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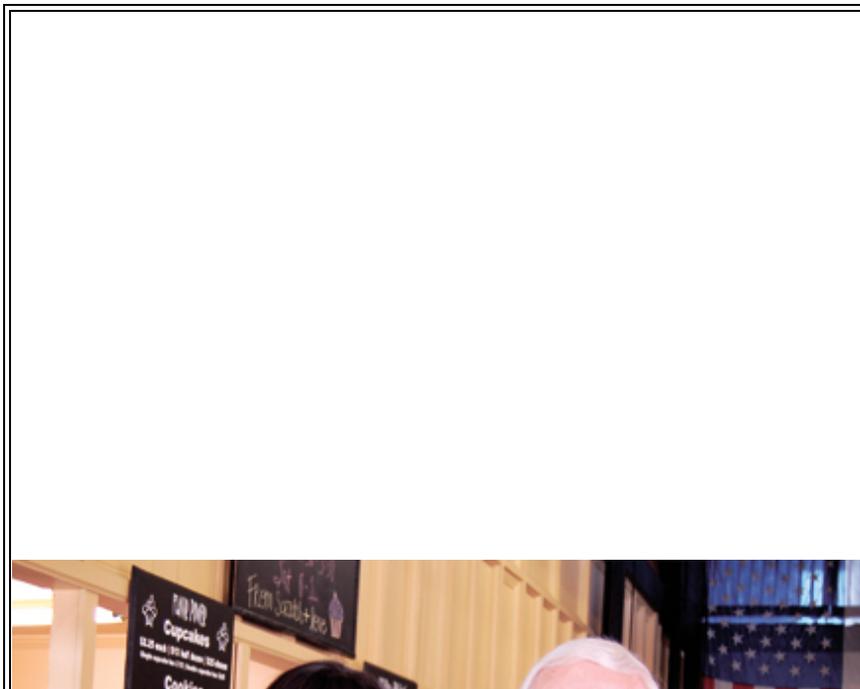
Paid for by The Committee to Elect Craig Elrod, 88 Sloan St. McDonough, GA 30253. Mike Elrod, Chairman

Local woman offers gift of life to stranger

By Melissa Robinson
Contributing Editor

A few months ago, Jessica Brannon was enjoying a birthday breakfast with a friend at Gritz Restaurant in McDonough, when she spotted a flyer in the window. There was a picture of a white-haired man holding up a sign that read "Veteran Needs a Kidney. Can you help?"

Larry Miller was the man on the flyer and said he decided to be proactive in his search for finding a live donor, as the time frame for obtaining a cadaver kidney could take years.



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Jessica Brannon and Larry Miller are better acquainted these days. Brannon has offered to donate a kidney to Miller, a veteran who is in need of a transplant.

Photo by Melissa Robinson

With a soft spot for veterans, Brannon, a 33-year-old baker, who owns and operates Flour Power in the [Courthouse Square Market](#) in McDonough, said she decided to contact Miller. Both she and her mother, Lisa Brannon, discussed donating a kidney to the man on the flyer, however, Lisa was not eligible. Both women are members of [Pinecrest Baptist Church](#) in McDonough, and in a strange twist, Larry and his wife joined the church this past June, several weeks before Miller met the Brannons.

Brannon said she attempted to contact Miller several times, to no avail. It was while attending a church picnic that someone told her how much a new couple at church loved her cinnamon buns from Flour Power.

"When she said the name Miller, I wondered if that could possibly be the man who I was trying to get in touch with. Turns out it was," she said.

Miller, a Navy veteran, said that after taking an anti-inflammatory drug for arthritis for more than a decade, he recently found out that he was in kidney failure. With only 19 percent kidney function, the 79-year-old said he went to Emory where he was put on a list for a transplant. He is also on a transplant list through the Veterans Hospital.

"I'm desperately trying to avoid dialysis, but if my kidney function drops another four points, I'll have to start it," he said.

For many people, the idea of giving a complete stranger a major organ is unthinkable. For Brannon, it's the right thing to do, particularly for a veteran, which is the motivating factor. She said her grandfather was killed in combat during Vietnam and just a few short years ago, she lost one of her best friends, Jeremy Faulkner, who was killed in action on March 29, 2011. She said she recently attended a screening of an ABC documentary detailing the battle in which Faulkner was killed. It's due to be released this spring.

Brannon was heartbroken, along with many others, when she lost her friend. She also has many other friends who have served or are

ment. She also has many other friends who have served or are currently serving, and they are in the forefront of her mind.

"People in the military put their lives on the line every day, so giving a kidney is a small sacrifice," she said.

Brannon said she's not worried about the future. She said her doctor was very supportive as is her family and friends, but there were a few people who were concerned for her health. She said she put their fears to rest.

"To me it's not that big of a deal. It's going to be a couple weeks recovery and then I'm not going to see a difference," she said. "If you get kidney disease or hypertension later in life, it's going to affect both kidneys and you're going to need treatment whether you have one or two."

As for Miller, he sees meeting Brannon and the fact that they attend the same church as a kind of divine intervention.

"It's God's hand. This is a God thing. How else do you explain it? It's amazing," he said.

He said he can't say enough about Brannon and her generosity.

"She is incredible. She is such an amazing woman and I'm so grateful," he said.

For now, both are anxiously awaiting results of a blood test cross-match, which is the last significant hurdle before being approved for surgery.

Brannon said if she's a match, she's ready to go right in to surgery and that her family and friends will help keep Flour Power up and running during her recovery.

"I figure even if I can't do the heavy work, I can still make the shopping list and the menu and the baking schedule and direct everything from a chair," she laughed. "I have strong family support."

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