

## Finding a perfect match

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Downers Grove resident Marilyn Danko was recently honored at the National Kidney Foundation of Illinois breakfast for donating a kidney to her husband, Dan.

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Downers Grove Reporter

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Downers Grove, IL -

After 25 years of monitoring, Downers Grove resident Dan Danko learned his kidney was failing last year.

The options were dialysis or a cadaver transplant, the latter carrying a four-year wait list. The only other choice was a transplant from a living donor if he could find a compatible match.

Danko's closest relatives were all ineligible and his three children had a 50 percent chance of carrying the same hereditary disease that killed his father and was now affecting his kidneys. But a possible donor happened to be the match of his life, his wife of 31 years.

“My husband would probably be going on dialysis very shortly, and if I was a match, which I turned out to be, I'd rather just do that,” said Marilyn Danko. “If strangers can do it for people, I should be able to do it for my husband.”

### **Five to seven**

*Number of years most patients in Illinois must wait to receive a kidney transplant, according to the National Kidney Foundation of Illinois.*

On Oct. 20, Danko received one of his wife's kidneys and said he has been feeling much better, though he must maintain a strict diet and take 10 different medications. The new organ will likely last him the rest of his life.

Marilyn was honored May 19, along with 19 other donors, at a breakfast in Oak Brook sponsored by the National Kidney Foundation of Illinois.

Mary Schlereth, organ donation awareness programs associate, said the event may become an annual affair. Sitting with potential donors and 20 organ recipients, including Dan, the attendees heard speeches from medical professionals about the field. Individuals who had received transplants expressed their gratitude and encouraged others to give.

"These living donors have made the difference to these recipients," Schlereth said. "They've saved more than one life because of their living donation because it allows someone else to receive from a deceased donor."

Since giving up her organ, Marilyn said she has noticed little difference in her health with a smooth surgery and a recovery. While she has remained relatively quiet about her role, Dan has become an advocate of organ donations to help the 71,000 people that are waiting to receive kidneys in the United States including 3,500 in Illinois.

"I've had a lot of contact now with transplant recipients, and it's almost like a fraternity," Dan said. "It's probably changed me to be a lot more grateful than I was. It's really the gift of life. I've been given a second chance."