



## **FIRE DEPARTMENT OF NEW YORK**

9 METROTECH CENTER

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DANIEL A. NIGRO, Fire Commissioner

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Office of Public Information

January 31, 2019

No. 07-19

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**\*\*\*PRESS RELEASE\*\*\***

### **FIRE COMMISSIONER NIGRO AND NEW YORK BLOOD CENTER HONOR FDNY BONE MARROW DONORS**

*FDNY Members Who Donated Bone Marrow Met Recipients for the First Time*

*Event Marks 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the FDNY Program That Matches FDNY Donors with Patients in Need of Life-Saving Transplants*

Fire Commissioner Daniel A. Nigro and Christopher D. Hillyer, M.D., President and CEO of New York Blood Center (NYBC) joined together today to add 13 FDNY bone marrow donors to the Honor Roll of Life at the annual induction ceremony at FDNY Headquarters.

During the ceremony Firefighter Robert Paolillo, 29, of Ladder Company 1 in Lower Manhattan met the recipient of his life-saving bone marrow, Jeff Faller, 45, a father of three from Waco, Texas; and retired Lieutenant Kieran Brosnan, 50, of Engine Company 79 in the Bronx met the recipient of his life-saving bone marrow, Joseph Stike, 29, of York, Pennsylvania.

"The FDNY is an invaluable partner to New York Blood Center and we are privileged to have the opportunity to honor the dedication of those who have given of themselves in such an extraordinary manner," said Dr. Hillyer. "The powerful donor-recipient reunions we're celebrating today are a reminder that all New Yorkers can step up and join the FDNY in helping to save lives."

"More than 200 FDNY members have answered the call for life-saving bone marrow donations – including several members who have donated to help others on multiple occasions – and thousands more stand ready to donate when a match is found," said Commissioner Nigro. "The FDNY's partnership with the New York Blood Center and the Be The Match Registry continues to provide our Department the opportunity to save lives well beyond the borders of the five boroughs. I encourage everyone to follow the Department's lead and sign up to potentially help save a life."

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### **More About Recipient Jeff Faller and Firefighter Robert Paolillo**

- Jeff Faller, 45, from Waco, TX, was living overseas with his wife and three children when he was exposed to an unknown toxin that began to destroy his bone marrow. In August, 2015, he came back to America to receive additional medical treatment, including platelet transfusions. Through his long illness, he spent time in a coma and found he could no longer do basic physical activities including running for exercise or playing football with his children. In 2016, a match was found for the life-saving transplant he desperately needed. Since then, his aplastic anemia is in remission and he has returned to full health. "These days, I am able to play football with the kids, cook dinner for the family, clean the house, wash the car, and just about anything else that I want to do," said Mr. Faller. "I haven't had a blood transfusion since the transplant."
- Firefighter Robert Paolillo, 29, has been with the FDNY since 2015 and serves in Ladder Company 1 in Lower Manhattan. He signed up for the Be The Match Registry in September 2010. When he was 9-years-old, his Aunt Lucille received a bone marrow transplant through the Be The Match Registry, and he vowed to one day join the registry when he was older and do the same for someone else if called. That call came on December 7, 2015 when he was notified of a 42-year-old male patient from Texas who might be a possible match with him. In May 2016, Firefighter Paolillo donated stem cells at the New York Blood Center in Manhattan to save that man's life. "I always knew I had a calling to help people," said Firefighter Paolillo. "I was just surprised to find out that this time it wasn't through my job as an FDNY Firefighter. In our line of work, we help those in need when they need it the most. In this case, I helped a man from Texas that I had never met before who happened to be a perfect match."

### **More About Recipient Joseph Stike and Retired Lieutenant Kieran Brosnan**

- Joseph Stike, 29, of York, PA was born with a low number of blood platelets which resulted in plasma transfusions as an infant before he was even able to leave the hospital. In his teenage years, his platelet numbers continued to drop consistently and at the age of 20, he was diagnosed with a rare genetic disease, Dyskeratosis congenita, which affects bone marrow function. He travelled to the University of Minnesota to meet with a doctor who had treated 13 patients with the same condition. His condition required a donor transplant from a non-family member. In 2012, a match was found. After ten consecutive days of chemotherapy and one day of radiation, he received the bone marrow transplant. Following weeks of rehabilitation, he returned home happy and healthy once again. About his donor, Mr. Stike says, "You are a true Hero Kieran. I wouldn't be here without you. I thank you from the bottom of my heart. You are the proof that there is still love, compassion and kindness in this sometimes-crazy world we live in."
- Lieutenant Kieran Brosnan, 50, joined the FDNY in May, 1993 and served 18 years as a New York City Firefighter working in the Bronx. He joined the Be The Match Registry in 2001 at the FDNY training academy. In 2002, he was promoted to Lieutenant and was later assigned to Engine Company 79 in the Bronx, before retiring in 2011. In May, 2012, he was contacted by the New York Blood Center and informed he was a potential match for a 22-year-old male who needed a bone marrow transplant. That summer, he donated bone marrow at Westchester Medical Center in Valhalla. "I never did this to get

any attention, I just wanted to help someone in any way that I could,” said Lt. Brosnan. “I am so delighted to have the opportunity to meet him in person, seven years post-transplant.”

### **More About the FDNY/NYBC Partnership**

Members of the FDNY make up New York Blood Center’s single largest group of bone marrow and stem cell donors. To date, a total of 205 FDNY members have given these gifts to patients — in some cases more than once — accounting for more than 10% of all donors from New York Blood Center. The FDNY has become the single largest group on NYBC’s bone marrow registry, with more than 8,000 active and retired FDNY members on the donor list. Probationary Firefighters, EMTs and Paramedics are encouraged to sign up for the bone marrow registry during their training. In addition to participating in bone marrow donation, FDNY members run blood drives in communities throughout the city. Last year, more than 1,600 blood donations were made at FDNY blood drives.

This partnership that pairs FDNY member donors with bone marrow recipients was started by retired Firefighter Mark Kwalwasser 30 years ago, and was originally known as the Elaine Diedrich and Terry P. Farrell Memorial Donor Program. Firefighter Kwalwasser first started the program to help his sister, Elaine, find a life-saving bone marrow match. Sadly, she passed away only eleven months after she was diagnosed with Chronic Myeloid Leukemia while waiting for a match.

### ***About New York Blood Center***

New York Blood Center (NYBC) is a nonprofit organization that is one of the largest independent, community-based blood centers in the country. Founded in 1964, NYBC, along with its partner organizations [Community Blood Center of Greater Kansas City](#) (CBC) and [Innovative Blood Resources](#) (IBR), based St. Paul, Minnesota, collect approximately 3,300 units of blood products each day, serving local communities of more than 25 million people in New York, New Jersey, parts of Connecticut and Pennsylvania, the Kansas City metropolitan area, Minnesota, and Nebraska.

NYBC and its partners also provide a wide array of transfusion-related medical services, while NYBC’s National Cord Blood Program (NCBP) at the Howard P. Milstein Cord BloodCenter is home to the world’s largest public cord blood bank. NYBC is also home to a renowned research institute, which — among other milestones — led to the development of a Hepatitis B vaccine and innovative blood purification technology.

For a list of NYBC blood drives and donor center locations in NY and NJ, please visit [www.nybloodcenter.org](http://www.nybloodcenter.org). To join the Be The Match Registry, go to [Join.bethematch.org/NYBC](http://Join.bethematch.org/NYBC) or Text “NYBC” to “61474.”

### **About Be The Match<sup>®</sup>**

For people with life-threatening blood cancers —like leukemia and lymphoma — or other diseases, a cure exists. Be The Match<sup>®</sup> connects patients with their donor match for a life-saving marrow or umbilical cord blood transplant. People can contribute to the cure as a member of the Be The Match Registry<sup>®</sup>, financial contributor or volunteer. Be The Match<sup>®</sup> provides patients and their families one-on-one support, education and guidance before, during and after transplant.

Be The Match<sup>®</sup> is operated by the National Marrow Donor Program<sup>®</sup> (NMDP), a nonprofit organization that matches patients with donors, educates health care professionals and conducts research so more lives can be saved. To learn more about the cure, visit [BeTheMatch.org](http://BeTheMatch.org) or call 1 (800) MARROW-2.

