was invited to join the organization’s Donor Family Advisory Council, a position she still holds today. She looked at it as an opportunity “to help other donor families like I had been helped – to ‘pay it forward,’ so to speak.” But it also helped her immensely as she began to realize what an incredible gift the donation of her husband’s bone and tissue had been.

“I attended donor family events, both locally and nationally, and listened to many recipients as they shared their thoughts and thankfulness for the gifts they received,” she said. “They get so emotional; they are just so grateful.”

Dianne, whose husband served in many

capacities in town, including as a member of the Board of Finance, said her personal journey propelled her into a larger, active role, and helped her come to terms with her loss.

“I needed to find a purpose for all that happened. I have since come to see how many people are in need, and to honor donors as heroes,” she said.

Part of what she wants to achieve is to help dispel the many myths that surround the subject of organ donation, and ensure that people are aware of all the facts.

She encourages people to sign up as organ and tissue donors when they get or renew their driver’s licences, but notes that while about 40 percent of licensed Connecticut drivers have opted via the DMV to be donors, this does not provide any details. For example, a person may not want to donate eyes. To document specific wishes, a person must register through an organ donation service such as LifeChoice, which can be done online at [www.LifeChoiceOPO.org](http://www.LifeChoiceOPO.org).

She stressed that those who choose to be donors should make sure family members are aware of that decision in advance. “Other than raising awareness, my other mission is to talk about how important it is to speak to your family and friends of your intent to be a donor,” Dianne said.

“Knowing your loved one’s wishes is so helpful at a time of trauma and shock. Though Michael’s gifts of bone and tissue helped so many people, and I am now sure he would think I did the right thing, I do wish we had sat down as a family before this tragedy happened and talked about our wishes. It’s sad that I had to learn the way that I did.”