



## Bond of Brothers: EMS General Counsel Gives Kidney to Ailing Brother

EMS Technologies General Counsel **Tim Reis**, 49, has always been close to his older brother, Bob, 57. They grew up in a large, close-knit family of nine kids in Chappaqua, a New York City suburb, and both work as attorneys and are graduates of Vermont Law School and of Fordham University.

*“The connection between us and our families is very strong – we married sisters. Bob married Linda Aylesworth, and I married her sister, Pat. Bob and I are both avid golfers and have been partners in a lot of tournaments. We like to ski together with our families as well.”* The brothers, who see each other at least twice a year at their homes in Vermont and Atlanta, also are both proud parents of three children of roughly the same ages, ranging from 20 to 14 years old.

On September 7<sup>th</sup>, they shared something else, something vital, when Tim donated one of his kidneys to Bob, who was diagnosed with polycystic kidney disease (PKD) five years ago. PKD is the most common inherited disease in the United States. Children of parents with PKD have a 50% chance of getting the disease. Sacs of fluid or cysts grow in the kidneys. If too many cysts grow or if they get too big, they can damage the kidneys or in some cases, cause kidney failure.

*“With PKD, you have multiple benign cysts that grow in and around the kidney tissue and eventually squeeze out the functioning tissue,”* notes Tim, whose mother was diagnosed with PKD at age 80; she lived to age 84 without any noticeable effects from the disease. Bob was not as fortunate. Tim says his brother’s transplant was just in time, as Bob was diagnosed with end-stage renal failure earlier this year, and was placed on a kidney donor list.

*“He had no kidney function the day before the surgery,”* says Tim.

More Americans are waiting for kidney donations than any other organ, according to the United Network for Organ Sharing/Organ Procurement and Transportation Network, which reported on its website some 67,166 people waiting for kidney transplants as of July 2006.

Although living kidney donors account for a small percentage of donated kidneys (the majority being from deceased organ donors), the number of live donors is growing, and many living donors are siblings of their recipients. With Bob having eight siblings, there was a good chance that at least one would be a strong match for a transplant. In fact, there were four perfect matches among his brothers and sisters, but most of them proved unable to become donors because of the strict physical health requirements.

*“The first six siblings who were tested for donor eligibility reside in New England and were closer geographically to Bob – unfortunately, all six were ruled out for various reasons. The three remaining siblings, a sister in Seattle, a brother in Cleveland and I, were tested beginning in July,”* recalled Reis, who said he ended up being the donor because of timing issues and because of his clean bill of health.

*“You have to be in very good physical condition to be considered as a donor, and you need to have a strong support system, both at home and at work,”* says Tim, who requested time off from his boss, **EMS President and CEO Paul Domorski**.

*“Paul didn’t hesitate to give his blessing. He was 100% supportive,”* recalls Tim. *“We’re very lucky to have a CEO who is compassionate about his employees and their families.”*

*"Heroes come in all shapes and sizes and Tim Reis is a hero," says Paul.*

The surgery, which was accomplished laparoscopically, a minimally invasive surgery, normally takes two to three hours, but in Tim's case it took six hours because of the presence of scar tissue in his abdomen -- a result of the emergency removal of his spleen as a youngster.

*"Laparoscopic kidney removal is still very much on the cutting edge. Because the surgeon doesn't put his hands in the abdomen, there is less chance of infection, a lot less trauma on the body and a more speedy recovery time -- about six weeks compared to six months for the traditional open nephrectomy."*

Tim was out of the office for two weeks in September and is now gradually building back to full time. He expects to live a pretty normal life with one kidney -- his physician gave him minimal lifestyle limitations -- "no sky diving," avoid contact sports, and keep an eye on salt intake and on blood pressure.

*"Your kidneys are integral to keeping blood pressure down,"* he says, adding that his brother had high blood pressure for years but since the transplant, his new kidney is functioning so well that he has low blood pressure at the moment.

Tim counts the experience as one of the most rewarding of his life, second only to being a parent. He adds that the bond with his brother has only gotten stronger. They plan to be together with their families in October for the Fordham University homecoming football game. Fordham, a Jesuit university located in New York City, is their alma mater and also where their sons, Timmy, a sophomore, and Robby, a freshman, are attending college. Linda Aylesworth Reis is also one of four generations of Aylesworths who were graduated from Fordham. Fordham varsity athletics also seems to be in the family's blood, as Bob and two of their other brothers, Randy and Chris, were Fordham football players, Tim played baseball, and a sister, Maureen, played volleyball. Robby Reis, Bob's son, now continues the family tradition as a Fordham football player.

*"It is the rarest of opportunities to give a loved one the gift of a better life. Bob was facing less than a high quality of life. Being able to help in that way was an awesome opportunity, and I will always be thankful for it,"* he says.

*Submitted by Anne Sargent*