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Kidney donor keeps on giving



Organ donation

Courtesy of Jesse Hunt

Jesse Hunt, left, met his kidney donor Mike Zavitz at Hunt's cottage on Mary Lake in 2012. Hunt is helping promote Zavitz's fundraising swim across a Muskoka lake.

By **Joanna Frketich**

[Mike Zavitz](#) gave a kidney to a stranger and still wants to do more.

The Pickering man who took part in Hamilton's first [kidney swap](#) will swim across Lake of Bays near Algonquin Park on Saturday to prove to other potential donors that giving up a kidney doesn't slow you down.

"I know it's going to be a struggle," said Zavitz about the swim. "But it's doable. You can live a normal life with one kidney."

Zavitz has spent thousands of his own money training for the 22-km swim from Dwight to Baysville that will raise funds for [Lion's Camp Dorset](#), which gives dialysis patients and their families a rare week's vacation in Muskoka.

"To have somebody who has been involved in a transplant want to give back is amazing," said Helen Walker, administrative co-ordinator of the camp and longtime Hamiltonian. "Without Camp Dorset, it would be next to impossible to have a getaway at an affordable price."

Patients pay \$150 to \$400 to go to the camp for a week with up to five family members. Dialysis is on-site three days a week so they can still get their treatments.

"I can do dialysis and, a half-hour later, be in a canoe," said Hilary Heenan, who has gone to the camp for the past six years. "It's heavenly. It brings back a bit of normal."

The Milton stay-at-home mom went into kidney failure while she was pregnant with her now nine-year-old daughter and has needed dialysis ever since. It has meant she is hooked up to a machine for four hours three times a week.

"You can't ever forget you're sick, but to have a place to go where you can shelf your worries is a blessing," she said. "We look forward the whole year to going."

The money raised during the swim will go to much needed updates to the 35-year-old camp.

"If people tied to machines in the city can get away from their troubles for a week, I like that concept," said Zavitz.

If his swim is successful, he's hoping next year to swim across Lake Ontario, which would be a swim more than twice as long.

His training is closely monitored by a doctor because he only has one kidney after giving the other to Burlington's Jesse Hunt who was 22 years old at the time and down to 12 per cent kidney function.

In return, Hunt's dad gave his kidney to a distant relative Zavitz barely knew. The transplants on Feb. 2, 2011, marked the first kidney swap at St. Joseph's hospital.

Just over a year later, Zavitz met the young man he saved while visiting at the Hunt's cottage on nearby Mary Lake — coincidentally about 20 minutes away from Zavitz's cottage on Oxtongue Lake.

It kindled a friendship that has seen Hunt help with the promotion of the swim, including his company Incision Creative making a video of their story.

"I think it's awesome," said Hunt about the swim. "When you are not on dialysis, you realize the freedom you have. You can't travel (on dialysis) or go to a cottage or get on a plane. If you can get away, it's very important."

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