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Guest opinion: In loving memory of a legendary lifesaving icon John W. Sheppard

Dr. Nanda Regmi Special to The News-Press

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When I became the first elected president of Blood Donors of America (BDA), a 501c3 nonprofit charity, I was on a quest to gather likeminded volunteers who could educate and encourage the next generation of blood volunteers. So far, I have not encountered any other organization established with the sole mission to engage the community through blood donation and health education .— except BDA.

BDA's genesis, in 2009, lies with its primary mission to create awareness of blood donation and its relationship to a healthy lifestyle. It's important to note that a benefit of blood donation is the free pre-donation health screening. From the start, the goal was to serve hospitals through blood donations while educating communities around America about blood donation and its relationship to the donor's health.

BDA was originally largely constituted of Nepalese Americans, who with a short history of being in the USA were missing a root linkage with American communities. In such circumstances, I had a dream to introduce BDA's noble mission to American communities and unite as many blood donors as possible to create a more giving, more engaged, and more informed communities. At our first convention in Dallas, TX in 2016, we adopted these mottos: "Assimilation with society through blood donation" and

"Entire world constitutes but a family".

Johnny was an important part of making these slogans a reality.

I first heard about John W. Sheppard through a Google search. I read about an extraordinary individual who was awarded with the Guinness Record Certificate for whole blood donations, at 315 verified whole blood pints. I got in touch with Lee Health Blood Center of Fort Myers and with their assistance 6 months later I was able to contact Johnny. I asked him if he would

join BDA as an honorary member. On February 26, 2018, Johnny sent me a hand-written letter gladly accepting. He was chief guest at BDA's second convention in Atlanta in 2018. Most recently he was a special guest to BDA's third convention held in May 2021. Johnny was a true teacher, a good friend, and a mentor to the entire BDA family.

In our combined effort to spread awareness, BDA generated a documentary in his name "Johnny with BDA" in 2019 (available at: <http://blooddonorsofamerica.org/>). Johnny knew the BDA family closely and was a member to admire. He introduced BDA and blood donors with Nepali origins to the larger American community through his article on News-Press in 2018: "Blood Donation experience memorable to me". Johnny also selflessly participated in BDA's memorial trust fund project: "BDA- Ira memorial scholarship trust" established in Nepal in 2021 to honor BDA life member Mrs. Ira Acharya, who passed away at 59 in 2019 in her Dallas home.

BDA family, well-wishers alike are deeply saddened by the passing of Johnny, a great icon, blood donor, and most importantly close friend at the age of 89 on February 4, 2022. In this difficult time, I wish his departed soul a heavenly peace. We also offer our deepest condolences and heartfelt sympathy to the Johnny's bereaved family members.

To honor his legacy of selfless service the BDA family organized a nationwide synchronized blood donation event last month to celebrate the life of a titan with at least 27 confirmed donations from Texas, Colorado and Ohio. Johnny is no longer with us, however, his 378 pints of whole blood donations and endless lessons to the next generation of donors will keep his memory alive. I invite you to help us do so.

Long live Johnny,

Dr. Nanda Regmi, Immediate Past President and Chief Adviser, BDA.