

## **[Braveheart to run Dublin Marathon on Transplant Anniversary \(https://www.activelink.ie/node/111743\)](https://www.activelink.ie/node/111743)**



**In a remarkable celebration of life and gratitude, Ernesto Antonio, a Galway native, is set to run the Dublin City Marathon, for the Irish Kidney Association (IKA), on the exact date of the 25th anniversary of his life-saving heart transplant at the Mater Hospital, 27th October.**

Given less than 15 hours to live back in 1999, when he was 36 years old, Ernesto has since accomplished more than most could ever dream pushing his physical limits in honour of his heart donor. **[Fundraising Page of Ernesto Antonio \(eventmaster.ie\)](https://eventmaster.ie/fundraising/pages/EA93810018)** (<https://eventmaster.ie/fundraising/pages/EA93810018>) He once broke a world-time record for a heart transplant recipient in the 2009 Dublin City Marathon, completing it in 3 hours and 45 minutes. Five years later he marked his 15th transplant anniversary by taking part in the 2014 Dublin City Marathon. Ernesto, in acknowledging the passage of time said, ***“When you have been as close to death as I have you appreciate every day. This year on October 27th, I’ll be embracing a considerably slower pace in the Dublin Marathon but every step I take will be for my heart donor. I will be proudly wearing my IKA running shirt featuring the message #InMemoryOfMyDonor.”***

In April this year, to mark the milestone silver anniversary year and pay tribute to his donor, Ernesto (now 60), carrying just a backpack, walked over 1,200 km from Cádiz in the south of Spain, through Seville, Salamanca and Zamora, to his final destination Finisterre in North West Spain. Over the past 25 years, Ernesto has swum the English Channel in a relay, climbed Kilimanjaro, cycled from Lands End to John O’Groats, participated in numerous marathons, Ironman triathlons, and represented Ireland at each of the biennial Heart & Lung Transplant Games between 2002 and 2018.

Despite his athletic successes, Ernesto reflects, “My greatest achievement isn’t measured in medals or miles. It was being there to care for my wife, Kate, when she was diagnosed with breast cancer, until she passed away in 2016. Because of my heart donor, I’ve been able to watch my daughter Isabella grow into a wonderful woman, just like her mother. Everything else pales in comparison.”

Born and raised in Ireland where he trained to be a nurse, Ernesto, left his home in Bushy Park, Galway in his early twenties to see work in the UK. He worked as a theatre charge nurse in Essex, England, which sometimes involved emergency surgery and brought him in contact with transplant coordinators and donor families for organ retrieval. Ernesto shared, ***“It’s pretty amazing that I have been in the unique position to have been on both sides of organ donation. One of the last things I did before I retired was an organ retrieval. I was called in on my day off to do it. It puts my life into perspective where you see both sides of the coin. You see the donors, their families coming in and you know someone is actually going to be receiving the donor’s organs and that is going to give them a new lease of life, improve their quality of life, and even save their life. I would urge anybody to tick the box to be an organ donor.”***

Since Ernesto retired in 2022, he now lives in Devon, in the south of England. He remains connected to his roots, with his sister Juliana and brother Jose still residing in Galway. His daughter Isabella, who was six years old when Ernesto was waiting for a heart transplant, was raised in the UK has a deep love for Ireland and came to live in Galway from 2016 to 2022 while studying and working as a student support officer at University College Galway. Ernesto’s late mother came from Termonfeckin in Co Louth, and she also worked as a nurse, and met Ernesto’s father, an engineer, of Portuguese heritage, from Hong Kong, at a captain’s table on a sea crossing to Japan.

Ernesto will be flying in to Dublin from the UK this Friday afternoon (*25th October 2024*) in advance of the Dublin Marathon. He will be raising funds for the Irish Kidney Association when participating in the Marathon two days later on 27th October

through his fundraising platform [Fundraising Page of Ernesto Antonio \(eventmaster.ie\)](https://eventmaster.ie/fundraising/pages/EA93810018) (<https://eventmaster.ie/fundraising/pages/EA93810018>). ***“I’m running to give back, to thank my donor, and to raise funds to support the Irish Kidney Association which advocates and supports patients with organ failure and in its promotion of the organ donor card and organ donation for transplantation. I encourage others to consider organ donation. Without my donor, none of this would have been possible.”***

To support Ernesto's marathon efforts and his fundraising campaign for the Irish Kidney Association, please visit **[Fundraising Page of Ernesto Antonio \(eventmaster.ie\)](https://eventmaster.ie/fundraising/pages/EA93810018)** (<https://eventmaster.ie/fundraising/pages/EA93810018>)

**Other people touched by organ donation who will be donning their running shoes for the Dublin Marathon to fundraise for the Irish Kidney Association and help raise organ donor awareness are:** a Kildare organ donor mother running a marathon for the first time in memory of her only child was just 24 when she became an organ donor when she passed away two years ago; a newly wed man living in Meath in his early thirties grateful to the donor family for the kidney transplant his ballet dancer bride's father received; two Irish cousins from Kildare who are flying in from Germany and Scotland where they work to run together in memory of their beloved aunt from Clonmel, in Tipperary, who was a kidney patient and passed away; a Dublin woman who received two living donor kidney transplants, from both her donor parents, and since her successful transplant eleven years ago she has embraced running; a Wexford mother of three who donated a kidney to her brother in law in 2022 and will run her 32nd marathon on 27th October; a Cork man whose wife is a kidney patient; a renal dietitian from Dublin who works with kidney patients at Tallaght University Hospital; a nephrologist who is working in the US and wants to raise kidney health awareness; a consultant anaesthetist at Beaumont Hospital whose patients include patients undergoing kidney transplants; the Meath woman grateful for the deceased donor kidney transplant her older sister received 29 years ago when she ten years old which is still a success and it allowed her to become a mother to two healthy children; and a 26 year old social media influencer who set up a successful running club with a social dimension for beginners earlier this year, who has always carried an organ donor card and has code 115 on her drivers licence will be running her first marathon on Sunday 27th October to raise organ donor awareness and funds for the Irish Kidney Association.

**Becoming an organ donor in Ireland is a simple process: carry a donor card, note your consent on your driving license, or set up the organ donor app on your phone but most importantly Share Your Wishes with your loved ones. For more information on organ donation and the Irish Kidney Association visit [www.ika.ie](http://www.ika.ie) (<http://www.ika.ie>)**

*An 8-minute interview by the IKA can be watched here on YouTube link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ladlJ2Rulpg> (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ladlJ2Rulpg>). Attached include photos from Dublin Marathon 2014, taken by Conor McCabe*

**Region**

Nationwide

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