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## **Body donations help UC train doctors of the future**

By Lori Kurtzman Enquirer staff writer

### **Those who gave to be honored at ceremony**

They met as teenagers in Eden Park.

Janet and Walter.

Both were good-looking, slender kids with dark hair and sweet smiles. She liked to collect things. He was into fishing. They married on Janet's birthday and had seven children and celebrated their 50th anniversary with a limo ride.

Both grew old, both got cancer, both died from it. She went first, in 2002. He followed less than two years later. Neither liked the fuss of a funeral. Neither had one.

And that was the life of Janet and Walter Bennett. It's also the story behind two bodies that ended up at the University of Cincinnati College of Medicine to be studied by UC's medical students, all of whom dissect a cadaver during their first-year gross anatomy course.

Between 300 and 350 people die and leave their bodies to UC in a given year, said Gina Burg, coordinator of the body donation program. More than 12,000 future donors have registered and the program is one of the largest in the country.

Ultimately regarded as a learning instrument, the dead still have their stories: who they were, how they died, why they donated their bodies. Today, the college will honor those stories during its annual memorial service for friends and family of body donors.

The Bennetts, whose cremated remains were buried Thursday in a plot for donors at Spring Grove Cemetery, are among the 150 who'll be recognized at the event. One of their daughters, 47-year-old Vicki Knepfle, will be there to say a final goodbye.

For her parents, body donation hadn't even been a thought, said Knepfle, an Oakley mother of two. Then Janet's brother got sick.

Carl Witschger was a bit of a loner who'd had a tough life and made no plans for his death, Knepfle said. Body donation seemed a good plan - it was convenient, it was inexpensive (the only cost to the family is the transportation of the body to the college) and it was a way to help students learn about the body.

So Carl signed up. When he died, his body went to UC and was ultimately cremated last year, when students were finished with it. Having learned about the process when Carl was exploring it, the Bennetts decided they wanted to donate their bodies, too, Knepfle said.

UC has no shortage of bodies, Burg said, and does not solicit people to donate.

But some donors worry about the stretch of time between when the donor dies and when the body is cremated. It can take years, and when a family gets notice of the cremation and burial - they can also request to receive the ashes - it can dredge up old, mournful feelings. Some also worry about what will happen to their remains, especially after hearing about scandals at places such as UCLA, where the willed-body program was suspended last year after its director was arrested on suspicion of selling body parts.

But Knepfle said there was no trepidation in her parents' decision. It happened just as they wanted: They both went to UC, Janet at age 74 and Walter at 78. Medical students explored them both, a head-to-toe dissection. They were cremated and buried. Together.

Students are "getting knowledge," Knepfle said. "And our parents are helping them."

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