



American  
Heart  
Association.

Cor Vitae  
*Society*



# The Pulse

Issue | 2023

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# LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

Taking the helm as President of the American Heart Association this past July has felt like a true pinnacle moment in my career. As a physician-epidemiologist, my work revolves around cutting-edge research that seeks to incorporate biology with social determinants of health to transform cardiovascular disease science and healthcare of global populations. The link between economic adversity and cardiovascular disease is a longstanding tragedy.

I've spent much of my career studying this connection, both as a cardiologist working one-on-one with patients and as a researcher working toward population-level solutions. So while I'm familiar with the jarring statistics that illuminate the marked wealth gap by race and ethnicity, I've also seen them up close. I know far too well how the lack of economic progress for disadvantaged communities of color limits intergenerational wealth and health. And I know this divide continues to widen instead of narrow.

In the United States, the stress that marginalized people experience due to everyday discrimination contributes to worse cardiovascular health. The timing of the pandemic in 2020 only strengthened our understanding of social risk factors and shined a harsher light on social inequities and their effects on overall health. Bleak as this seems, there is also hope. Many levers can be pulled to stem this harmful tide.

I am thrilled that the American Heart Association's work now focuses so sharply on health equity. It truly feels like I am the right person at the right place and time as President to further champion this work and help ensure that we improve health disparities caused by historical and systemic problems. Policymakers and medical professionals can use their status and power to make systemic changes.

This is an excellent time to create meaningful change across barriers, both visible and invisible. In this issue of The Pulse, we will share several ways the American Heart Association and loyal supporters are taking bold action and addressing health equity in under-served and rural populations.

As a valued Cor Vitae Society member, your meaningful personal commitment allows us to stand steadfastly committed to seeking innovative ways to curb heart disease and other health problems that stem from adversity, particularly among women and people from underrepresented racial and ethnic groups. Thank you.

I look forward to helping lead us boldly into our Second Century and continuing our relentless fight for longer, healthier lives for all.



*Michelle A. Albert, President*

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michelle A. Albert".

**Michelle A. Albert, MD, MPH, FACC, FAHA**  
President, American Heart Association  
Member, Cor Vitae Society

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# AHA'S SOCIAL IMPACT FUNDS

## The American Heart Association and like-minded donors are taking bold action

Where you live should not determine how long you live, yet about 50 million people in the U.S. are at higher risk for cardiovascular disease because they lack the most basic necessities that contribute to life quality and expectancy.

"When people face housing instability and lack clean air and water, their health suffers," said Nancy Brown, chief executive officer of the American Heart Association. "Life expectancy of two people living just a few miles apart can differ by 20 years due to these social determinants of health and the Social Impact Funds seeks to address and solve these health disparities so everyone everywhere has the opportunity to live a full and healthy life."

Through the AHA's Social Impact Funds, donors have the opportunity to invest in local entrepreneurs and organizations that are breaking down the social and economic barriers to health equity.

Dedicated donors Liz Elting, Michael Burlant, and the Elizabeth Elting Foundation; the Ray and Tye Noorda Foundation; Gary and Sue Ellis; Oscar and Cathy Munoz's Pave it Forward Foundation; Kaiser Permanente; James and Donna Sublett Family Foundation; and the Helen and Will Webster Foundation recently made additional investments increasing the total nationwide investment of the funds to over \$36 million.

These contributions help provide financial grants and low-interest loans for evidence-based, community-driven work in targeted communities nationwide. The resources provided by the American Heart Association Social Impact Funds can help social entrepreneurs scale their businesses quickly to have a positive effect on the community.

The Social Impact Funds invite social entrepreneurs with solutions to healthcare access, food security, economic resiliency and poverty reduction to apply for funding opportunities to support their important work.

Since its launch in 2018 and initial community investments in 2019, the American Heart Association's Social Impact Funds have invested in a total of 106 local social enterprises in 16 cities across the country.

Learn more at [Heart.org/SocialImpact](https://www.heart.org/SocialImpact). ■



*"Breaking down systemic barriers and building bridges toward a path of true equality, is vital to the fight for health equity.*

*Entrepreneurs, small businesses, and grassroots organizations are doing the critical work to tackle economic and social barriers to health within their communities, and I am honored to stand with them alongside the American Heart Association.*

*Social entrepreneurs and community changemakers are paving the way for a brighter future for all – it's up to us as leaders to step up and support their efforts."*

- Liz Elting  
Founder and CEO,  
Elizabeth Elting Foundation



# SURVIVOR SPOTLIGHT

## After stroke at 32, young mom's small town pitched in to help

At 50, Elizabeth Gilberg has learned to knit and is relearning how to quilt. She took lessons in cross-country skiing and tried her hand at beekeeping. Bike riding didn't go so well, but she's game to keep trying. Like many women whose children have grown, Gilberg, a mother of four, now has more time for herself. The difference is, she wasn't sure she'd live this long.

Two weeks after giving birth to her fourth child, Gilberg woke up with a terrible headache. That morning in early November, she dropped off her other children at school then called her then-husband to tell him about the headache. That's all she remembers.

After a few minutes of not being able to reach Gilberg, her husband went home to check on her. He found the car and house doors open. Gilberg, then 32, was sitting on the floor holding the baby in her right arm. Her left arm hung loose. She was speaking slowly, slurring her words. He called 911.

Doctors found that Gilberg had experienced two strokes, one on each side of her brain. Blood flowing out of her brain had backed up causing clots in the main vein to her brain, known as dural sinus thrombosis. She was flown to a hospital in Portland, Oregon, for a then-experimental procedure. Clot-busting medication was delivered directly to the clots via a scope through her groin. It worked. Still, the stroke caused damage. Gilberg initially was paralyzed on her left side and had vision problems. For two months, she also was delusional and paranoid. She didn't remember giving birth.

She stayed in the hospital for two months, relearning how to walk, talk, eat and read. Her parents and younger sister took turns staying with her, while her in-laws helped take care of the four children. Townspeople cooked and delivered meals for several months. Gilberg went home in time for Christmas but still faced several more months of outpatient rehab. Finally, after more than six months, she was able to return to driving and being a mother and wife.

However, things had changed. Her executive functioning skills – such as planning, working memory, time management and flexible thinking – had deteriorated. Folks in her small town of Columbia Falls gave her the help she needed. If she couldn't find her car in a parking lot, store employees would help. If there was an early-release day at school, someone in the office would call ahead to remind her. In the case of dental appointments, the receptionist would always call 20 minutes ahead of any appointment so it wouldn't slip through the cracks.

"There is no shame in saying, 'I can't do this alone,'" Gilberg said. "I think that's one of the things that's allowed me to come as far as I have. Also, I have hugely simplified what I can deal with and handle at a certain time." She also reaches out to others who need help, especially stroke survivors. "If I could have seen someone my age who got better, that would have helped my recovery," she said. "I've been to where I can't talk and I can't feed myself, so to see where I am now, maybe that can give someone hope."

After nearly 20 years, Gilberg, now happily remarried, will soon leave Columbia Falls and the neighbors that helped her through. "It's hard to imagine a better place to have lived in through all this," she said. "But I have a wonderful partner and some brain space to continue to expand what I've got going on here. I feel so much excitement for my life and the future." ■



*Elizabeth Gilberg*

# MISSION IN ACTION

## Addressing the rural health crisis in America – rural health care outcomes accelerator

**A** new three-year initiative by the American Heart Association aims to eliminate rural health disparities by helping hospitals and clinicians provide high-quality, consistent, timely and appropriate evidence-based care.

The American Heart Association is launching its Rural Health Care Outcomes Accelerator to provide up to 700 rural hospitals with no-cost access to Get With The Guidelines® quality programs for coronary artery disease, heart failure and stroke.

In addition, the American Heart Association will launch a rural recognition program for these hospitals to assist in communicating their commitment to care excellence with the communities they serve.

The Association will convene rural clinical experts and leaders over three years to develop and publish rural quality and outcomes research.

Participating hospitals also will have access to professional education, an online rural community network that encourages peer-to-peer connection and provides resources to support model practice sharing, and collaborative innovation.

“This new initiative will help ensure all Americans living in rural areas have the best possible chance of survival and the highest quality of life attainable,” said Tim Putnam DHA, MBA, EMT, FACHE, volunteer expert for the American Heart Association, past president of the National Rural Health Association (NRHA) and former CEO of Mary Margaret Mary Health in Batesville, Indiana.

Addressing the unique health needs of people in rural America is critical to achieving the American Heart Association’s 2024 impact goal for equitably increasing healthy life expectancy nationwide.

Innovative approaches like this are key to improving rural health across the nation. ■

Visit the Rural Health Care Outcomes Accelerator project webpage on [Heart.org](https://www.heart.org) to learn more.



People who live in rural communities live an average of three years fewer than urban counterparts and have a 40% higher likelihood of developing heart disease (14.2%) compared with their counterparts in small metropolitan (11.2%) and urban (9.9%) areas, a gap that has grown over the past decade.

Additionally, rural communities face a critical shortage of health care professionals, including public health workers, which negatively impacts care. This leaves many people vulnerable to increased morbidity and mortality that could be prevented with appropriate identification and treatment.

# AHA'S SECOND CENTURY

## Preparing to celebrate 100 years of bold hearts and bold moves



### Thank you to the following Second Century Cornerstones for their gift of \$1M+ to the Second Century Campaign.

- Advance Auto Parts
- American Heart Association National Center
- Amgen
- Anonymous
- AstraZeneca
- AT&T
- Bank of America Charitable Foundation
- Bayer
- Bertram L. Scott
- Beverly and Jim Postl
- Big Lots
- Bristol Myers Squibb
- Bristol Myers Squibb Foundation
- Care Access and BRIDGE Initiative
- Cathy and Oscar Munoz's Pave it Forward Foundation
- Corrine and Tom Greco
- Deloitte
- Edwards Lifesciences
- Gates Ventures
- Harry S. Moss Heart Trust
- HCA Healthcare
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- Healthy West Orange Foundation
- Helen and Will Webster Foundation
- Henrietta B. and Frederick H. Bugher Foundation
- Kaiser Permanente National Community Benefit Fund
- Lipton
- Living on the Go Foundation
- Liz Elting, Michael Burlant and the Elizabeth Elting Foundation
- Lorenzo Fertitta & Frank Fertitta
- National Football League Foundation
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- Pilot Company
- Robert Wood Johnson Foundation
- Sanofi
- Stevie and David A. Spina
- Sublett Family Foundation
- Sue and Gary Ellis
- The Leona M. and Harry B. Helmsley Charitable Trust
- Trifecta
- UPMC and UPMC Health System
- Walgreens
- Valerie and Lee Shapiro

List as of 1/27/2023

For nearly 100 years, the American Heart Association has made bold moves that have saved and improved lives, pioneered scientific discovery, and advocated for healthy public policies in communities across the country. We have much to be proud of!

These bold moves have helped transform our nation's health and significantly reduce heart disease and stroke death rates. None of this is possible without donor support.

While our work has been transformative—leading to a decline in deaths from heart disease and stroke over the past two decades—these gains were not shared equitably among Black, Asian, American Indian/Alaska Native, Hispanic/Latino and LGBTQ+ communities.

And, in recent years, the death rate has alarmingly been on the rise, exacerbated by a tsunami of factors due to Covid-19, particularly for those under-resourced communities who have been disproportionately affected. Success over a century has prepared us for this moment.

With Bold Hearts, and cutting-edge science, we forge ahead into our Second Century of lifesaving work. We pledge to work relentlessly to eliminate heart disease and stroke, optimize brain health and ensure equitable health in every community across the country.

We're transforming the health journey to ensure all people have the opportunity to live longer, healthier lives, and we're just getting started.

We're celebrating 100 years of mission impact in 2024, because of the generosity, support and Bold Hearts of individuals, researchers, caregivers, advocates, communities, corporations, foundations, and people like you. ■

*"I am honored to be the Association's Chair of the Second Century Campaign. The most impressive thing is the advances we have made in saving people's lives, and we've become even more relevant as an organization today.*

*The future will build on the legacy of what's been accomplished to continue this trajectory of making a difference every single day. It will be incredible to see the second century of impact of the American Heart Association."*

**Jim Postl, Second Century Campaign Chair (2022-24)**



# SOCIETY MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

## Oscar Munoz | Chicago, Illinois

SECOND CENTURY CORNERSTONE, HEART AND TORCH CIRCLE, CEO ROUNDTABLE MEMBER



Oscar Munoz

Just 37 days after taking the helm of United Airlines in the midst of severe turbulence for the storied company, Oscar Munoz was returning from an early morning workout when his own life suddenly hung in the balance.

On that October morning in 2016, his knees buckled. He remembers thinking, “That was weird,” but recalled a recent conversation with a doctor friend. “Oscar,” the friend had said to him, “you’d never believe how many people die on my operating table and they have no idea they’re having a heart attack.” He had told him not to ignore any weird feelings, and to call 911 immediately. “If you’re lucky, the worst that happens is you feel foolish for a false alarm.” Munoz did just that and it saved his life with only minutes to spare.

As he explains in his forthcoming book, *Turnaround Time*, a memoir dedicated to telling the parallel stories of United’s revival and his own survival from a heart transplant – which occurred in tandem – Oscar seemed an unlikely sufferer of cardiac disease.

“I was healthy and ate vegan, an avid biker, and former marathoner, and I had recently completed a hundred-mile bike race. I didn’t smoke or drink caffeine, and none of my family members had a history of heart troubles, as far as I knew.” Unfortunately, his risk for heart disease was genetic and went undetected by current standard tests. His blood work had given his practitioners no reason to pursue further checkups that might have detected the blood clot accumulating in his left ventricle earlier.

He had suffered a massive heart attack and was in a coma for a week in the hospital. He received an LVAD, a left ventricular assist device, to keep his heart pumping, and was placed on a heart transplant waiting list.

Then, in January 2016, coincidentally on his birthday, while presiding over a pivotal meeting with his United executive team that would determine the very survival of the airline itself, Oscar received ‘the miracle call’ – a donor heart was ready for him.

“I was given a gift of, in essence, life,” Munoz said. His recovery went smoothly, and he returned to work in March. But he knows not everyone is as fortunate, especially those from underserved communities who encounter social and economic barriers to health equity. “For every one of us that is saved, unfortunately, there are many that aren’t,” Munoz said.

His experience with heart disease has motivated him to share his own story, helping to raise awareness on the risk factors for heart disease and the signs of heart attacks, with a strategic focus on helping the American Heart Association address health equity. Munoz is a key supporter of the AHA’s Social Impact Fund in Chicago, where various social enterprises are being funded that are helping to remove systemic barriers that impact access to affordable housing, quality education, nutritious food, and healthcare. Munoz is steadfastly committed to helping the AHA achieve optimal, healthier lives for all. In addition to being an annual Heart and Torch Circle member of the Cor Vitae Society, Munoz is recognized as a Cornerstone Donor, supporting AHA’s Second Century Campaign.

To help improve early detection of heart risk, Oscar is also an investor in a precision health startup that uses Artificial Intelligence to better diagnose and treat patients who are at-risk of heart disease. “It is a technology that, if it had existed then, would have alerted me to my risk, likely even averting it altogether.”

While preparing for *Turnaround Time* to land on bookshelves in May, Oscar hopes that by telling his story he can achieve two things at once: raise awareness of cardiac disease, and also repay the generosity shown to him by members of what he calls his “United family”, whom he credits for truly saving the airline and himself.

“If I can help even one person take better charge of their heart health care, then it will have been well worth it.” ■



# SOCIETY MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

**Dr. Peter DiBattiste** | Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

PRESIDENT'S CIRCLE, PAUL DUDLEY WHITE LEGACY SOCIETY



**Dr. Peter DiBattiste**

**D**r. Peter DiBattiste is quite familiar with matters of the heart. He holds a medical degree from Harvard Medical School and completed his Fellowship in Cardiology at the University of Pennsylvania. Throughout the course of his impressive career, he has authored more than 40 publications in cardiovascular medicine. Pete then joined the pharmaceutical industry where he has overseen numerous development programs specializing in cardiovascular drug development.

It seemed a natural extension of his career to get involved with the American Heart Association. "I faced the extensive consequences of heart disease on a daily basis," Pete said. "AHA's mission always resonated with me." In addition to studying and treating heart disease, Pete experienced it personally. He lost his own grandmother and mother to end-stage heart failure and aortic valve disease, respectively.

In the 1990's, Pete began attending his local annual Heart Ball, and after becoming more familiar and inspired by AHA's work, has now been a loyal volunteer serving in a multitude of positions for over 20 years, including his current role on the Greater Philadelphia Board of Directors and his long-standing Cor Vitae Society membership at the President's Circle level.

"This is just my way of contributing in a small way to better health for all," he said.

Pete's passion for the work of the American Heart Association was reignited when he began learning about disparities in health care. "Social determinants of health were not addressed in the medical school curriculum when I attended," he said. "What I learned through the AHA was really eye-opening. It was a very powerful motivator for me."

It was this new focus and excitement about the work being done around health equity that prompted Pete to join the Paul Dudley White Legacy Society by leaving a gift to the American Heart Association in his will. "It was time for me to do some meaningful estate planning," Pete said, "and as I thought about how I would like to see my resources utilized after my death, I couldn't think of a better cause than the one AHA fights for every day."

Pete encourages others to join him as a dual Giving Society member by taking action to create their own legacy gift. "Think about how you can do the most good for our community and its health, both now and for the long term," he said. "For me, that lead me straight to AHA as an organization whose missions was aligned with my goals and whose track record demonstrates an unrelenting commitment to making it happen." ■

## Understanding Social Determinants of Health

Social determinants of health are the structural determinants and conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work, and age that affect health, functioning, and quality of life.

The American Heart Association recognizes that that health disparities are largely influenced by social determinants. Medical care alone is insufficient to ensure better health and well-being when people don't have stable homes, nutritious food, good schools or clean air or water, their health suffers.

Learn more about the work being done through the AHA's Office of Health Equity at [Heart.org](https://www.heart.org).



# SOCIETY MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

## Ron and Sheila Cuccaro | Utica, New York

### PACESETTER'S CIRCLE

For Ron and Sheila Cuccaro, heart disease hits close to home. Of her tight knit family comprised of her parents and two siblings, Sheila is the only one who has not suffered a heart attack or stroke.

Sheila grew up watching her father struggle with heart disease, having had five heart attacks and multiple strokes that left him paralyzed for 16 years until he passed away at age 73.

Sheila's mother also lived with heart disease and underwent open heart surgery. One of Sheila's brothers sadly died in his 50s as he awaited a heart transplant after suffering multiple heart attacks and stroke, and Sheila's other brother remains her only immediate relative still living, now with multiple lifesaving stents in his heart as a heart attack survivor.

To say the American Heart Association is close to her heart would be an understatement. Sheila and husband Ron have been loyal donors and Cor Vitae members for years, but when the Cuccaros found out about the specific work being done by the American Heart Association in their community of Utica and the Mohawk Valley around blood pressure control, their passion was reignited.

Sheila herself has been on hypertension medications since she was in her 30s and she knows how important maintaining a healthy blood pressure is to protecting the heart, and wants to ensure as many people as possible in her community and beyond receive that message. "Education and prevention is the key to health for all and this effort is a great start," said the Cuccaros.

The Cuccaros' generous gift supports many community-centered initiatives such as distributing nearly 600 blood pressure devices and evidence-based educational materials to those in need. ■



*Ron and Sheila Cuccaro*



*Blood pressure monitoring devices and evidence-based educational materials were distributed to community health centers throughout the Mohawk Valley.*



# WAYS TO GIVE

## Dennis Francis | Honolulu, Hawaii

### GIFT OF WINE



**D**ennis Francis appreciates wine. The Honolulu resident has what he calls a “reasonably sized” collection of about 1,500 bottles. During the pandemic, his passion for wine intensified. “That’s when I started scouring online auctions hunting for wines that looked interesting.”

The timing was perfect. “One of the things I found was there were a significant amount of great restaurants in big cities with large wine inventories,” said Francis, who is the president and CEO of Oahu Publications, Hawaii’s largest media company. “These restaurants needed to raise funds and auctioning their wines was one way to do it.” Francis has been a long-time supporter of the American Heart Association through events such as Honolulu’s successful Heart Ball, but when pandemic restrictions canceled in-person fundraisers, he was eager to help the AHA in other ways.

That’s when he found a greater purpose for some of the wines in his collection. Through a collaboration with The Legacy Cellar Foundation, wine lovers like Francis can convert their valuable bottles into charitable donations. I thought donating wines was a really clever way of raising funds,” he said. “Wine lovers can help an organization by lightening their load a little bit.”

Donors can choose any timing for their donation. It can be now, later through an estate plan, or a combination of both. Experts coordinate shipment and authentication.

The bottles are protected from damage and temperature changes. After liquidation of the wine, 100% of the funds are distributed to the AHA. Francis chose nine bottles including Lokoya 2018, Mount Veeder and Cardinale 2018. He refers to them as “big wines,” which are dark, heavy and meant to be enjoyed with a hearty meal, in moderation!

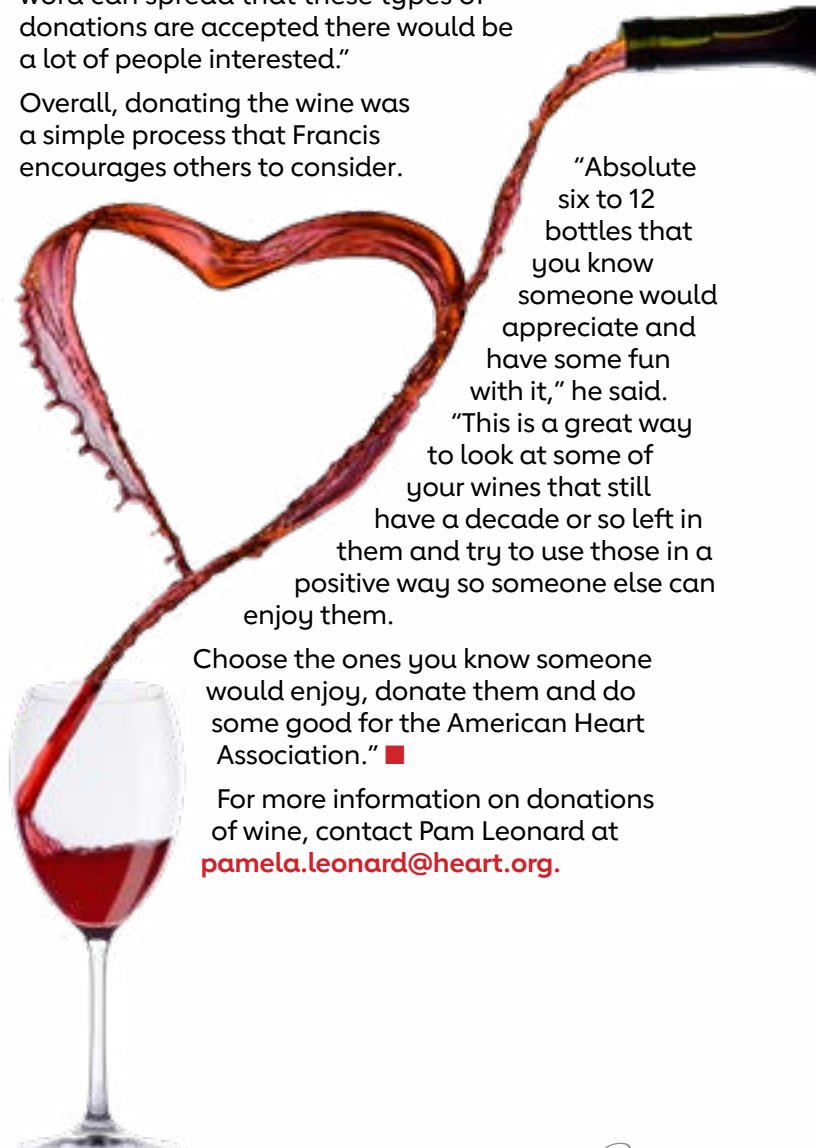
“I picked really great wines that I felt people would appreciate and be familiar with,” he said.

Francis, who loves collecting and learning about wine, savors every glass.

He hopes the recipients of his donations do, too, “I hope whoever is the successful bidder enjoys the wine,” he said.

“I want the bottles to be consumed . I think if word can spread that these types of donations are accepted there would be a lot of people interested.”

Overall, donating the wine was a simple process that Francis encourages others to consider.



“Absolute six to 12 bottles that you know someone would appreciate and have some fun with it,” he said.

“This is a great way to look at some of your wines that still have a decade or so left in them and try to use those in a positive way so someone else can enjoy them.

Choose the ones you know someone would enjoy, donate them and do some good for the American Heart Association.” ■

For more information on donations of wine, contact Pam Leonard at [pamela.leonard@heart.org](mailto:pamela.leonard@heart.org).





## THE HEART OF LIFE

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# Life's Essential 8™ - A Checklist for Lifelong Good Health

## Health Behaviors

### 1. Diet

Aim for an overall healthy eating pattern that includes whole foods, lots of fruits and vegetables, lean protein, nuts, seeds, and non-tropical oils like olive and canola.

### 2. Physical Activity

Adults should get 2 ½ hours of moderate or 75 minutes of vigorous physical activity per week. Kids should have 60 minutes daily.

### 3. Nicotine Exposure

Avoid use of inhaled nicotine delivery products, which includes traditional cigarettes, e-cigarettes, vaping and second-hand smoke.

### 4. Sleep Duration

Most adults need 7-9 hours of sleep each night. Children require more. Adequate sleep promotes healing, improves brain function and reduces the risk for chronic diseases.

## Health Factors

### 5. Weight

Achieving and maintaining a healthy weight has many benefits. An optimal Body Mass Index, a numerical value of your weight in relation to your height, is less than 25.

### 6. Cholesterol

High levels of non-HDL, or "bad," cholesterol can lead to heart disease. Non-HDL cholesterol can be measured without fasting and is reliably calculated among all people.

### 7. Blood Sugar

Over time, high levels of blood sugar can damage your heart, kidneys, eyes and nerves.

### 8. Blood Pressure

Keeping your blood pressure within acceptable ranges - less than 120/80 mm Hg - can keep you healthier longer.



Learn more at [Heart.org/Lifes8](http://Heart.org/Lifes8)

