MAKING A DIFFERENCE

PERFECT STRANGERS

As a journeyman gas troubleman for Ameren Illinois, Justin Maduena (pictured left) is a first responder to gas leaks, so helping in times of trouble is part of the job. But his journey as a kidney donor started in an unlikely manner: with a puppy and the power of social media.

Maduena’s father-in-law breeds Japanese Akitas, and after a couple in Chicago bought a puppy, Maduena’s wife became friends with them on Facebook. She saw a post on their page: “Type O blood—Dad needs kidney” and texted it to her husband. It resonated with Maduena, a father of six, and he immediately contacted Stewart Botsford, who had Stage 4 renal failure and was desperately seeking a compatible donor.

It takes a special person to donate a kidney to a complete stranger.

“All Stewart and his family wanted was for Stew to be able to one day walk his only daughter down the aisle. Having four daughters of my own, that really tugged on my heartstrings,” said Maduena.

The two were a match. After successful surgeries, both are now on the mend, and the experience has left Maduena with a new friend and a new calling: promoting kidney donation.

“We need more compassion in the world, and I will do whatever I can to help get the message out about the thousands of people who are still waiting for someone to help them,” said Maduena. “I would do this all over again in a heartbeat.”

PHOTO COURTESY OF JUSTIN MADUENA