

Carrier donates kidney to family member

Fort Collins, CO Branch 849 member **Lauren Vande Walle** first learned on Facebook that she had a chance to save a life.

Vande Walle saw a post saying that her niece's husband, Jon Wegge, had been diagnosed with polycystic kidney disease, which causes cysts to grow around the kidneys, impairing their function. Without a kidney transplant, Wegge could die.

She immediately began the process of donating her kidney.

"I knew that this needed to be done," Vande Walle said. "It was great to be able to give something this big back to my family."

Before she could donate her kidney, though, Vande Walle, who has carried the mail since 2001, had to find out if she was a match. She already knew they had the same blood type, Type B, which was the first test to pass. At a donation center in Denver, she also was tested for certain proteins in the tissue of her body to make sure they matched sufficiently with Wegge's to avoid the rejection of the kidney by his immune system.

When she learned that she was a match with Wegge, Vande Walle, 58, began a battery of physical tests to confirm that she was healthy enough for the surgery and could remain healthy with just one kidney, and also that her donated kidney would thrive in Wegge's body.

She put aside the testing when another matched donor came forward—but just a week before the scheduled donation surgery last May, the donor was diagnosed with kidney disease and the surgery was canceled. That made Vande Walle's donation plans more urgent, so she went back to the donation center to complete the tests.

Her health and kidney were deemed suitable, and Vande Walle was cleared for the donation. She scheduled the surgery for as soon as possible. "I wanted to get it done quickly because I was taking care of their 'baby' for a month and I wanted to turn it over," she said. "I didn't want anything to happen to Jon's kidney."

In August.

Vande Walle traveled to University Hospital in Madison, WI, a hospital Wegge chose for its transplant expertise, where one of her kidneys was transferred to Wegge. The surgery was a success. "The doctor said my kidney was running like a race horse," she said.

Vande Walle was discharged from the hospital after two days; Wegge went home following a one-week stay. After eight weeks off work to recover, including three weeks of administrative leave that the Postal Service provides to employees who donate organs, Vande Walle is back on her route.

Living donation surgery involves the same level of risk to the donor as any other major surgery. While there is not much data on the long-term effects of organ donation, overall risks are considered to be low.

Vande Walle said she hoped other postal employees would consider

Lauren Vande Walle with Jon Wegge before the surgery



organ donation, especially because the Postal Service provides administrative leave. Also, she said, the donor doesn't pay medical bills and financial aid is available to some donors for other expenses, such as travel.

"I'd like to encourage more people to donate," she said. "There's really a big need."

She emphasized the importance of living donors. Because she gave her kidney, Wegge's prognosis was better than it would have been had he waited for a deceased donor, she said. A kidney donated by a living person starts working almost immediately, while a donation from a deceased person can take a month or more to recover its function.

"A person like me can get by with one kidney," Vande Walle said. "For him to receive a live donor kidney was huge.

"It's one of the best gifts you can give to somebody," she added. **PR**

Lassan appointed as Region 8 National Business Agent



Steve Lassan

NALC President Fredric Rolando has appointed Steve Lassan as national business agent (NBA) for Region 8 (Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi and Tennessee). Lassan replaces retired Region 8 NBA Pete Moss, a member of Gulf Coast Merged Branch 1374, who had served as NBA since being elected to the position in 2010.

“Our thanks go to Pete Moss for his many years of dedicated service to NALC members, and we wish him a happy retirement,” Rolando said.

Lassan, a member of Nashville Branch 4, joined the Postal Service as a city carrier in Nashville in 1985, and soon became a shop steward. He served as dispute resolution team (DRT) representative for the Tennessee District and then as an arbitration advocate for Region 8.

Branch 4 elected Lassan as branch secretary in 2004. That year, then-NALC President William H. Young appointed Lassan to serve as regional administrative assistant (RAA) for Region 8. **PR**

Letter carrier's bone marrow donation saves life

A decade ago, Honolulu, HI Branch 860 President **Howard Komine** added his name—and with a swab inside his cheek, a DNA sample—to a registry for potential bone marrow donors. Years later, his simple act may have saved a life. After learning that he was a match with a woman who was sick, Komine donated blood cells in December.

The registry showed that his DNA was a 97 percent match with the woman, who was suffering from Non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, a cancer of the white blood cells. “The doctors told me I was a 1-in-12-million match,” he said. “The woman had done chemo and radiation, but it didn't work.” A donation of Komine's blood cells was the last hope for saving her life.

“How could I not do it?” he asked.

Komine donated marrow cells using a simple, non-surgical procedure called peripheral blood stem cell (PBSC) donation. The same blood-forming cells that are found in bone marrow, and that can give life to someone suffering from certain cancers, also are found in the circulating blood. These cells were extracted from Komine's blood and injected into the woman's bloodstream.

The donation process began with a series of injections of a medication that increased the concentration of these

cells in his blood. On the day of the donation, Komine's blood was transfused to a machine that extracted the cells, before returning the rest of his blood to his body. The transfusion procedure, done at Kapi'olani Medical Center for Women and Children in Honolulu, took about four hours. After a day of recovery, Komine was back at work.

Komine's donated blood cells were sent immediately to be injected into the ailing patient. Aside from her age and sex, Komine doesn't know her identity or where she lives. He said the registration and donation process was simple and well worth the satisfaction of giving life to another.

“It was that easy,” he said. “We can



put ourselves on a registry and hopefully help another human being.”

Bone marrow donations can treat leukemia, lymphoma and other blood and bone marrow disorders. To learn how to join the registry of potential bone marrow donors, go to bethematch.org. **PR**

COLA: Cost-of-living adjustment

- ▶ Following the release of the December consumer price index (CPI), the projected fourth cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) under the 2016-2019 National Agreement is **\$291 annually**. This COLA will be based on the change in the CPI from the base index month to January 2018, with the previous three COLAs subtracted.
- ▶ The 2019 projected COLAs for the Civil Service Retirement System (CSRS) and Federal Employees Retirement System (FERS), which are based on

the CPI's increase between the third quarter of 2017 and third quarter of 2018, is **0.4 percent** and will be finalized with the publication of the September 2018 CPI in October.

- ▶ The 2018 COLA under the Federal Employees' Compensation Act (FECA) is **2.2 percent** following the release of the December CPI. This COLA is based on the change in the CPI between December 2016 and December 2017.

Visit nalc.org for the latest updates.