

OBITUARY

Community activist John Monahan dead at 56

By CHARLES ALEXANDER



John Monahan

Nine years ago gay human rights activist and former Triangle Foundation president John Monahan was given an exceedingly rare gift - the transplanted heart of a 16-year-old youth.

The transplant gave John a new lease on life, and he devoted what he called "his second chance at advocacy" to providing important, if at times controversial, Triangle Foundation leadership for our Detroit-area and state-wide LGBT community.

He was a founding board member of

Triangle Foundation and served as president and chair of its board of directors.

"I have no idea who the young man was," John once remarked. "If he were straight, he became an activist by unique circumstance. If gay, he benefited our cause in a way I'm sure he never imagined possible. In a sense I've lived these past years with the heart and soul of two persons. You can imagine what that realization has meant to me in my outlook on life and my work."

John died early New Year's Day at Henry Ford Hospital, where he had been hospitalized for the past several weeks, recovering from hip surgery and at the same time undergoing daily kidney dialysis. He had been taking drugs to allay organ rejection since his initial heart transplant.

John is survived by no family members. Among those close to John were Jeffrey Montgomery, Triangle Foundation executive director and Dr. Henry Messer, human rights activist and also a founding member of that organization.

"John was a kind and sensitive guy outside of work," said Montgomery. "As head of the Triangle Foundation he was dedicated but sometimes inflexible in his approach to handling organizational strategy and delegating responsibilities.

He stepped on a few toes, but when you're calling the shots for an organization that's growing dramatically, that happens.

"I think John realized he needed to take time out for personal needs. He wanted something of a life apart from activism. He spent the past two years socializing, painting, traveling, dating and taking it easy. But he remained an important voice at Triangle."

"John played a key and seminal role in getting the Triangle Foundation established and operational," said Messer. "He was a bridge builder between Detroit's black, white, and Hispanic communities. He knew how to listen and to get others to listen as well. And, importantly for me, he was a friend who could be counted upon.

"He saw Triangle Foundation grow from a dream to a far-reaching reality."

A memorial celebration of John Monahan's life will be held at 2:00 p.m. on

Sunday, January 20, 2002, at the Unitarian Universalist Church, 4605 Cass

Avenue, Detroit. Memorial contributions may be made in John's name to Triangle Foundation; 19641 West Seven Mile; Detroit, Michigan; 48219.