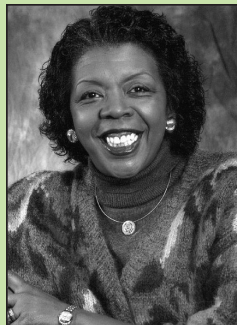


The Stephanie Effect

BY HADIE BARTHOLOMEW

As a trailblazer in politics, Rep. Stephanie Tubbs Jones was no stranger to making a difference. Ohio's first African American woman elected to Congress, she dedicated her life to public service. When she died in 2008, it was no surprise to her fellow Ohioans she was a registered donor.



Donor and Congresswoman Stephanie Tubbs Jones

Immediately after her death, LifeBanc worked closely with the Tubbs Jones family to make sure the Congresswoman's wish to be an organ and tissue donor was realized.

"She was the type of person who would do whatever she could for anybody," her sister, Barbara Walker, said. Walker added she herself was compelled to register as a donor in the wake of her sister's example.

In fact, in the three months following her death, online donor registration rates soared 500 percent across the state, reaching an all-time high in October. The increase was especially high in northeast Ohio, the area she represented in Congress. Since then, the total of online registrants has been three times what it was over the same period one year ago.


"Over the past eight months, we've definitely seen a 'Stephanie effect,'" said Gordon Bowen, LifeBanc's CEO. "Ohioans are following Stephanie's example to help save lives."

LifeBanc staff has heard repeatedly how "someone of her stature" always "has the power to make a difference in people's lives." In churches, hospitals and at health fairs, people have told LifeBanc that they have become registered donors after seeing how Stephanie Tubbs Jones saved lives. A local donor family stated they chose to donate their loved one's organs because that is what Stephanie did.

The increase in online registrants "really blew my mind," Walker said. "I know people loved her—she was a big part of many people's lives. But when you see something like this, it really is a testament.

"I have a new mission," Walker added. "After seeing the powerful effects of donation, I am on board to help in any way I can." An opportunity came when she was invited by LifeBanc to participate in its "Legacy of Life" luncheon on April 30 when she, along with Stephanie's son, Mervyn, accepted the inaugural "Legacy of Life" award on behalf of her sister. The award was created to honor heroes who have educated the public about donation and been a catalyst for increasing the numbers of registered donors.

"My mom has won countless awards," Stephanie's son said, "but this one means so much.

"It's not just about my mother," he added. "It's about all the lives that are being saved through organ and tissue donation." 

Hadie Bartholomew is community affairs coordinator at LifeBanc in Cleveland.