



“Jay didn’t hesitate to enroll as Megan’s donor partner and, after passing the medical testing, they were approved.”

MATT NEFF, *assistant superintendent, Wedgewood G&CC, Powell, Ohio*

The lifesaving power of a selfless act

“I want to buy a house with you before I die.” Those were the words Megan McDaniel said to her husband Jay, superintendent at Kinsale Golf and Fitness Club in Columbus, Ohio, in early 2012 — not even a year into their marriage.

While on their honeymoon in July 2011, Megan began experiencing extreme fatigue and elevated blood pressure. What followed was three months of intermittent hospital stays culminating in a diagnosis of kidney failure.

Megan had undergone a kidney transplant while in college and, due to complications following her transplant, the kidney that she had received from her mother was now failing. Without another transplant, she faced daily dialysis treatments and, ultimately, a tragically early death.

Upon her diagnosis, Jay and several other family members and friends immediately volunteered to donate a kidney to her, but none were a match. Five months after her diagnosis, she was placed

on the Donate Life Ohio kidney transplant list, putting her in line for a deceased organ donor’s kidney.

The first call came, coincidentally, during a house hunting trip. A potential donor had been found and the final testing procedures were initiated. As would be the agonizing pattern that would repeat itself several times over the next 18 months, the donor kidney was not a match.

Almost as bad as the cycle of optimism followed by disappointment, was what Jay described as “the surreal and conflicted feeling of knowing that someone needed to die for Megan to live.”

By August 2012, it was apparent that Megan’s health was deteriorating to the point that time was no longer a

luxury she had. In a last-ditch effort to save his wife’s life, Jay posted a plea for donors on Facebook. Over 120 people applied. Again nothing — no suitable matches.

While anti-rejection medications reduce the need for perfect matches in most cases, Megan’s previous transplant made a close match more of a necessity. As a result of her previous transplant, she had not only her naturally occurring blood and tissue antibodies, but also antibodies from the first donor kidney. The combination of antibodies increased the chances that her body would reject a new kidney.

Megan was told she’d be a match with only nine percent of the world’s population. That seems like it would be a

pretty significant number of people given the earth’s population is around seven billion, but when you consider the fact that people aren’t exactly lining up to donate organs to people they don’t know, the odds of finding a match becomes pretty discouraging.

Unless you’ve lived it, it’s probably impossible to imagine dealing with the stress that comes with the possibility of losing your spouse, especially while working in a profession that can be as all-consuming as ours.

It would certainly be understandable if someone in that situation was not quite as focused or productive as usual. But not only was Jay still producing at a high level at Kinsale while also simultaneously pursuing a second college degree, he was faithfully supporting and advocating for Megan throughout her illness.

Finally, in 2013, a ray of hope. During a check-up with the transplant team at the Cleveland Clinic, a nurse mentioned the National Kidney Registry (NKR) to Megan and Jay.

The NKR is a non-profit organization dedicated to saving and improving the lives of people facing kidney failure by increasing the quality, speed and number of living donor transplants. Living donor transplantation has been shown to have better long-term outcomes than transplants from deceased donors. This is accomplished by enrolling donor/recipient

Continued on page 50

// ASSISTANT LIVING

Continued from page 18

pairs that are incompatible with each other and then creating links with other incompatible donor/recipient pairs. Many of these are termed “paired exchanges” meaning two donor/recipient pairs essentially swap kidneys.

Jay didn't hesitate to enroll as Megan's donor partner and, after passing the stringent medical testing required by NKR, they were approved for the program. The McDaniels were linked to nine possible NKR chains, but all of them fell through.

“Early one morning, less than a month later, Jay was wheeled into an operating room at the Cleveland Clinic to have one of his kidneys removed.”

Salvation came in the form of an oceanographer from North Carolina. He had applied to the NKR's Good Samaritan program, meaning he was volunteering to donate a kidney without a recipient partner. This man had decided to give a kidney to a complete stranger with no benefit to himself or anyone he knew. The guy “with no dog in the fight” ended up being a nearly perfect match for Megan.

Early one morning less than a month later, Jay was wheeled into an operating room at the Cleveland Clinic to have one of his kidneys removed and sent to a recipient in California. Later that afternoon, Megan received her donor kidney from the Good Samaritan in North Carolina.

One year later, Megan is healthy and living a full and normal life. They finally bought a house together but, more important, they can now look forward to living in it for years to come.

Matt Neff (mneff4@yahoo.com) is assistant superintendent at Wedgewood G&CC in Powell, Ohio.



SPECIALIZED TURF EQUIPMENT COMPANY

Quality. Innovation. Delivered.

1-888-325-2532

www.stecequipment.com

STEC Equipment is an industry leader in Specialized Turf Equipment distribution. Our commitment to quality products and impeccable customer service keeps you on schedule and ahead of competition.

EarthWay®
EV-N-SPRED®
FLEX-SELECT

FLEX-SELECT® F80S
You've never seen
anything like it!

EarthWay®
MADE IN THE USA

For information call 1-800-294-0671
or visit www.earthway.com
patents pending