

# After years on registry, carrier made a match to donate marrow

**A**long with many other volunteers in her town several years ago, Burnsville, MN, letter carrier **Deb Ochetti** responded to an appeal in her local newspaper to help save the life of a stranger with leukemia by volunteering to donate her bone marrow.

She wasn't a match. But that didn't end Ochetti's chance to be a hero, because a record of her DNA was saved in the national "Be the Match" registry.

Four years later, in March of 2015, the Minneapolis Branch 9 member received a phone call: She was a match to someone else who needed a donation.

Ochetti didn't hesitate to help. "I learned that my individual was a very sick person," she said. Ochetti quickly began the process of donating her tissue to help the anonymous stranger.

"There's a lot of legwork leading up to it," she said. "I was amazed." She had to review paperwork to assure she understood the process and risks, and to sign consent forms. Then it was on to the physical exams.

Ochetti, who has carried the mail since 1987, then had to decide between two ways to donate. Traditional bone marrow donation involves a surgical procedure that draws marrow directly from inside the donor's hip bone. The tissue is then transplanted into the recipient. However, a new procedure called peripheral blood stem cell (PBSC) donation extracts stem cells from the blood—special cells that help form new blood that can be donated to the recipient for treatment instead of bone marrow.

She was willing to do whichever procedure the patient required, but the anonymous patient's doctors said either would work, so Ochetti chose stem cell donation.

"It all came down to the need to travel," she said. Bone marrow donation would require her to go to the same hospital as the recipient.

"It was all anonymous, so I didn't know where I would be traveling to," she said. "Thankfully, there was a location where I could donate stem cells" in nearby St. Paul, MN, where the cells could be extracted and then sent to the recipient.

"Had she needed the other, though, I absolutely would have traveled out of state, or even out of the country," Ochetti said.

Ochetti was given a series of injections of a drug that prepared her body for the stem cell extraction by boosting the number of those cells in her blood. On the day of the extraction at the St. Paul facility, a special machine drew her blood, separated and stored the stem cells, and then pumped the blood directly back into her body in a closed loop. The process took several hours.

She experienced a few aches and pains as side effects of the injections, but they didn't last long. "I just looked at it as all the stuff that I endured with my body was a temporary thing, and it would subside," Ochetti said.

"The idea of giving life to someone else? In a heartbeat, I would do it again and go through that," she said.

In recognition of her efforts to save the life of a stranger she had never met, Ochetti's branch presented her with an "Above the Call of Duty" award in 2015; in 2016, her postmaster nominated her for a USPS "Civil Servant of the Year" award.

Donation of bone marrow or stem cells can be used to treat more than a dozen diseases and disorders, includ-



**Deb Ochetti received an "Above the Call of Duty" award for donating her bone marrow to someone who needed a donation.**



ing leukemia and a number of blood and bone diseases.

The Postal Service is a partner of Be the Match, the organization that searches for donors and matches them with recipients. Thousands of postal employees and family members have joined the registry. Collecting a sample for the registry requires a simple swab of the inside of the cheek. For more information and to learn how to join, go to [bethematch.org](http://bethematch.org). **PR**