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Posted on Wed, Jan. 18, 2006

Two more bodies — live ones — for 'Body Worlds' show

By Peter Dobrin
INQUIRER CULTURE WRITER

Walking through the "Body Worlds" exhibition at the Franklin Institute, taking in the diaphragms and slices of human cadavers and fully erect circulatory systems on display, one wonders:

Who *were* these people who donated their bodies to Gunther von Hagens, the German P.T. Barnum of anatomy who authored the traveling show?

Shawn Petri can answer that one:

Him.

Well, not him yet. Maybe not him soon.

But Petri, a 31-year-old chief financial officer for a Blue Bell pharmaceutical consulting firm, has signed the paperwork that will turn over his body to von Hagens after death, allowing him to do with it what he will.

Ideally, Petri would like to be in the part of the exhibition with the basketball player, the bike-rider and the bodybuilder.

"Not that I'm anything like that," said Petri. "But if they ever decide they need my demographic, a normal white guy who is 5' 7", 155 pounds, who wears glasses, that would be me."

Petri might have competition. Contrary to what viewers who consider the show repellent might think, von Hagens will probably not want for biological material in future shows. According to a spokeswoman for the show, 142 Americans since 2004 have registered to become subjects of the plastination process, a method of preservation that replaces bodily fluids and fat with silicon.

"Body Worlds" has posted some of the strongest attendance numbers for the Franklin Institute since the opening of its Futures Center: 220,000 visitors since opening Oct. 7. Five future Pennsylvania donors have signed on the dotted line - from Douglassville, Arnold, McKeesport, Mohnton and Sanatoga.

"It's the ultimate organ donation," said Petri.

Chrissy Jenks signed up even before she saw the show. After reading about it in the newspaper, she looked up the Web site and clicked on the link for "body donation," she said.

"I just wanted to give my body to something that would be useful," said the 19-year-old University of Delaware nursing student. "My roommate and best friend, Heather, thinks it's a great idea. My mom was cool with it."

To donate, von Hagens' Institute for Plastination asks U.S. donors to complete a four-page form and return it to him in care of New York University, where he is a visiting professor at the College of Dentistry. By signing the form, donors agree to have their body transferred to the nearest embalming facility under the supervision of von Hagens. (The Institute for Plastination won't pay for the transportation, the form says.) Von Hagens reserves the right to sell "the specimen" to "educational establishments."

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to see the specimen to educational establishments.

Two witnesses are required at signing. The form suggests that if relatives of the donor object to the donation, a lawyer should witness the signatures.

Traditional organ donation is not precluded by donating a body to von Hagens, the form says, though that idea is stated on the part of the document that is a set of "recommendations rather than binding terms."

The donor's consent can be withdrawn at any time - in writing, with the signature of two witnesses.

Petri and Jenks cited their desire to be useful after death. But both were also impressed with the "Body Worlds" show, the spectacular realness of which was part of the draw to donation.

"Impressed is putting it lightly," said Petri. "Blown away is more like it. It's something I was waiting to see for years. It's real. It's not fake, it's real people.

Petri said he has no strong opinions about life after death, and said his wife doesn't object.

Her feeling was, 'You're probably going to blow up or die in a big way, so good luck to them if they can do something with you.'

Contact culture writer Peter Dobrin at 215-854-5611 or pdobrin@phillynews.com. Read his recent work at <http://go.philly.com/peterdobrin>.

"Body Worlds" runs through April 23 at the Franklin Institute, 222 N. 20th St. Tickets cost up to \$26.75, with discounts for seniors, students with identification, military personnel, and children 11 and under. Evening tickets, from 5 to 9 p.m., are \$10.50 to \$14.75 (the rest of the museum is not open at those times). Timed tickets and reservations are available. Information: 1-877-801-2639 and www.fi.edu.

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