

Former HHS classmates doing well after '09 kidney transplant

Written by Darci Tomky

“You never quite know how to thank someone when they do something like this for you,” said former Holyoke resident Rod Ellis. One thing is certain, Ellis knows he is very blessed to have received a kidney transplant from 1978 HHS classmate Clay Warren.

Life is now back to normal for Ellis after transplant surgery over a year ago. He said he basically has no restrictions, allowing him to enjoy life and even get out on the golf course every once in a while.

Ellis, who lives in Aurora, has much more energy, strength and stamina with his new kidney. Prior to the transplant, he would get really tired by 1 p.m.

His blood pressure is better now too, and he is gradually getting back on some of the vitamins and supplements he took before the surgery.

With no reactions to the transplant so far, Ellis only goes to the transplant center once every three months, with his blood drawn once every quarter as well. He takes two anti-rejection drugs and three other pills.

For exercise, Ellis rides his stationary bike and lifts light weights in addition to hitting the golf course. The only thing he has to stay away from is grapefruit, which happens to be the one food that would cause a bad reaction to the medicine he takes.

Ellis keeps in contact with his kidney donor and reported Warren is also doing great with no problems at all.

Looking back, Ellis' story began back in 2002 when he was diagnosed with Polycystic Kidney Disease (PKD). The genetic disease causes cysts to grow inside the kidney, slowing, and eventually stopping, kidney function.

By 2008, Ellis was at a stage four out of five stages of kidney failure. It was time to start looking for a donor.

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The next months were a roller coaster ride for Ellis and his wife Melodee when two individuals contacted Ellis as prospective donors, but both were declined after testing.

After coming back to his 30th class reunion in Holyoke that year, Ellis got the idea to put his need for a kidney donor on Facebook. Thanks to this great social network, former classmate Warren saw the news.

After much prayer and discussion with his family, this youth pastor from Puyallup, Wash. was certain he was the man for the job, even before he was tested for compatibility. Warren told Ellis he was “a gift from God.”

Months later, the two high school friends were ready for surgery to get Ellis the new kidney he desperately needed.

“The good Lord had chosen him to do this for me,” said Ellis.

A successful kidney transplant took place in Denver Sept. 3, 2009.

Now when he goes to the transplant center and sees other people still waiting for organ donors, Ellis said he feels so blessed. There is always a great need for transplant donors, and Ellis said if he could do something like that for someone else, he would.

Ellis encouraged readers who might be facing situations like PKD to start taking care of themselves now by keeping in touch with their doctors and by watching their diet, weight and blood pressure.

And for those seeking organ donors, Ellis reminds them to: “Never give up—there’s somebody out there for everybody!”

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