



# PRESS RELEASE

Mississippi National Guard Public Affairs

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## **A Match Made in Service: Mississippi Air Guard's Kidney Donation Finds Unexpected Recipient in Alabama Airman**

Story by: Maj. Dusty Culpepper

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**JACKSON, Miss.** – Master Sgt. Ron Bohl, Mississippi Air National Guard, didn't hesitate when action was needed. His brother, Matthew, was battling stage five kidney disease and time was running out. When Bohl learned the wait for a donor kidney could take up to six years, he knew he had to act.

Matthew had been on dialysis since early 2023, but his condition was worsening. His blood pressure would shoot up to 180/140 without warning. Dialysis helped, but his blood pressure remained dangerously high.

"We really couldn't go anywhere for any length of time because he had to be close to a dialysis center to be able to dialyze three times a week for four hours at a time," Bohl said.

Bohl serves as a cyber operations noncommissioned officer in charge at the Mississippi National Guard headquarters in Jackson. When he learned his brother's wait for a transplant could last years, he immediately volunteered to be a donor – if he was a match.

After a year-long screening process, he found out he wasn't a match for Matthew. However, he learned about a paired donor program through the University of Alabama at Birmingham, which operates one of the largest kidney transplant programs in the country.

According to UAB Medicine, its Paired Kidney Donation Program allows incompatible donor-recipient pairs to be matched with other pairs increasing the chances of finding a compatible kidney. The incompatible kidney program has facilitated more than 125 kidney transplants since it launched in 2013 and completed one of the longest-running transplant chains in the U.S.

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*The Mississippi National Guard (MSNG) is commanded by the Adjutant General of Mississippi, the state's senior military official appointed by the governor, and is comprised of the Mississippi Army National Guard (MSARNG) and the Mississippi Air National Guard (MSANG). The MSNG consists of approximately 12,500 Soldiers and Airmen that are "Always Ready, Always There" for Mississippi and the Nation. For more information about the Mississippi National Guard visit our website at <https://ms.ng.mil/Pages/default.aspx>.*

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## MSNG – A Match Made in Service

Bohl's kidney wasn't going to his brother, but through the program at UAB, he could still save a life. Chief Master Sgt. Kevin Sargent, a guardsman with the Alabama Air National Guard, was also in desperate need of a kidney.

Sargent, an equipment maintenance flight branch chief at the 117th Air Refueling Wing in Birmingham, had been diagnosed with stage five kidney disease in March 2023 and faced the same predicament as Bohl's brother.

Three potential donors stepped forward on his behalf: his brother, James Vick; a member of his church; and a family friend, Nicole Brannon. But one by one, complications arose.

"My brother was actually a match for me, but during the screening process, he found out he had colon cancer," Sargent said. "Thankfully, he's okay now."

He was 0-1.

The church member was also a match but had to opt out due to his own health issues.

He was 0-2.

That left Nicole Brannon. She was a match.

A UAB transplant coordinator told Brannon that she actually matched with a different donor in addition to Sargent and asked if she would be open to donating to another kidney seeker – a paired donor. She agreed.

At the same time, Matthew was told that he had a match. His match was Nicole. Sargent's match was Ron Bohl. After coordinating schedules, a date was set for the transplant, Dec. 20, 2024. The two pairs of donors would undergo their respective procedures simultaneously. In the waiting room, their spouses sat anxiously, hoping for the best. As they waited, a conversation sparked between two strangers about their family members in surgery. They soon realized their spouses were both service members.

When the surgeries concluded, the kidney swaps were a success. Within a few days, all four were on their way home.

Bohl recounted the "victory lap" each patient must complete before discharge.

"They make you take two laps around the nurse's station before you can go home," Bohl said. "We all took our laps together."

Sargent's quality of life has improved substantially since the transplant. No longer bound to dialysis, he has regained his freedom and energy.

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"You don't have to be tied to a machine or to a dialysis clinic three to four days a week," Sargent said. "And all of that would have never happened without somebody with a heart like Ron and Nicole."

Sargent and Bohl agree that the kidney exchange was meant to be. Not only do they now share a kidney, but they were born just hours apart on nearly the exact same day.

It's often said that the National Guard is a family, but for Bohl and Sargent, that phrase is no longer just a cliché – it's their reality.

"This kidney was meant for his biological brother, but his brother [Sargent] still got it," Sargent said. "We are family now."

# # #

### **Photos and cutlines for publication consideration are below.**



Chief Master Sgt. Kevin Sargent (middle) and family visit with Master Sgt. Ron Bohl (second from left) and his family at a Tuscaloosa, Alabama restaurant, celebrating one month after successful kidney transplants for Sargent and Bohl's brother, Matthew. Bohl, a Mississippi Air National Guardsman, donated a kidney to Sargent, an Alabama Air National Guardsman, through a University of Alabama at Birmingham paired donor program. Bohl was found not to be a match for his brother, but through the program, he ultimately received a kidney from another donor, Nicole Brannon (second from right), in a successful kidney swap. (Photo courtesy of Master Sgt. Ron Bohl).

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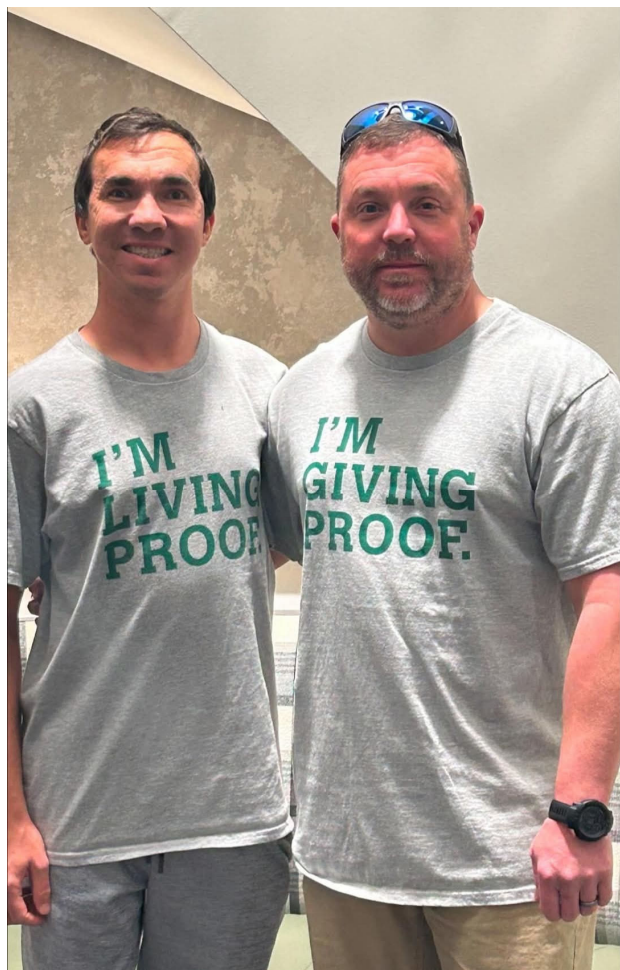
Three days post-transplant, Chief Master Sgt. Kevin Sargent (left) and Master Sgt. Ron Bohl, who donated a kidney to Sargent, share a smile at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, marking a new beginning for Sargent's health journey. Bohl, a Mississippi Air National Guardsman, donated a kidney to Sargent, an Alabama Air National Guardsman, through a paired donor program after Bohl was found not to be a match for his brother Matthew. (Photo courtesy of Master Sgt. Ron Bohl).

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MSNG – A Match Made in Service



Master Sgt. Ron Bohl (right) and his brother, Matthew, share a smile after a successful three-week checkup, marking a major milestone in Matthew's recovery from a kidney transplant, which was made possible by a paired donor program at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. After Ron Bohl, a Mississippi Air National Guardsman, was found not to be a match for his brother Matthew, he received a kidney from another donor in a successful kidney swap. (Photo courtesy of Master Sgt. Ron Bohl).

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