

Heritage Media clip  
AlloSource

The story of AlloSource really begins with the thousands of stories from families across the United States. These families give the gift of life by providing donations of organs and bone tissue. Despite personal sadness, they are able to step forward and envision the good that can come from tragedy. Each selfless gift of donation creates a ripple effect that results in saving and enhancing the lives of dozens of people.

In the 1990s donations of organs and tissue could not keep up with demand. And monitoring of national trends indicated increased regulation by the Food and Drug Association, mergers and alliances by regional transplant banks and increased medical knowledge and acceptance of transplant procedures would continue to drain supplies. In Denver, Mile High Transplant Bank made a key decision that would result in the creation of one of the nation's largest bone tissue processing facilities.

When bone tissue is donated, it must be processed in accordance with FDA regulations. This processing is costly but critical. Small transplant banks are often overwhelmed by these processing costs and sometimes unable to accept donations as a result. Mile High Transplant Bank proposed a radical solution to this problem.

The nonprofit organization decided to design and construct a bone tissue-processing facility that would meet FDA requirements and allow for the eventual processing of 800 donors. The idea was that the facility would pay for itself by agreeing to charge a reasonable fee to process bone tissue from communities that could not afford to process their own donations. In February 1993 the doors to the new 18,000-square-foot building opened on Harvard Avenue and the processing of tissue from about 150 donors began.

Just one month later, two organizations – Mid America Transplant Services of St. Louis and The Regional Organ Bank of Illinois in Chicago – approached Mile High Transplant Bank with yet another radical idea. Although each of these organizations recovered both organs and bone tissue, they shared core philosophies with Mile High Transplant Bank and wanted to form a partnership between the three nonprofit organizations. To enhance service to local donor communities while achieving maximum cost efficiencies, it was agreed the partnership would handle only bone tissue. The new alliance became a nonprofit organization called AlloSource in January 1994.

Considered one of the strongest materials on earth, bone is widely used in a variety of operations because it grows into the patient's existing bone and has a low immune response. Unlike metal implants, bone grafted to bone eventually forms what can be called a perfect repair. Many bone grafts even stimulate bone growth in the recipient, which currently cannot be done synthetically.

As AlloSource, the partners were able to take advantage of economies of scale in the bone tissue processing arena. AlloSource processed the bone tissue for each partner, placing separate labels on products for each partner and returning the products to the communities of origin. During this time, Mile High Transplant Bank merged with Colorado Organ Recovery Services, the

designated organ procurement organization for Colorado and Wyoming, and became known as Donor Alliance. Costs were quickly reduced but the partners realized they could eventually be competing on the distribution end of the process. In November 1995, the three decided to restructure not only each partner but AlloSource as well.

“AlloSource is successful because of planning,” says Jeff Sandler, president and CEO. “We continually look to the future and watch for potential changes in our industry. When we see those changes, we adjust.”

As part of the restructuring, each partner agreed to recover bone tissue and continue their leadership roles in maintaining public education and hospital donation programs in their own areas. As a result, AlloSource could concentrate on processing, research and product development, marketing and distribution. Labels began bearing the AlloSource name and distribution centers were created in Chicago, St. Louis and Columbia, Missouri.

Advances in technology constantly drive new discoveries in bone-tissue processing. While traditional bone grafts are still made from pure bone, science soon created methods to combine other products with bone to produce better bone grafts. AlloSource provides bone that is combined with calcium sulfate, for example, which can be used as a putty or formed into pellets to create a variety of products that are more useful for a surgeon and more beneficial for a patient. AlloSource products like these are used frequently in a variety of common surgeries such as hip and joint replacements, spinal and cervical fusions and ligament and cartilage repair. AlloSource bone tissue products are even used in tumor surgeries.

In April 1999, another alliance was formed with the University of California at San Diego Regional Tissue Bank on a contractual basis. At the end of 1999 AlloSource processed 1,350 donations, creating revenue of \$19.5 million and distributing 66,000 bone grafts nationwide.

The continued success of AlloSource meant a new facility was necessary in order to keep up with donations. Anticipating this development, AlloSource broke ground on a 40,000-square-foot facility on Troy Circle that same year, several miles south of the original building. The new facility will have the capacity to process 4,000 donations. That increased capacity will be critical as more and more of the baby boom generation reaches retirement age. Spinal and hip injuries are more prevalent in senior citizens, which places higher demand on bone grafts. Continuing research into synthetic alternatives may ease the demand but AlloSource products will still be required to aid in bone regeneration and keep costs reasonable.

More than 130 employees work tirelessly to carry out the family’s wishes when a donation is made. Striving to provide useful products at a reasonable price, AlloSource works closely with its partners to ensure that tissues in highest demand are returned to the communities of origin to benefit patients of all ages. Field employees work directly with physicians to determine the types of products most in demand and beneficial to patients. The company also supports its partners’ public education programs, believing continued education in the bone tissue donor program will help people see the good that can come from tragedy.

Science fiction novels predicted many fantastic things in the 1900s but few, if any, foresaw the kinds of strides that could be made when a passion for life was involved. From the scientists working on new discoveries to the families struggling over extremely personal and difficult decisions in a hospital room, passion for life is undeniable. Goals for the future are many, but AlloSource's ongoing success is a testament to an unbreakable commitment to the circle of life shown by hundreds of people on a daily basis.