

# BOND OF BROTHERS

Two superintendents, one email, a medical procedure and an example of personal sacrifice. How Brian Conn and Scott Dodson changed each other's lives.

By **Guy Cipriano**

**C**olleagues and supervisors use words such as pragmatic, cerebral and methodical to describe Brian Conn. Until last year, reason dictated nearly every decision in his personal and professional life, making him no different than thousands of other golf course superintendents.

Thinking with your brain is safe. Science-based decisions create job and personal security. Thwarting turf diseases and meeting budgets allow middle-aged managers to raise families in comfortable surroundings. A marriage spanning two decades, guiding children through the perils of grade school and maintaining steady employment are measures of superintendent admiration.

By any metric, Conn was a success, having ascended to the position of superintendent at Transit Valley Country Club, a venerable private club in East Amherst, N.Y., in 2015. His career included stints as a public course superintendent and assistant at one of Buffalo's revered private clubs. The Erie, Pa., native possessed a degree from Penn State University. He served multiple terms as president of the Western New York Golf Course Superintendent Association.

Conn developed a work-life balance that eludes people holding a similar job. He ate summer dinners with his wife, Jennifer, and children, Victoria and Noah, attended church and maintained hobbies away from the course, including running, canoeing and fishing. Superintendents working



Scott Dodson

Brian Conn

70-, 80- and 90-hour weeks were just stories to Conn. He never experienced a major surgery and replaced a tobacco addiction with training for races.

But, as 2016 ended, Conn was hurting. Last year didn't start any better. "I was yearning for something more in my life," he says.

Scott Dodson, the superintendent at neighboring Park Country Club, was also hurting. His right kidney was failing. Thirty percent, 20 percent, 7 percent. Every time Dodson visited the doctor, kidney disease, a result of being born with a scarred kidney, had eliminated more of the organ's functioning capacity.

Described as outgoing by everybody, including himself, Dodson kept the pain hidden as he guided Park Country Club through one of the biggest renovations since the club moved to its current Buffalo location in 1927. A pride over pain philosophy helped Dodson, the club's superintendent since February 1993, endure the demands of balancing regular golf course maintenance with project construction.

A year removed from a double-knee replacement surgery, Dodson showed abnormal signs as 2017 progressed. The perkier person on the grounds, with a toughness developed through playing and coaching hockey in his native Ontario, visited his office twice a day to shut his eyes. "I remember seeing him a few times on the course just sitting in a cart in one spot for 15 minutes," Park Country Club assistant superintendent Jim Frey says. Dodson admits to staying in wayward places even longer. "I spent an hour in one spot," he says.

Finally, in mid-September,

Dodson started dialysis, a time-consuming and emotional process of filtering waste and excess fluid from the blood, functions normally performed by a kidney. Dodson needed a new right kidney. A superintendent fighting his own pain was ready to give him his left one.

Dodson and Conn held similar jobs at private clubs separated by 5.1 miles – or to put it in Buffalo parlance, three Tim Hortons restaurants rest between Transit Valley and Park Country Club – and they were heavily involved in the same association. But, in the miracle world of living organ donations, they were almost strangers. "That's what amazes so many people," says the 48-year-old Conn, who donated his kidney to the 60-year-old Dodson on Jan. 9, 2018. "We were simply acquaintances."

### THE BROTHERHOOD

Colleagues? Nope. Relationships among Western New York superintendents run deeper.

"Anytime I text anybody or call anybody or email anybody it usually ends with an endearment: thanks, brother" says Thad Thompson, the superintendent at Terry Hills Golf Course in Batavia. "Literally, every time."

Thompson and Dodson have blood brothers in the business. Thompson's younger brother, Drew, is the superintendent at East Aurora Country Club in suburban Buffalo. Dodson's brothers, Paul and Bruce, are superintendents in opposite parts of Canada. A shared last name, though, isn't required for Western New York superintendents to borrow equipment, visit a neighboring course or trade ideas. Professional and personal help is always a text,



## Support and trust in the workplace

A supportive work atmosphere can help overcome a major obstacle involving an organ donation: temporarily stepping away from the job.

"Employers understanding the importance of helping their employees out is very important," says the University of Rochester Medical Center's Dr. Mark Orloff. "By and large, most of our employers are very positive about the impact of transplant on their employees' lives and they are very supportive of the time off. They understand the hardship a family goes through dealing with a major medical condition."

When Transit Valley Country Club superintendent Brian Conn mulled donating a kidney to Park Country Club superintendent Scott Dodson, he initially analyzed how the decision might impact his job. Meetings with Transit Valley's leadership made it easier for Conn to proceed with the donation.

"Brian, in typical fashion, was more worried about time away from the club and vacation hours," general manager/COO Mike Reilly says. "I said, 'Brian, what you are doing is just unbelievable and don't worry about a thing. Your team is going to cover you.' There are some strong guys that work under him who picked it up. One of the unique things about Buffalo is that part of their job is keeping the parking lot clean and clearing snow. His guys were very busy in his absence and they didn't miss a beat. That's a testament to his leadership."

Conn says the ability to trust his staff has helped him balance work and family through a nearly three-decade career. The trust in his current crew has expanded as he slowly returns to work following the Jan. 9 transplant. Conn is in his fourth year as Transit Valley's superintendent.

"I let people help me and work to get the most out of them," he says. "I'm kind of the opposite of 50 percent of our field, I think. They lack putting trust in people. Sometimes I'm on the other side to a fault – I put too much trust in people. But 99 percent of the time people come through for you. It's just human nature to want to do good for others. You reap what you sow. If you care for people, I think they care for you back, too."

Dodson received similar support from Park Country Club leaders and co-workers who observed his deteriorating condition because of kidney disease. But even in challenging and inspirational circumstances, a superintendent's prideful instincts can yield a reluctance to delegate.

"There was a point in time where I was one of those crazy guys that was nuts about working," Dodson says. "I have learned to kind of step back a little bit and get into the other part of my life, especially now with this happening. It changes your outlook. It changes your perspective. The job is obviously important, but it's not the end all and be all. You have to live your life."

call, swipe or click away.

Dodson needed serious help by last year. A dual citizen who lives in Fort Erie, Ontario, Dodson was placed on Strong Memorial Hospital's kidney donor candidate list in 2016.

Kidneys are the most donated organ, with close to 91,000 transplants occurring from Jan. 1, 2013 to Dec. 31, 2017, according to Organ Procurement and Transplantation Network data. But kidney demand far outpaces supply. The candidate list in the U.S. is approaching 100,000, with another 400,000 to 600,000 patients on dialysis, according to University of Rochester Medical Center nephrologist Dr. David DeWolfe. The average wait time to receive a kidney from a deceased donor in Western New York is around six years. Transplantation and dialysis are the two forms of life-sustaining support for kidney failure.

"Neither one of those completely replaces having normal, functional kidneys and no kidney disease," says Dr. Mark Orloff, the URMIC transplant surgeon who operated on Dodson. "However, transplantation is as close as you're going to get and that's a very, very big deal for society in general."

Thirty-one percent of kidney transplants in the last five years (28,340) involved an organ provided by a living donor, according to the OPTN. Although challenging to find, a living donation provides the best solution for a recipient because it can potentially prevent the need for dialysis, the new kidney is coming from a healthy individual and surgery can be accomplished in a "much more elective fashion," Orloff says. Historically, Orloff adds, "most donors come from a



The University of Rochester Medical Center's Dr. Mark Orloff, Dr. Randeep Kashyap and Dr. David DeWolfe were among the medical professionals who assisted in the kidney transplant involving golf course superintendents Brian Conn and Scott Dodson.

relative by blood or a relative by marriage."

Dodson couldn't find a donor within his circle of family and close friends. So, in a hallway at a regional turf seminar last March, he pulled aside Thompson, the then-President of the Western New York GCSA. Speaking to Thompson confidentially, yet like a brother, Dodson described the extent of his condition and his need for help. "I was totally shocked," Thompson says. "I don't think anybody had any idea he had kidney disease and he had been on a donor list for a year."

Once the emotion subsided, Thompson understood why Dodson turned to a fellow superintendent. "You go to your family when you need help," Thompson says. "That's the best way I can say it."

On his drive home, Thompson started outlining a letter in his head. He typed a draft into his computer, refining the letter multiple times over the next week. Thompson awaited Dodson's approval before sending the letter via email to a list consisting of Western New York GCSA, Finger Lakes Association of Golf Course Superin-

tendents and Central New York GCSA members. Thompson estimates between 150 and 200 association members received the following ...

**To All Members of the WNYGCSA, FLAGCS and CNYGCSA**

**Scott Dodson, our friend and fellow superintendent at Park Club in Williamsville, needs our help and support. Scott has been privately dealing with kidney disease for some time. The disease has progressed to the point where Scott is in need of a kidney transplant. He has not been on dialysis yet, and the best course of action according to his doctors would be to go from this stage of the disease to a kidney transplant.**

**New York State has very few transplant hospitals, so consequently, a large number of potential recipients. Scott has been on the kidney donor list at Strong Memorial Hospital in Rochester, NY for over a year.**



**The best option at this point would be to find a "live donor," meaning an individual who is a match could donate a kidney to Scott. A simple blood test is all that's required to see if you are a potential match. To make an appointment, please call Strong/URMC at 585-275-7753, ask for the Donor Coordinator and tell her that you would like to be tested as a potential match for Scott Dodson.**

**Thank you all,  
Thad Thompson**

"When I hit the send button, I was proud as hell," Thompson says. "Just 15 minutes before that, I got a response from Scott. I wanted him to proof-read it. He called me and was very emotional."

**THE DONOR**

Conn received, opened and read the email. The message incited lingering emotions.

"It was all so fast moving," he says while sitting across from Dodson last month. "Seeing the email ... This is the part of the

process I have only told to my wife and in my head so far. It's so hard to get out. But I was at a process in my life where I was searching for my path forward."

Victoria and Noah, who are 20 and 18, respectively, and attend nearby Erie Community College, were becoming adults. A lifelong Catholic, Conn started noticing different religious undertones being brought into the house by Victoria, whose boyfriend attended a Christian-based church. Victoria exposed Jennifer to the religion, and the pair urged Conn to give the church a try. Begrudgingly, Conn says, he attended services at the church, thus leaving a comfort zone to explore something different. Conn describes the services as "singy," which contrast his personality. "I'm not terribly outgoing in most cases," he says. But he found the sermons "rewarding" because they "filled you every week with what I think I was missing."

The personal metamorphosis continued when a pastor handed Conn the book "Engaged." One of the conversion steps, according to the book, which is guide to receiving more meaning from religious services, involved humbling one's own self. That step brought Conn to the most traumatic event of his life: the suicide death of his father, Ron, on Nov. 15, 2015. Ron turned 65 a day earlier, and Conn had chatted with him on the phone that day. Following the 2016 winter holidays and during the early stages of 2017, Conn and Jennifer entered what he calls "kind of a gray area of limbo."

"I started reading this book and come to find out, I was always trying to think with my brain and we always do that so much in my line of work,"

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“It came as a revelation shortly after I saw the email. There was something that drove me. My brain would have told me, ‘You can’t do this. You don’t have time for this. It won’t work out. Analytically, it doesn’t work with what you have on your plate.’ Something pushed me and thank God it did.”

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—Brian Conn, Transit Valley Country Club

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Conn says. "We are analytical thinkers, everything is science and human resources. Everything is on the surface. I broke myself. They say you have to break yourself. I started to think with my heart.

"It came as a revelation shortly after I saw the email. There was something that drove me. My brain would have told me, 'You can't do this. You don't have time for this. It won't work out. Analytically, it doesn't work with what you have on your plate.' Something pushed me and thank God it did."

Conn quietly started the donor process last spring, which includes thorough mental health, blood and diagnostic tests. Conditions such as high blood pressure, diabetes and obesity eliminate thousands of interested donors. Not only is Conn a runner, he boasts an O negative blood type, making him a match for almost every other potential recipient. Less than 7 percent of the population has O negative blood. "Until this process, I didn't know how valuable my blood type is," Conn says. Dodson's blood is type A positive.

During the mental evaluation, Conn mentioned his

father's suicide to the donor team, which included a social worker. "Any one of those people could knock you out during the process if they see something they don't like," Conn says. "I brought up the death of my father and all the sudden the room got quiet. I was thinking, 'Crap, should I have brought that up?'"

Personal and financial stability are other necessary donor characteristics. A supportive wife and children, along with a management job, checked those boxes. A potential donor also must have a work schedule that permits significant time off following the surgery. For a superintendent in a cold-weather region, winter affords that opportunity.

"What we are looking for are healthy people," DeWolfe says. "This is the one procedure we do to somebody in medicine where they do not personally benefit from the procedure itself. We need someone who's going to be able to come through the surgery themselves without any issues; they are able to take the time off and not lose their job; and they can live out the rest of their life having only one kidney."

Dodson didn't know a turf neighbor was maneuvering to give him a kidney. The pair saw each other at Western New York GCSA events and board meetings – Dodson also has served multiple terms as president – and Dodson was one of the first superintendents to welcome Conn to the association when he moved from Erie to Western New York in 1996. Beyond perhaps a quick equipment exchange, neither Dodson nor Conn remember spending significant time alone together. They respected each other's work and commitment to the industry, but they knew little about the other person's life or physical condition. "I had no idea Scott was going through any of this until Thad sent out the email on behalf of the association," Conn says.

Because of its architectural history and status as a former PGA Championship site, Park Country Club's renovation sparked curiosity throughout Buffalo, so Conn called Dodson last August to arrange a tour. Dodson gladly showed Conn the changes, and the pair then chatted with a few other Park Country Club employees. When the conversation ended, Conn



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“Our relationship has already changed. We’re closer. I love him like a brother.”

—Scott Dodson, Park Country Club

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asked Dodson if they could speak privately in Dodson's office. Conn revealed he had been pre-approved to donate Dodson a kidney.

"My first reaction was, 'Really?' Dodson says. "It wasn't even emotional at first. It was like, 'What are you talking about? No, you're not going to do that.' He just came out with it. Then I kind of regained my composure and literally looked at him, and remember this really, really, well ... It was like, 'Why? Why me?' The answer was so nonchalant: 'It's the Christian thing to do.' Those were his exact words."

Word started reaching others by mid-August that a donor stepped forward. Thompson says he was "overjoyed" when Dodson told him the letter helped.

"It was so surreal," Thompson says. "I had no doubt when we put out the letter that we would find somebody. Looking back on the research I have done since then, I found out that it was more of a miracle that it did work out. But at the same time ..."

Thompson's voice trails off. Why was he so confident the letter would help? "Because it's our organization. We're a family. People are going to step up in this business. That's the way it has always been."

## THE PROCEDURE

Reaching a Rochester, N.Y., operating room, required Conn to pass dozens of physical, emotional and stress tests. Somehow, a person known for being thorough in every life and work decision avoided the gory medical details until retreating to a hotel suite bedroom the

## Manage your lifestyle

Hypertension and diabetes are the leading causes of kidney disease, according to the University of Rochester Medical Center's Dr. David DeWolfe. Habits that lead to kidney disease are societal issues and not specific to a job or industry.

"Controlling stress is a very important part of health care in general," says the University of Rochester Medical Center's Dr. Mark Orloff. "There's not any one singular factor that is involved in driving people to in-stage organ failure. Stress is likely partly involved, so is lifestyle management of your diet, which really could come down to salt and eating healthy. Also, genetics are involved."

Park Country Club superintendent Scott Dodson was born with a scarred kidney, although a doctor didn't diagnose his condition as kidney disease until 15 years ago. Dodson also has type 2 diabetes. Meetings with dietitians throughout the organ transplant process are leading to revamped post-surgery eating habits. "It's nothing fanatical," Dodson says. "It's all about balance."

evening before the surgery.

With his wife and children in another room, Conn started watching an animated YouTube video of a kidney transplant. YouTube followed the video with an Oct. 30, 2017 "Today" show interview featuring popular entertainer Selena Gomez and actress Francia Raisa. The best friends used the public forum to reveal why Raisa, 29, donated a kidney to Gomez, who was suffering from the chronic autoimmune disease lupus. Complications stemming from flipped arteries required Gomez, 25, to undergo an emergency second

surgery.

"Watching that was the worst thing I could have ever done," Conn says. "Up until then I hadn't looked at anything or called anybody. I don't know what drove me to doing that. I look back on it and think, 'What the heck was I thinking?'"

Conn, surprisingly, slept well, rising around the same time a superintendent begins a work day. When Conn and his family arrived at the hospital at 6 a.m., they were sent to an unfamiliar basement waiting room. "You feel like you are in the castle of Dr. Frankenstein," he says. Conn closely studied URM's Strong Memorial Hospital layout on previous visits and figured they would be sent to a different room. He figured they would be the first people in the room, but they shared the space with 20 other people, including a pair of tussling teenagers. He also figured they would see Dodson and his wife, Brenda, who were staying in a separate hotel.

The donation was close to being cancelled in mid-November after a cardiologist detected what appeared to be a heart flutter while examining Dodson, nixing a scheduled stress test. An angiogram revealed no blockages, a major relief because Dodson's father, Arthur, a longtime golf course superintendent, experienced heart problems in his 60s. Conn encountered a similar pre-surgery scare when a chest MRI revealed spleen calcifications. Three weeks later, tests revealed a case of mononucleosis Conn experienced as a teenager caused the calcifications.

For Conn and his family, not

immediately seeing Dodson on the morning of the surgery felt different. Was Dodson involved in a car wreck? Did an alarm not beep? Did a last-minute medical situation develop? "We're 15 minutes from this," Conn says. "Just the pressure as it got closer and closer and just the mental burden of it not happening or getting pushed off ... You're so invested bracing yourself physically and mentally for this."

Tears filled the room as the Conns awaited Dodson and the surgery. The mood changed when Dodson, accompanied by Brenda, arrived and, in what many would describe as typical behavior, started cracking jokes.

Conn underwent surgery first, a procedure that lasted around three hours, according to Dr. Randeep Kashyap, the URM's transplant surgeon who operated on Conn. Dodson was placed in an adjacent room two-thirds of the way through the Conn's surgery. Once the kidney was removed, a 30-minute procedure Kashyap calls a "back-table operation" cleaned and prepared the organ for insertion into Dodson. "The goal is that the kidney should not stay on ice for too long," he says. "We kind of overlap both of these operations."

Donors at Strong undergo laparoscopic donor nephrectomy, a minimally invasive form of surgery designed to increase donor availability, while the recipient's surgery team performs an open procedure, Orloff says. A minimum of six, and potentially more than 10 trained Division of Solid Organ Transplantation professionals, participate in a transplant. And, in most cases, including Dodson's, the donated kidney

is placed below the diseased organ.

“The recipients’ kidney might be making some urine, but it has very little function,” Orloff says. “It might have a little blood flow. By and large, it’s a minimally nourished organ and it’s not causing problems. Sometimes there are reasons to remove that organ. For the most part, we leave those organs in place. It’s a fairly big deal to remove them unless there’s an infectious disease or blood pressure reason or cancerous reason to remove them.”

Neither Conn nor Dodson, whose surgery also lasted around three hours, grasped the magnitude of the procedure in its immediate aftermath. Conn spent four hours in a recovery room before seeing his family again and fielded a call from his grandparents in Florida. “I guess I had a con-

versation with them,” he says. “I don’t remember that.” Dodson, who has two children and a stepdaughter, asked Brenda to text two-third of his phone contacts, including co-workers.

The superintendents from neighboring clubs had their first post-surgery encounter the following day. Using a walker and receiving help from a physical therapist, Dodson shuffled into Conn’s room. “He was a bit annoying,” Conn says. “Because in Day 2, my pain level was way up and he was just the happiest guy you could be. I was like, ‘Just go away. Shut up.’”

Conn, a runner deemed in good enough shape to live without a vital organ, was humbled when Dodson lapped him during a therapy session. Two weeks following the surgery, while sitting next by a fireplace inside the Runyan Room of

Park Country Club’s castle-like clubhouse, Conn and Dodson traded barbs about their pre- and post-surgery conditions.

“He looked 75 before this whole thing happened,” Conn says. Without hesitation, Dodson glances at Conn and demonstrates his quick wit, “Oh yeah,” he jokes, “you looked 100 on that walk the first day buddy. I was lapping you. You were this old man walking on your walker.”

Consider the exchange a form of relationship building.

**THE FUTURE**

Somebody else’s kidney rests in Dodson’s body – and he couldn’t feel better. He juggled 14 pills in a container as he returned to Park Country Club two weeks after the surgery. He will gradually be weaned off numerous pills, although he must take three anti-rejection

medicines 12 hours apart – his alarm is set for 9 a.m. and 9 p.m. – every day for the rest of his life. Dodson must monitor his diet carefully and he faces temporary lifting restrictions.

But he’s no longer on dialysis, a taxing process that required three, four-hour sessions each week. When you’re on dialysis, you don’t always see the same faces in the clinic.

“It’s an eye-opener,” Dodson says. “You look at how many clinics there are, just in this region there are probably 40 alone. They operate six days a week, three shifts a day. I think at one time I’m trying to count the chairs at the one I was in. There had to probably be 30 chairs in there. The sad part is, you know what the end game is for 80 percent of the people – they’re not going to get a kidney. They’re older. That’s their life. There was one lady in there

**Waiting list candidates by organ type**



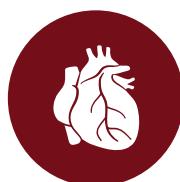
Kidney

**95,555**



Liver

**13,876**



Heart

**3,939**



Kidney/pancreas

**1,691**



Lung

**1,373**



Pancreas

**907**



Intestine

**255**



Heart/lung

**42**

Source: Organ Procurement and Transplantation Network data as of Jan. 18, 2018

who celebrated 20 years of dialysis. From the start, knowing what people were there on my shift ... By the time I left, there were four of them that weren't there anymore. You know where they are."

Dodson experienced less than four months of dialysis, undergoing his final session the night before the transplant. "There are very few people who can hold an active job and be on dialysis," Orloff says. "Yeah, there are some exceptions. But you're talking 15, 20 hours a week just shuttling back and forth. The majority of people on dialysis have to leave the workforce. Scott, because of his short time on dialysis, was in relatively good shape for somebody in kidney failure. You have to look at where he's going to be in six months or a year, and the reality is unlikely he would be working. He might be a couch potato."

The number of times Dodson must visit Rochester, a three-hour roundtrip drive, for blood work has already decreased. Doctors initially told him he wouldn't be driving for a month. He was cleared to begin driving less than two weeks after the surgery. He drove to Park Country Club, 20 miles from his home, to be interviewed for this story and an accompanying photo shoot. Following the nearly four-hour session, he drove to lunch at the nearby Creekview Restaurant, where he ordered a salad and bowl of chili. Conn sat in the passenger seat of Dodson's SUV.

Conn ordered a chicken wrap and coleslaw. His diet will permanently change because of the surgery. Once a go-to condiment at home, the Conns have removed salt from their

table. The donation cost Conn 30 percent of his kidney function, meaning he must drink at least three liters of water daily to protect his remaining kidney. He can no longer take anti-inflammatories because they can scar the kidney.

Like Dodson, Conn faces lifting restrictions when he returns to the work, which will represent a temporary change for an active superintendent who rakes, shovels and hauls alongside his crew. Neither superintendent is permitted to lift more than 10 pounds for the next three months.

Conn says he's been humbled numerous times since the surgery, including when he encountered two patients on the candidate list for a liver, in the emergency room. One of the candidates, a 5-foot-8 male, had spent 14 years on the list awaiting a deceased donor and was in the hospital to have 14 liters of fluid drained from his stomach. "It's just heartbreaking," Conn says.

Witnessing others endure extreme pain has turned the introverted Conn into an advocate for organ donation, a role that will likely expand when strangers begin learning his story. Orloff calls the donor community "tight-knit," with numerous organizations and associations conducting events such as golf tournaments and runs to raise awareness. Transit Valley is planning a charitable 5K, and Park Country Club and the Western New York GCSA will likely organize similar events. "It's kind of hard to do something heroic," says Jerry Lample, who served as Dodson's donor coordinator. "This is really something where you can change somebody's life on the micro level so intensely and



## Types of organ donation

### Deceased donation

You can declare your intentions to donate on your driver's license or by visiting the Donate Life America website (<https://registerme.org/>) to join your state's online registry. Letting your family and friends know about your decision is an important part of the process because family members are often asked to give consent for a deceased donation.

"We need to make sure everybody is registered to be a deceased donor," says the University of Rochester Medical Center's Dr. David DeWolfe. "If something should happen to you, you can't take it with you - but there's somebody that needs it."

### Living donation

Most living donations occur when a close family member, distant family member or friend provides an organ for a transplant. Medical professionals and advocacy groups are working to expand the donor pool, thus the attention given to stories such as the one involving Transit Valley Country Club superintendent Brian Conn and Park Country Club's Scott Dodson. Conn and Dodson were golf industry acquaintances at this time last year.

"Historically in the past, most living donors were from a relative by blood or a relative by marriage," says the University of Rochester Medical Center's Dr. Mark Orloff. "The message we would like to convey is that it's really wonderful when you see two totally unrelated people receive transplants and when somebody that casually knows a fellow in their workplace, in their church, in their school, or in their town or village and says, 'I can help that person out. I can see what that person is going through, and I can really be a transformative person in somebody else's life.'"

The National Kidney Foundation website ([www.kidney.org](http://www.kidney.org)) provides resources for potential living donors.

## Kidney donations since 2013

	Deceased	Living	Total
2013	11,163	5,733	16,896
2014	11,570	5,538	17,108
2015	12,250	5,628	17,878
2016	13,431	5,629	19,060
2017	14,037	5,812	19,849

Source: Organ Procurement and Transplantation Network



so quickly.”

After months of trying to match schedules, Conn and Dodson’s families met for the first time on New Year’s Day at Dodson’s house. The meal helped Conn’s family understand the reasoning behind his donation and marked the commencement of new friendships. “Our wives instantly hit it off,” Conn says. “They are two peas in a pod it seems like. It was like long lost friends – like we hadn’t seen each other for a long time.” Both families are eagerly anticipating future gatherings.

As for the husbands, Conn

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“It was so surreal. I had no doubt when we put out the letter, that we would find somebody. Looking back on the research I have done since then, I found out that it was more of a miracle that it did work out. But at the same time ...”

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—Thad Thompson, Terry Hills Golf Course

and Dodson have communicated daily since the surgery. Each conversation brings more understanding about the other’s life, family and career. “Our relationship has already changed,” Dodson says. “We’re closer. I love him like a brother.”

Conn voluntarily lost a vital organ on Jan. 9, 2018. The donation provided Conn with something greater. “Scott got a new kidney out of this,” he says. “Without that email, I don’t know if I would have gotten a new heart.” **GCI**

Guy Cipriano is GCI’s senior editor.