

## **Melinda Dykstra Receives First NAAA Distinguished Service Medal** *West Michigan auction employee honored for selfless act as organ donor*



**Melinda Dykstra**

Some people are so kind that they'd give you the shirt off their backs if needed. Melinda Dykstra's generosity goes deeper—much deeper—than that.

The registration clerk at America's Auto Auction of West Michigan unhesitatingly gave a kidney to a dealer client faced with life-threatening circumstances unless a transplant was performed.

Her unconditional act of caring for another person she only knew as a friend from work has earned Dykstra the distinction of becoming the first recipient of the National Auto Auction Association's Distinguished Service Medal.

As the organization's highest honor, the medal is to be "bestowed upon a person employed by a member of the National Auto Auction Association for a conspicuous act of heroism in circumstances of extreme danger, without regard of risk to oneself, to save the lives of others."

The NAAA Board of Directors determined that Dykstra's volunteering as an organ donor more than met the criteria for the prestigious award.

"Melinda's courage and compassion truly merits recognition, serving as an exceptional example of the humanitarian spirit this decoration was created to encourage and setting a high standard for future medal aspirants to achieve," NAAA President Jerry Hinton stated as he presented her with the honor at NAAA's 69th annual convention in La Quinta, California, last November. The association also provided its special guest complimentary travel and accommodations.

The handsome decoration, complete with a ribbon to be draped about the neck, was an initiative of the outgoing president. "The Distinguished Service Medal is not to be just our association's highest honor," Hinton explained in his remarks. "It's a tribute to the idea that we have the opportunity to make major positive changes all around us if we're willing to act selflessly."

Dykstra's opportunity came when she learned that Mark Hamilton, a dealer she had befriended, was suffering from serious kidney problems and was in desperate need of a transplant. Dykstra shared the story with her colleagues at West Michigan and, following a gut feeling she had, she got tested to see if she was an organ-donor candidate.

Confirming her hunch that she was a match, Dykstra volunteered and with the support of her employer had the procedure performed at the University of Michigan hospital. Both Dykstra and Hamilton, who attended the award ceremony, are well and thriving.

In addition to the medal, Dykstra's selfless act proved to be a key factor in West Michigan earning another distinctive honor last year. Her organ donation topped the list of the auction's many charitable acts that were recognized by NAAA when it chose the auction to receive the inaugural "NAAA Auto Auction of the Year Award for Excellence in Community Service" in 2016.

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