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MARIO RUIZ/Daily Herald

From left, National Kidney Foundation of Utah and Idaho CEO Deen Vetterli, Charley's Grilled Subs franchise owner Marcus Gilbert, Charley's employee Juan Delgado, and Charley's Marketing Director Betsy Wright stand for the media in front of Charley's Grilled Subs at the University Mall in Orem Tuesday, March 31, 2009. Charley's corporate offices donated \$10,000 to the National Kidney Foundation Tuesday. Gilbert donated a kidney to his employee Delgado in September 2008.

Wednesday, 01 April 2009

Kidney donation to Orem boy spurs others to help

Michael Rigert - DAILY HERALD

OREM -- The initiative and generosity of Marcus Gilbert, owner of a local sandwich store, already saved the life of an Orem boy, and his example has led to others helping those with kidney disease.

Gilbert, a Roy resident, owns two Charley's Grilled Subs franchises, including the one at the University Mall in Orem. In September, Gilbert donated one of his healthy kidneys to his employee, Juan Delgado, who was suffering from end stage renal disease.

Delgado, nearly fully recovered from the transplant surgery, said on Tuesday that he's back attending classes at Timpanogos High School and planning to return to work at Gilbert's store this summer.

"I'm almost 100 percent," said Delgado, who added that it's still hard for him to believe that his boss gave him a kidney after he had waited four years for one.

But Delgado's sister, Esmerelda, also an Orem employee of Gilbert's, and the one who initially informed her boss about her brother's medical condition, said the act was just like her boss.

"I'm glad for him doing what he's done," she said. "He's really nice."

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Delgado and his family were at the sandwich shop in the mall's food court Tuesday morning to celebrate the donation of \$10,000 from the Charley's Grilled Subs company to the National Kidney Foundation in Utah. Because of Gilbert's example and Delgado's story, the company in February dedicated a portion of each sub sold at all its locations during National Philly Cheesesteak Month to fight kidney disease.

While Delgado was hospitalized for about two weeks in his recovery process, Gilbert said it took him about seven to eight weeks to get back up to full speed again following the surgery.

"He felt better right away, and I didn't feel that good," he said. "It was a surprise for me that they said the donor actually has a longer recovery time."

Still, Gilbert said he'd do it all over again in a heartbeat. He said it's important for people to know that donors have no long-term side effects, and both a donor and a transplant recipient can go on to live long and healthy lives. He hopes others are willing to be kidney donors.

"I'm blessed to have been part of a miracle in someone else's life," Gilbert said.

Apparently his goodwill was infectious. While laid up in the hospital for a week following the surgery, Gilbert said he was personally visited by the CEO of Charley's Grilled Subs, Charley Shin, who wrote out a personal check to Delgado in the sum of \$10,000 to help cover his hospital bills.

Gilbert has continued to raise funds for Delgado at his two store locations with the hopes of eventually paying for the family's approximately \$100,000 in hospital bills. He said he'd rather Delgado concentrate on his education and going to college rather than having to worry about medical debts.

Those interested in making a donation to kidney patients on behalf of Delgado and others can go to www.charleys.com, click on the "Eat a Cheesesteak, Save a Life" icon and make a contribution.

Deen Vetterli, CEO of the National Kidney Foundation of Utah and Idaho, said the company's donation will go toward patient services, medical research at the University of Utah and public education programs about kidney disease and how to prevent it.

In Utah, she said, there are approximately 2,200 patients on dialysis, and of those, 230 are on the waiting list for a donor kidney. Nationally, 80,000 individuals with kidney disease are on waiting lists for transplants.

What's surprising, she said, is how many donors like Gilbert are willing to share a kidney with someone they hardly know or who are strangers to them, but who might die without it.

"The Good Samaritan ones are so heart-warming," she said.

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