GOLD MEDAL TRIBUTE

Mike Strusiak received the gift of life 12 years ago. Since then, he has seen his four daughters graduate college, walked three of them down the aisle, enjoy his five grandchildren and recently got married. And for all of that, he will be forever grateful to and celebrate his donor, Kristen O’Hara.

Fifteen years ago, Strusiak was an active parent and an avid golfer. But a diagnosis of renal cancer required the removal of both kidneys and, ultimately, years of dialysis. On September 12, 2007, he was fortunate enough to receive a kidney and pancreas transplant. Since then, he has found his way back to the sport he loves and is thankful for a rich life.

Strusiak is now 62 and has participated in the Transplant Games of America since 2008. As co-manager of Team Liberty, he has won medals in golf, basketball, ballroom dancing and bocce. And with each victory comes a renewed tribute to the person who has made it all possible—Kristen.

His “angel,” as he refers to her, was a 19-year-old basketball player at Jackson Memorial High School who passed away in a motor vehicle accident. Strusiak’s medals are attached to Kristen’s donor square on a memorial quilt at NJ Sharing Network. “I wouldn’t have these medals if it weren’t for Kristen,” he says.

Strusiak’s story doesn’t end there: He met and married the love of his life, Lisa Colasurdo, in July 2018. In recognition of this new chapter in their lives, Strusiak and Colasurdo exchanged vows in NJ Sharing Network’s Landscape of Life Meditation Garden with Kristen’s parents in attendance. The wedding was a fundraiser for NJ Sharing Network in honor of Kristen. In the 2018 Transplant Games, the newly wedded couple foxtrotted their way to the podium in the Ballroom Dancing Competition. The pair will once again take the floor next summer at the 2020 Games hosted right here in New Jersey.

Competing at the Games is a chance for them to share great new moments together and to remember those who have made it possible. It’s also a chance to spotlight the need for more registered organ, eye and tissue donors.

“I hope the Transplant Games coming to NJ in 2020 will bring more awareness to the tri-state area and get people to register as organ and tissue donors,” Strusiak says, “and, as a result, save more lives.”