

# Billboard for O donor set up to help Becky Kelly in her search for a kidney

Cañon City Councilman Dennis Wied donates billboard for resident Becky Kelly's search for a kidney

**By Carie Canterbury**

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Becky Kelly's life was turned upside down nearly five years ago when she was diagnosed with kidney disease. Up until that point, she was healthy and active, living a fulfilled life.

"I was very healthy before, really healthy," she said. "I was pretty blindsided by that."

Now, three years after one failed transplant, Kelly is in desperate need of another kidney donation.

When Kelly was first diagnosed with the kidney disease, she was told she needed a kidney transplant, and her name was added to two donor lists. For a year after the diagnosis, she continued to work teaching health classes at Territorial Correctional facility until her health started failing.

In 2010, her friend Shellen Rhoden passed away from Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis, and donated her kidneys to Kelly. She was sick for 18 months following the transplant, and unfortunately, the kidney disease eventually attacked the new kidneys.

While in Houston, in 2011, Kelly agreed to participate in a study of a new drug that is infused through a port every two weeks. In October, Kelly's doctor said she now is in remission, but she will have to be on the drug for the rest of her life, with or without a transplant.

"Looking at me, I look pretty healthy, but I was so sick in 2010, I could hardly even walk," she said. "I'm healthy enough now for a kidney transplant — I've built myself up and gotten back in the swing of things; this is the perfect time for a transplant."

Because of the new medicine, Kelly said her kidney disease won't attack a new kidney.

Kelly, 61, put up a billboard last year that captured the attention of a few people who tested, but they were not a match. Donated again by Cañon City Councilman and Raft Masters co-owner Dennis Wied, a new billboard on U.S. 50 was resurrected last week, asking for help finding Kelly a kidney.

"I just hope people see it," Kelly said. "I couldn't think of any other way to get the word out."

Kelly is in need of an O donor, which she said is a very hard match. The potential donor first would call the donation coordinator at University of Colorado Hospital for a brief phone interview where they screen for diabetes, high blood pressure and a family history of kidney disease.

"Then they would go over more of their medical history," she said. "Their testing can probably be done in Cañon City, they don't have to go to Denver for that."

Kelly said the candidate undergoes a great deal of tests to ensure he or she won't have problems after giving a kidney.

She said donor medical expenses are paid for by her insurance, and all donor and personal expenses are covered by other sources.

Kidney paired donation is another option for those who may want to donate a kidney, but are not a match. Kidney paired donation matches one incompatible donor/recipient pair to another pair in the same situation, so that the donor of the first pair gives to the recipient of the second, and vice versa.

If she doesn't find a living donor on the wait list, Kelly said it will be four years before she could potentially receive a new kidney. In the meantime, she drives to Pueblo three times a week for the four-hour dialysis sessions.

"A dialysis machine keeps me alive," she said. "If I don't do dialysis I'll die."

Kelly has a grown daughter in Denver and a son in Texas. She would like to be able to travel and spend time visiting friends and family without being tied down to dialysis appointments.

"I'd like to start teaching again, I'd like to start traveling again and I'd like to kind of get my life back," she said.

Those interested in being tested may call the donor coordinators at the University of Colorado Hospital at 720-848-2262.

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