

Branch supports CCA who donated kidney

Buffalo-Western New York Branch 3 member **Kimberly Zielkiewicz** was determined to help save the life of a man in need of a kidney donation, even if it meant losing her job as a city carrier assistant (CCA) or going without pay while she recovered from donation surgery.

“Regardless of the outcome money-wise, I was going to find a way to do it,” said Zielkiewicz, who lives in West Seneca, NY. “I can’t look someone in the eye and say, ‘I can’t help you, for financial reasons.’”

She didn’t have to worry. Zielkiewicz underwent the donation surgery last November, and with the support of her branch, she was quickly ready to carry the mail again—and she managed to pay the bills while recovering.

“Let me say how incredibly proud I am of this union,” she said. “They have far exceeded what help I thought they would provide for me.”

Zielkiewicz’s journey to becoming a kidney donor began when she saw a truck in a grocery store parking lot bearing a sign asking for potential kidney donors with Type O blood to step forward. She soon learned that a donor had already been found for the man, 51-year-old Bob Parczewski, also of West Seneca. But when she heard that the donation was canceled just days before the surgery, and Parczewski had to search all over again for a new donor, the CCA was inspired to sign up as a potential donor.

“While delivering the mail, I was eating my lunch under a tree,” she recalled, “and I thought, ‘I’m going to call.’ Come to find out, I’m a match.”

After a battery of physical and

psychological screenings, Zielkiewicz was approved as a donor. The doctors told her that carrying mail probably helped by keeping her in good shape.

The surgery went well: “As soon as they took the kidney out of me and put it into him, it started working like it was meant to be there,” Zielkiewicz said. She and Parczewski bonded over their common Polish heritage as well.

But recovery from a kidney donation takes weeks, and as a CCA, she had no guarantee that she’d have a job when she was back on her feet, nor paid leave or other benefits to rely on while she was not working.

In short order, her branch came to her aid. The steward in her station, **Jim Fatig**, set up a web-based fundraising site to benefit Zielkiewicz. Helped by donations from some local businesses and a hat passed around at the branch Christmas party, the efforts raised several thousand dollars to sustain Zielkiewicz while she recovered. “No way did we expect for that to happen. It’s amazing we got as much as we did,” she said.

Though sick-time donation was not an option, postal employees did donate some leave time to Zielkiewicz.

Despite the risk of losing the opportunity to return as a carrier, Fatig said, “she had the determination to help someone she didn’t even know.” Even postal patrons on Fatig’s route ask about her and say they want to help her get back to work.

“We’re trying to do our best to help her out,” Branch President **Larry Kania** said. “She was amazed at what a tight organization we are.”

Last month, Zielkiewicz received



CCA Kimberly Zielkiewicz met her kidney recipient, Bob Parczewski, on the day that both of them were leaving the hospital (above). They’ve since bonded over their shared Polish heritage (below).



word that the post office wanted her back on the job. She was scheduled to begin working part-time on a trial basis at the end of February, and to ease into full-time work when she is ready.

“I’m incredibly proud of my union brothers and sisters for their support,” Zielkiewicz added. “Even now it brings tears to my eyes. That is what a union’s about—they help you when you need help.”

Zielkiewicz has no intention of slowing down. After she recovers, she plans to run a 5K at the Transplant Games of America in Cleveland in June. **PR**