

# MSBL player donates kidney to fellow member

by Jackie Piro

Chicago, IL—In July 2010, Chicago North MSBL players received an urgent email from league president Max Reising. One of their own, Greg Kuhs of the 45+ White Sox, was in need of a kidney transplant. The email asked people who might be willing to be donors to contact the Northwestern Memorial Hospital's Kidney Donation Foundation.

Dan Jacenko, of the 45+ Cubs, felt compelled to respond. Although he did not know Greg Kuhs personally, Jacenko knew who he was and remembered playing against him. And he knew a little about living organ donation. "I thought, 'I feel good. I would hate to see somebody in need of that lose his life. And it was somebody in our league, it wasn't somebody I didn't know altogether,'" Dan explained.

Jacenko called the hospital and was put on the list of possible donors. In September, the hospital called him in for blood tests. By November 2010, after a lengthy screening process, he was told he was a match. The surgery was scheduled. There was no turning back.

At this point, Dan, who is divorced and has a 19-year-old daughter, had not yet told his family of his plans. Neither had he contacted Greg Kuhs, who was unaware of his donor's identity. When Dan finally told his daughter, she was supportive. "She turned out to be one hundred percent on my side," he said. At Thanksgiving dinner, he broke the news to the rest of his family. "They had a lot of questions," he said, "But they were amazed, and also very supportive."

He also gave his nurse permission to finally reveal his identity to Greg Kuhs. Shortly after that, "I'm sitting in my office and I get a call," recalled Dan, who works at a large security firm in Chicago, "And a voice said 'This is Greg Kuhs,' and one of the first things out of his mouth was 'Dan, I just don't know what to say.' It was very emotional."

The surgery took place December 17, 2010. "We met about seven in the morning, said a little prayer before going in to the surgery, and everything went well from there," said Dan. "It was a very neat experience. I was only there for one night. He was only there for two nights. My recovery went really well, I had one bad day I think. Just normal pain, nothing major."

And how is Greg Kuhs doing with his new kidney?" "I'm feeling great," the 55-year-old Kuhs told us in May 2011. He has returned to his job as Director of the Wood Dale Park District—which he described as "similar to a Recreation Department in most cities." He is back enjoying life with his wife Darla, to whom he has been married thirty-one years. The couple have two children in their twenties: daughter Emily, a school teacher, and son Kyle, with whom Greg has competed in the MSBL Father/Son Division in Arizona.

"Generally speaking, I have more energy than I had before," Greg told us. "I feel better. I lost 25 pounds, which is good—I'm a pretty good-sized guy and it doesn't hurt to have that extra weight off. I feel comfortable batting...I have my first baseball game tomorrow night actually. I'm looking forward to playing, I've been going to the cages, throwing, no issues at all; back to normal. I'm just very fortunate that this all worked out and indebted to Dan for his contribution. He's a very special person. And I don't have words to describe how I feel about what he did.... We actually had a little get-together in March this year honoring Dan for what he did for me. We had a small little place at a restaurant and invited family and friends."

"Obviously we've become very good friends," said Jacenko, who has been a member of the Chicago North MSBL for four years. The men's shared experience made their first 2011 league game against each other extra-special. And Dan got an unexpected reward for his good deed: Max Reising and the Chicago North MSBL granted him a lifetime fee waiver, "in honor of his most generous gift of life to Greg."

## RESOURCES:

For information on organ donation, visit Northwestern Memorial Hospital's excellent website at <http://www.nmh.org/nm/transplant>.

Another great resource is [Livingdonorsonline.org](http://Livingdonorsonline.org), which has bulletin board where you can talk to others who have already gone through the procedure.



Greg Kuhs and Dan Jacenko in June 2011.

## In Memoriam

### Dennis Viegas 1957-2010

Dennis Gene Viegas lived for baseball and died on the diamond. Those who knew him as a tenacious competitor said he wouldn't have had it any other way.

Viegas, who was featured on the cover of *HardBall* after the 2010 MSBL World Series, died suddenly of a brain aneurysm September 21 in center field during the first inning of a game in Auburn, California. News of the tragedy spread quickly.

"Everybody knew him," said one former teammate, past Sacramento MSBL President Lanny Ropke. "He was a high profile league personality."

In 2006 Viegas became complex manager at Dan McAuliffe Memorial Ball Park—the jewel of the Sacramento MSBL—and took pride in creating a premier baseball facility and venue for SMSBL, local high schools and tournaments. He was involved in scheduling, and was Sacramento MSBL president Jim Tygrett's right-hand man.

Viegas won seven MSBL World Series rings and played on nine MSBL Championship teams from California to Florida. He left Phoenix in 2010 as the three-time defending champion of the 55+ National Division. Only a week before his death, he was inducted into the Sacramento MSBL Hall of Fame. "During his induction speech Dennis mentioned that the rings were secondary to all the friends he made nationally while playing in Phoenix and Florida," recalled Tygrett.

Viegas was born in Sacramento on Oct. 18, 1957, and was well known in Sacramento and surrounding areas, where he played organized baseball since 1965. In 2000, Viegas was instrumental in helping rebuild Tahoe Tallac Little League in the area he loved so much. His father, Dan Viegas Sr., died on Oct. 10, 2010, not quite a year before his son.

Friends and teammates say Viegas' baseball motor never really slowed down. He played on several teams and he always played hard.

Viegas was a beloved husband to Shari Viegas and father, devoted son, brother, uncle, nephew, godfather, friend and teammate.

A memorial service was held for Viegas at McAuliffe Memorial Ball Park on October 10. "We had the memorial at our complex in the pouring rain and literally hundreds showed up," said Tygrett. "And his teammates are all wearing his number, #4, on our hats or jerseys.... The SMSBL would like to thank all of you across the country who offered your condolences via phone calls and emails," Tygrett added. "We will miss him forever."

As a final tribute to Dennis, members of 2011 World Series champion Sacramento Giants scattered some of his ashes on the infield dirt at several of the spring training complexes in and around Phoenix.

—JM

See photos and videos of Dennis at [smsbl.com](http://smsbl.com)

