

For Immediate Release

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Heart on Southwest Airlines flight provided life-saving gifts

*Donated heart received in time to prepare tissue grafts
used to repair heart damage and defects*

Virginia Beach, Va. (Dec. 14, 2018) — The heart that was inadvertently left on board a Southwest Airlines plane in Seattle on Sunday, Dec. 9, made it to LifeNet Health’s Pacific Northwest facility in time to provide two potentially life-saving cardiac tissue grafts.

“Thanks to the quick actions of the airline, we will be able to provide these healing gifts to patients with life-threatening heart conditions,” said LifeNet Health President and CEO Rony Thomas. “We are grateful to Southwest Airlines for their rapid response — and to the donor and donor family whose selfless decision provided these precious gifts.”

The heart was on its way to LifeNet Health after being recovered from a California tissue donor when the crew accidentally left the package on the plane rather than taking it off in Seattle. The aircraft returned to Seattle once the oversight was identified, and the heart was safely transported to LifeNet Health.

As a regenerative medicine company and accredited tissue provider, LifeNet Health utilizes hearts that cannot be transplanted as whole organs to prepare tissue grafts — also known as allografts — that are used to repair damaged heart valves and congenital heart defects in both adults and children.

Each year, LifeNet Health provides more than 2,500 implants processed from donated hearts to critically ill patients. Unlike whole-organ heart transplants, tissue grafts such as these are stored to allow for medical screening to ensure the graft is safe for implantation.

The need for these gifts is profound. According to the Centers for Disease Control, nearly 40,000 children are born in the U.S. each year with a congenital heart defect, with approximately 5,000 of them considered critical.

LifeNet Health is based in Virginia Beach, Va., and operates a full-service recovery, preparation and distribution facility near Seattle. In addition to cardiac and vascular tissue implants, LifeNet Health recovers and prepares donated tissue for use in a wide variety of procedures — including orthopedic, spine, trauma, chronic wound, dental and oncological surgeries.

About LifeNet Health

LifeNet Health — celebrating 35 years of saving lives, restoring health, and giving hope to thousands of patients each year — is the world's most trusted provider of transplant solutions, from organ procurement to new innovations in bio-implant technologies and cellular therapies — a leader in the field of regenerative medicine, while always honoring the donors and healthcare professionals that allow the healing process. For more information about LifeNet Health, go to LifeNetHealth.org.