

Carrier donates kidney to woman in need

Letter carriers see yard signs on their routes every day, but not all of them help save a life. When **Matthew Duncan** spotted a sign on his route in November of 2021 that said, “KC Needs a Kidney,” he felt the need to act.

“I’ve seen signs and stuff before, but this time it felt like maybe I should do something,” the carrier, a member of Portland, OR Branch 82 and a Marine veteran, said.

Duncan went to the website listed on the sign, which took him to a local organ donation center, where he signed up for testing to see if he was a suitable donor for the woman who needed a kidney. Her name was KC Strader of Sherwood, OR, just outside Portland, and she was suffering from a life-threatening kidney disease. Duncan didn’t know KC and she wasn’t on his route—Strader’s friends and family had organized an advertising campaign to search for donor candidates, and the yard sign was part of that effort.

Matthew Duncan with KC Strader



An “altruistic” donation—the giving of an organ to a stranger—required a few extra steps. “You go through a huge amount of tests,” he said. “They wanted to make extra sure I was healthy. I went through every possible test you can think of.” The tests include screening for a tissue match to ensure that the donated kidney will not be rejected by the recipient and to ensure that the donor, and the donated kidney, are healthy and disease-free. The donation center also ensured throughout the process that Duncan understood the risks and was willing to follow through. Although most people have two kidneys, the National Kidney Foundation says that people with just one kidney can live normal, healthy lives.

Duncan, a 20-year carrier, is in his 50s, but he says that donors of his age are preferred because many kidney diseases can develop later in life, so older donors who have passed the age that those kidney diseases emerge are likely to have healthy kidneys.

As he went through a battery of questions and tests, the donation center told him he probably wouldn’t be a match for KC, but perhaps he would be a match for someone else who needed a kidney.

“But the craziest thing was I ended up being a direct match for her,” Duncan said. “Then I thought, ‘I have to do it.’ ”

After about three months of preparation, “you go under the knife and you’re minus a kidney,” he said. He underwent the donation surgery, which took nearly five hours, in March.

Recovery took about two months. Duncan took two weeks of administrative leave that USPS provides for employees who donate organs, and then his own sick leave. As a letter carrier

who walks many miles a day, he was in good shape and bounced back quickly, but because it was abdominal surgery, there was a restriction on how much he could lift, and that’s what kept him home longer.

The remaining kidney, he added, increases urine production to take up 25 to 30 percent of the slack when the other one is removed, so living with only one is easier than it sounds.

Duncan’s kidney donation came at a time when organ donation has reached a milestone: This year, the one millionth organ donation in the United States was performed. The first successful organ donation surgery occurred in 1954, according to the United Network for Organ Sharing, a group that coordinates organ donations nationwide.

Saving the life of a stranger through organ donation was a gratifying experience, Duncan said. “It feels like such a simple thing that any one of us could do,” he said. “It felt really good.” It’s not his first time. In 2008, Duncan donated bone marrow.

Since KC and Duncan were not family, they were not allowed to meet until a few months after the surgery. “She’s a really awesome person and just living her best life,” Duncan said.

“He is amazing and I’m so grateful and thankful for his gift and what he has done for me,” Strader wrote on the “Find KC a Kidney” Facebook page after meeting Duncan. “He is my angel and the person I prayed for.” Strader urged others to consider a kidney donation.

As Duncan delivers his route and travels around Sherwood, he occasionally sees some of the “KC Needs a Kidney” signs still standing—but with the “Needs” crossed out and replaced with “Got.” **PR**