

Spotlight on Bronx People: Bill Connolly's charity gets to the marrow

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Fevelo for News

Capt. Bill Connolly of Engine 48 at his firehouse on Webster Ave. in Fordham; the firefighter is a three-time bone marrow donor.

FDNY Captain Bill Connolly jokes that the New York Blood Center must have his number on speed dial.

Connolly, assigned to Engine 48 in the Bronx, is one of only 18 people in the world who have donated bone marrow three times to three different patients.

"I was surprised. Most people don't get called ever," he said.

Connolly was honored for his repeated readiness to donate at a New York Blood Center awards ceremony at the Waldorf-Astoria last month.

Dr. Robert Jones, president of the center, said it is rare for a bone marrow donor to match patients three times and rare for a donor to agree to donate multiple times.

Donating bone marrow requires local anesthesia before the marrow is withdrawn through several points on the pelvic bone and a few days of recovery pain.

"He's not only been called three times, but he's also stepped forward and saved people's lives. That's quite a heroic attitude," Jones said.

Connolly first registered as a donor in 1990 in response to the call of a fellow firefighter whose sister was ill.

"It's an extension of being a firefighter," Connolly said. "If you're a firefighter, you want to help people. If someone needs help we're there, off duty or on duty."

Donors who are matched to a patient and undergo the procedure are taken off the registry for three years. Connolly, who has donated within the past three years, said he hopes to be called again when he's back in rotation.

"I hope I match more people," he said. "I'm more than willing to do it and hopefully some lives can be saved. It's a great feeling."



Vital Stats

Best part of donating: "The potential to save somebody's life."

Hardest part of job: "Losing friends."

Hardest part of donating: "Not having it work out."

Bio bits: 42, born and raised in Suffolk County. Was a New York City Transit police officer for four years before realizing fighting fires was a better fit for him. "I would rather fight fires than chase criminals. It's more rewarding as far as I'm concerned." Has been a military reservist for 25 years. Lives in Eastport, L.I., with his wife, Doris, son, Liam, 14, and daughter, Erin, 13.

Favorite food: Guinness

Favorite place in the Bronx: Engine Company 48

Favorite leisure activity: Fishing

Favorite vacation spot: Camping with my family