



Discover **Bose®** performance for your iPod®



Expand and explore 

**WATCH IT!**  
24/7 News, Sports, Biz & Entertainment Videos

# BIG TOWN BIG HEART

CELEBRATING NEW YORKERS WHO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

**DAILY DISH** 

REGISTER | HEADLINES

SEARCH FOR  IN

CLASSIFIEDS | HELP

HOME NEWS & VIEWS SPORTS ENTERTAINMENT BIZ/MONEY BOROUGHES CITY LIFE SERVICES

**Ad Links**

**Knee Pain?**

Learn about Stryker Knee Replacements Designed with Women in Mind  
www.aboutstryker.com

**Rates have dropped.**

Refinance your mortgage and lock in a low interest rate today.  
www.nationalhomes...

**Too busy for a degree?**

Don't sacrifice your current job for a new career. Get a degree online  
www.ClassesUSA.com

**Hylexin Eye Cream**

Serious Dark Circles? Try Hylexin. Buy Directly From The Manufacturer!  
http://www.Hylexin....

[Buy a link here](#)

## Three decades of giving the gift of blood

74-year-old Wilbur Armstrong makes uncomfortable plasma donation twice a month

By ALAN KRAWITZ

As New Yorkers prepare for yet another holiday season, much attention is paid to the spirit of giving in the form of charitable contributions, community service and help for the less fortunate.

For more than 30 years, Long Island resident Wilbur Armstrong has embodied that spirit of giving and transcended community service - but not by giving money to sidewalk Santas or volunteering at the local soup kitchen.

Every other Thursday, Armstrong, who is 74 and legally blind, takes three different buses from his home in Hempstead for the very uncomfortable process of donating lifesaving blood plasma at the nonprofit Long Island Blood Services in Lake Success.

"I first started donating whole blood in 1974," says Armstrong, clad in green corduroy pants, brown shoes and a red, white and blue sweater. "I started donating platelets only in 1993. You can actually donate platelets every three days since the body replenishes them quickly."

One can't help but be impressed by the 6-foot, 165-pound Armstrong as he lays perfectly still in his dentist-like blue chair in the intimidating donation room with a needle stuck in each arm.

The needle in Armstrong's right arm draws blood into a centrifuge that separates the blood into platelets and plasma. Then, the blood is returned to the body-minus platelets - through the left arm.

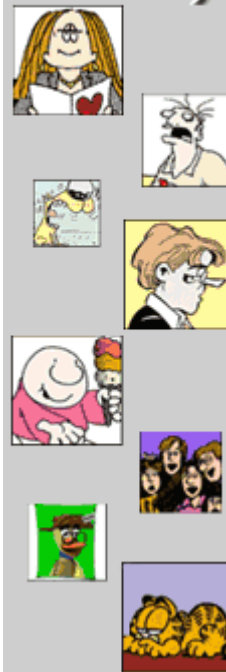
Donors report that the blood feels very "cold" coming back to the body due to anti-clotting factors added to the returning blood.



Farriella for NEWS

**Wilbur Armstrong has made more than 215 blood donations since 1974.**

New York Daily News  
**Comics and Games**



**REFINANCE TODAY**  
**3.9%**

**\$250,000 MORTGAGE FOR \$833/MONTH. GET FREE QUOTES. BAL CREDIT OK!**

"I feel that I'm helping people; even though I don't really know who the people are," says Armstrong, who is treated as something of a rock star at the center. "This doesn't take anything away from me but time."

The fragile, coveted platelets are used as clotting factors for cancer patients undergoing chemotherapy, hemophiliacs and accident victims of all types in addition to a host of other disorders.

"The word hero is often overused but not in Wilbur's case," says Ralph DiSalvo, a donor specialist with the center. "He's a dedicated, special individual who truly believes in what we do here at the center."

According to DiSalvo, there is always high demand for blood platelets since they have a very short shelf-life and must be transfused within five days of donation. By submitting to the time-consuming and uncomfortable process of platelet donation, Armstrong is doing the work of about 12 different donors.

By contrast, whole blood has a rather long shelf-life of 42 days but can only be donated once every 56 days due to the amount of time the body needs to make new red blood cells.

Armstrong says he was inspired to donate by several younger people, many only in their 30s, from his old neighborhood in Flushing and Corona, Queens, that died from various types of cancer.

"I decided to help the best way I could," says Armstrong, who has made more than 215 blood donations since 1974.

Moreover, Armstrong says that while the privacy of blood donors and recipients is held in the strictest confidence, he knows for certain that in 2000 his donated platelets helped save the life of a 78-year-old woman who was suffering from leukemia.

Armstrong, who is now No. 3 on the donation center's all-time list of leading donors, retired from the New York City Transit Authority in 1991 as an assistant electrical engineer specializing in the design of subway station lighting.

"When I worked, it was even more difficult to get to the donation center on time," he says. "I worked for the Transit Authority for 30 years but I'm retired now so it's easier for me to get here."

Armstrong nowadays keeps busy by dabbling in photography, gardening and staying active in his church.

"I'm never bored," he says. "There's always something going on."

"He's our most interesting donor," says Carol, a volunteer at the center, who preferred not to give her last name. "He feels he has to give 'back' to the world. Imagine. I think he gives back quite a bit. He's very special."

Most blood donation sessions are usually followed by a period of recovery, where Armstrong says "You can sit down, have some snacks and juice while running your mouth."

Marion Fox, unit manager and 25-year veteran of the donation center, says that Armstrong is also a "big help" in getting other people to become platelet donors.

RefinanceSave.co

Fox compared blood donation to a "social event," where donors get together, talk about their relatives and compare notes on the state of world affairs.

She appealed for more donors to sign up, either for whole blood or platelets. Fox says that even kids as young as 16 can donate blood with parental consent.

Armstrong says that he has his eye on the No. 1 spot on the donation center's all-time list donors.


"I plan to continue donating for as long as I'm healthy enough," he says.


For more information on how to become a blood or platelet donor, contact the New York Blood Center at (800) 933-2566 or visit their Web site at [www.nybloodcenter.org](http://www.nybloodcenter.org).

\*\*\*


Do you know a New Yorker who makes a difference? E-mail us at [BigTown@nydailynews.com](mailto:BigTown@nydailynews.com).

**Originally published on December 14, 2006**

 [Fresh stories hot off the site every day via RSS!](#)

 [Have stories like this emailed right to your inbox!](#)

 [Email this story](#)

 [Printer-friendly version](#)



---

[Home](#) | [News & Views](#) | [Sports](#) | [Entertainment](#) | [Business](#) | [Boroughs](#) | [City Life](#) | [Services](#)

All contents © 2006 Daily News, L.P.  
[Terms and Conditions of Use](#) | [Privacy Policy](#)