

# “An incredible gift”

Phil Griffin’s battle with Focal Segmental Glomerulosclerosis (FSGS) officially began in 1997, though its symptoms may have been showing long before the diagnosis.

FSGS is a disease that attacks the kidney’s filtering system causing serious scarring. Patients typically progress to end stage renal disease within five to 20 years, making a transplant or dialysis a necessity.

Over the years, Phil has tried multiple therapies including chemotherapy and high-dose steroids, none of which had lasting effects. It was 11 years after his diagnosis, in October 2008, that Phil began the evaluation process to become eligible to be placed on the organ transplant list. Kidneys must be functioning at 15 percent or below to be considered for the list. He was placed on the list March 5, 2009.

During this time, Phil, who serves as the director of the Kansas TB and Viral Hepatitis Control and Prevention, was working with Thor Elliott, a microbiologist for the TB lab. In June 2009, the two attended a conference together in Atlanta and quickly got to know one another. One of the things they talked about, in addition to learning they were both from the South, included Phil’s need for a transplant.

“Every day, I would ask questions because of professional curiosity,” Thor said. “I’m a lab guy. I want to know how transplants work.”

It was in early September, following a lunch meeting that Thor asked Phil for the information to become a transplant donor.

“I had no idea he was considering it or was thinking about it,” Phil said. “I had struggled whether I would consider a live donor or not. It’s hard for me to accept that I’m worthy of someone doing something for me.”

What Phil didn’t know is that Thor had spent the summer thinking about donating his kidney and discussing it with his family.



*Phil Griffin and Thor Elliott.*

**“We make a living by what we get. We make a life by what we give.”**

**— Sir Winston Churchill**

"I knew Phil would do the same thing for anybody. It was an easy decision for me because I know he puts himself out there for the TB Program, the State and at the national level. He's an incredible force," Thor said.

Thor underwent various testing to confirm he was a match – blood work, evaluations, various tests, consultations, etc.

"It's a good fit. My kidney will work for him," Thor said.

Thor will continue to undergo tests up until the transplant which is scheduled for December 16 at Research Medical in Kansas City, Missouri.

The transplant will be conducted in adjoining surgical rooms and is anticipated to last 4-6 hours.

With an average 5-7 day hospital stay anticipated for Phil and a several-day stay anticipated for Thor, both should be home in time for the holidays and Phil well in time for his December 30 birthday.

Thor joked, "I'm not getting him anything else either!"

Phil anticipates being off work for about eight weeks following the surgery. Mainly, he said, to give his immune system time to recover. Thor's recovery is expected to include several weeks out of the office as well as several months adjusting to having one kidney.

"We both believe everything happens for a reason," Thor said. "Everything lined up for me becoming a donor."

Both credit their families and each other for support, and also KDHE and the State of Kansas. In fact, the Kansas Donor Leave Program allows benefits-eligible employees up to 30 work days for recovery from an organ or tissue donation procedure, without using accrued sick or vacation time.

"Thor is a very special man and a real gift not only to me, but also to KDHE and the State of Kansas," Phil said.

And, the timing of the transplant is nothing short of miraculous. Phil was scheduled to begin dialysis in November. However, because a donor was found and the transplant is approaching, he is able to avoid beginning dialysis.

"It's an incredible gift," Phil said.