

THE KIDNEY DONOR CHAIN



CECILIA JANISIESKI
Recipient

LINDA JANISIESKI
Donor

GEORGE LEOHNER
Recipient

AVA ROBY
Donor

RAYMOND STAYLOR
Recipient

JEAN STAYLOR
Donor

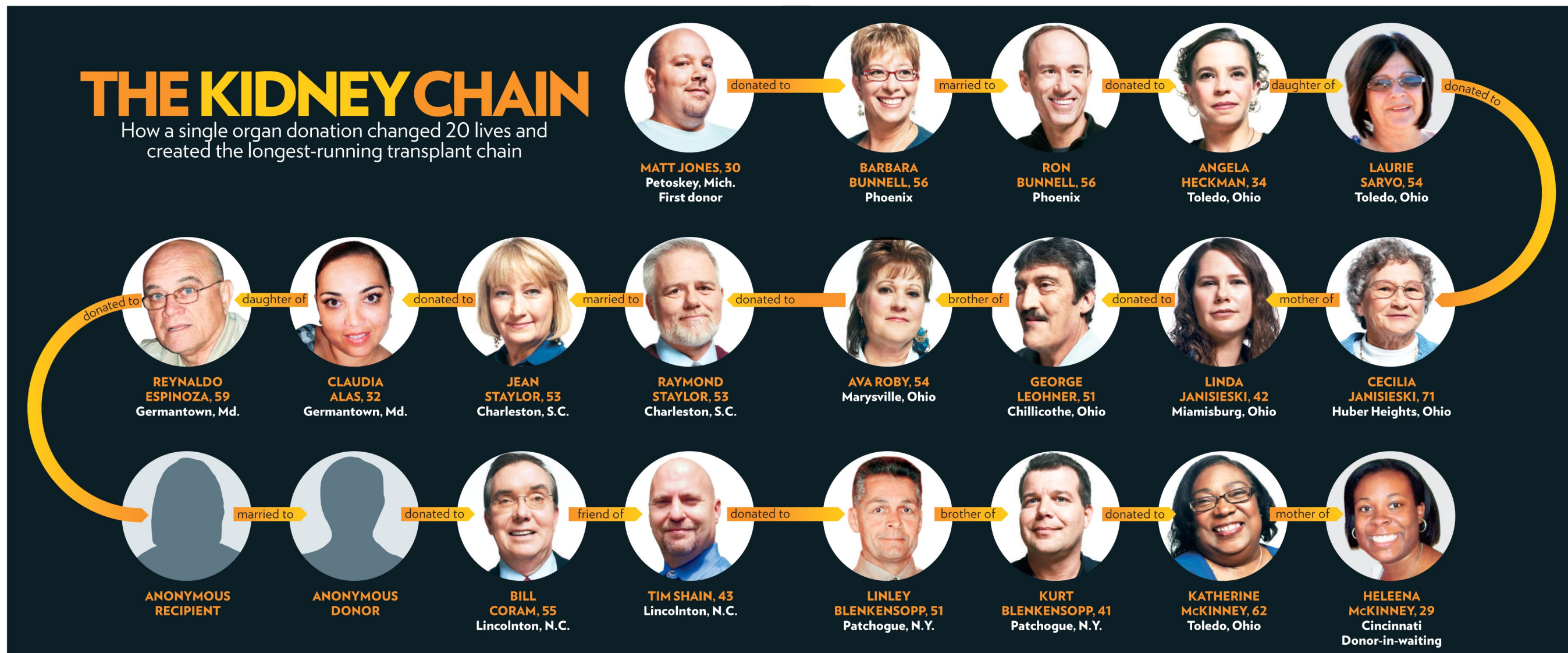
HAIR AND MAKEUP: ANDREA DUCHESNEAU/ZENOBIA AND RENATA STOLCE/SENZOBIA

HEROES *of the* YEAR

The men and women in these pages reached into their hearts—and found ways to make the world a better place

THE KIDNEY CHAIN

How a single organ donation changed 20 lives and created the longest-running transplant chain



Matt Jones tried to calm his frightened fiancée and explain, once again, why a working dad with a blended brood of five would want to donate his kidney to a perfect stranger. “Tell them you’re not doing it,” a teary Meghan Baumer pleaded. But the burly car-rental agency manager from Petoskey, Mich., held his ground. “I want to do something the kids can look at and remember me by,” Matt, 30, explained. “I want to leave a legacy.”

He did that—and much more. For when Matt donated his kidney in July 2007, he set off a chain reaction that changed the lives of 20 people

in what has become the nation's first and longest-running open-ended kidney-transplant chain. How it works: A person who needs a kidney is matched with a stranger in exchange for a friend or family member's donation of their own kidney to another member of the chain (see box).

Last month, at a hockey game in Toledo, Matt shared hot dogs with Angela Heckman, 34, and Barbara and Ron Bunnell, other members of the life-giving connection and now close friends. "Matt won't take credit," says Angela; she received a kidney from Ron, who donated his organ after Barbara got a kidney

from Matt. "But he gave us a second chance at life."

Just a few years ago Barbara, Angela and others were tethered to dialysis machines three times a week and, in a few cases, counting their days. Now Barbara and Ron, both 56, of Phoenix, are taking their grandchildren to Disneyland. Angela, who nearly died twice during her 11 years on dialysis, has returned to college to become an ultrasound technician. Her mother, Laurie Sarvo, 54, donated to Cecilia Janisieski, an Ohio grandmother who lost four toes to complications from kidney failure but, after her transplant, was able to take a Caribbean

cruise. "There's nothing better," says Laurie, a bar owner, "than watching someone's life improve."

The chain's home base is the University of Toledo Medical Center, where transplant surgeon Mike Rees performs operations and coordinates the program through his nonprofit, the Alliance for Paired Donation. People enter the chain because they need a kidney and have a friend or family member who is willing to donate, but who isn't a match. Once they enter the chain, Rees's staff inputs their names, blood types and other information into a database of other patient-and-donor pairs; the



Dr. Mike Rees (center left) and his team perform a kidney transplant.

“
EVERYONE
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FOR
SOMEONE
ELSE”
—MATT JONES



“We’re like family,” says Angela (third from left, with Matt, in gray, and Barbara and Ron Bunnell).

computer then matches would-be donors and recipients. “This is an amazing group of people,” Rees says. “This chain could go on forever.”

Still small in number—so far, only a few hundred people have participated—kidney chains rely on an honor system: Once the sick patient gets his kidney, the friend or family member must make good on

their promise to donate. “At first I was nervous: Would anyone cheat?” Rees, 46, says. “But these people have watched their own loved ones get kidney failure, have seen their skin turn gray. No one has cheated.”

But it’s not an easy thing to do. Matt underwent X-rays and scans, multiple blood draws and a psychological evaluation before getting the

go-ahead to give. After the July 18, five-hour surgery at Banner Good Samaritan Medical Center in Phoenix, he took a month off. “I was on the operating table and thought, ‘This is creepy,’” Matt recalls. “The day after surgery, I felt like I got hit by a semitruck. But it got better.”

And it seemed well worth it on Oct. 24, when, at the chain’s 2009 reunion in Toledo, some donors and recipients met for the first time. There were tears and hugs, tales of grandchildren and group T-shirts with the motto “Pass It On.” Katherine McKinney, 62, the chain’s 20th member (and whose daughter, Heleena, 29, is on call to donate) embraced donor Kurt Blenkinsopp, 41. “Oh, here I go,” said Katherine, dabbing her eyes with a tissue. “Thank you so much.”

Watching it all, Matt—who married Meghan in June 2008—shook his head in amazement. “It’s crazy,” he says, “that I changed 20 lives. This has changed my life forever.”

By Lorenzo Benet. With Kristen Mascia and Christina Tapper.

PAY-IT-FORWARD TRANSPLANTS

For the 82,563 people on the United Network for Organ Sharing’s kidney waiting list, entering an open-ended transplant chain is a promising new option. Not only can chains offer a needy patient a kidney faster, the organ comes from a living donor and typically lasts twice as long as a deceased donor’s kidney. So far, in addition to programs at major transplant centers like Johns Hopkins, nonprofits like Dr. Mike Rees’s Alliance for Paired Donation and the National

Kidney Registry have helped facilitate more than 20 chains. “These chains,” says National Kidney Registry founder Garett Hil, “will save thousands of lives.” For information on how to give—or receive—a kidney, go to: paireddonation.org and kidneyregistry.org.



Surgeon
Mike Rees

MORE
HEROES
of the
YEAR!

“I pray every day
Jaycee is healing,”
says Campbell
(left, with Jacobs
at UC Berkeley.)



SHARPEST INSTINCTS

THE COPS WHO HELPED SAVE JAYCEE

Lisa Campbell, 41,
and Ally Jacobs, 34,
Berkeley, Calif.

They didn’t like his strange talk. So the two University of California, Berkeley, police department employees ran a background check on the odd man who had come to campus to get an event permit—and the rest is history. On Aug. 26 Phillip Garrido, 58, was in custody, and Jaycee Dugard, 29 (along with her two daughters), was freed after 18 years in captivity.

JACOBS: I’ve always wanted to catch bad guys, like Jodie Foster in *Silence of the Lambs*. I have young sons. It was a mother’s intuition. CAMPBELL: People say we’re heroes. We were just doing our job. JACOBS: We went a little bit out of our way and ended up saving three lives. Jaycee and her family will always be part of our lives.

Photograph by GREGG SEGAL