DaVita Contest Gives Away Cruise to 'Kidney Idol'

DaVita Inc. announces the winner of the 2005 Kidney Idol contest that was held on its website, DaVita.com. The winner is Valen Cover-Sheriff, who was nominated by Lisa Dalto. The contest began in October 2005, when website visitors were asked to nominate and write a 250-word story about their "Kidney Idol." The top four finalists were posted at DaVita.com in November. Website visitors voted for their favorite story, and the winning finalist was posted on the website in December. Today, Valen and a guest will set sail from the Port of Miami on a seven-day cruise to the Caribbean, sponsored by DaVita, Dialysis at Sea® and DaVita Patient Citizens.

(Logo: http://www.newscom.com/cgi-bin/prnh/20020729/DAVITALOGO)

Valen's story caught the attention of website visitors. She was diagnosed with polycystic kidney disease (PKD) when she was 10-years old and began to have symptoms when she was in her teens. Normally, symptoms of PKD appear much later, when someone is in their 40s or 50s. Complications from cyst bleeds kept Valen in and out of the hospital for much of her high school years. She had both kidneys removed to alleviate the cyst bleeds, then suffered a setback and needed another surgery to repair a burst blood vessel in her stomach. Valen concentrated on regaining her strength, and, nearly eight months after her kidneys were removed, she received her new kidney from a family friend, Sally Robertson. Valen remembers, "When I woke up from surgery, I felt like a whole new person. I was so happy and had so much energy. I was given the greatest gift of all -- life!"

Her struggle with PKD behind her, Valen began thinking about what she could do to help others with the disease. She formed the South Central Pennsylvania PKD chapter. In 2004, Valen organized a walk, the chapter's first annual fundraiser. Although flooded out because of Hurricane Ivan, the chapter still raised $24,000, a strong first effort for the new group and its beginner coordinator. The 2005 walk proved even more successful by raising $34,000 to help find a cure for PKD.

When Valen got the call that she was a Kidney Idol finalist and was told that the person who nominated her was not a family member, but a chapter member named Lisa Dalto, Valen started to cry. "It was more rewarding that Lisa nominated me. I was so touched that she would do that."

Valen and a guest will be treated to the seven-day Caribbean cruise, roundtrip airfare to Miami, ground transportation and a one-night hotel stay before the cruise. The approximate value of the prize is $5,495.00.

The contest was created to let people in the dialysis community realize that it is possible to travel while on hemodialysis. DaVita has dialysis centers in many popular travel destinations, such as Las Vegas, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Orlando and Chicago. A dialysis center can be located by going to www.davita.com and using the Find a Dialysis Center online tool. Cruises are also a vacation option for people on dialysis. Dialysis at Sea, www.dialysisatsea.com, offers dialysis treatment aboard the luxurious Royal Caribbean International® cruise liner. In addition to educating dialysis patients about their travel opportunities, the contest entries hopefully provided inspiration to those in the kidney disease community.

"We hear so many wonderful things in our clinics every day about how people make such a positive difference in each others' lives. There are people living well with chronic kidney disease and on dialysis, and family members and health care professionals who rise to the occasion and maintain a positive outlook and productive lifestyle," states Kent Thiry, DaVita's CEO. "We wanted to honor these people by sharing their stories and awarding someone with this dream vacation."

The contest is sponsored by DaVita, Dialysis at Sea and DaVita Patient Citizens. Dialysis at Sea is the largest provider of dialysis services aboard cruise ships in the world. Since 1977, Dialysis at Sea has helped thousands of individuals on dialysis and their families experience the pleasures of cruising and the excitement of taking their dream vacation, confident that all their shipboard medical needs are being handled by trained medical professionals.

DaVita Patient Citizens (DPC), www.dialysispatients.org, is an independent, nationwide, non-profit, patient-governed dialysis patient organization. DPC is dedicated to improving dialysis patients' quality of life by developing awareness of dialysis-related issues, advocating for dialysis and pre-dialysis patients, improving the partnership between patients and caregivers, and promoting favorable public policy.

About DaVita

DaVita is a leading provider of dialysis services for patients with chronic kidney failure. DaVita operates and provides administrative services to kidney dialysis centers and home peritoneal dialysis programs domestically in 41 states, as well as Washington, D.C. with about 1,220 outpatient centers serving approximately 95,000 patients.

About DaVita.com

DaVita.com is the premier online resource for information on dialysis and chronic kidney disease. From informative articles and animated learning modules to recipes for the renal diet and other useful tools, DaVita.com is always adding to the wealth of information it offers website visitors. Special online features include: Discussion Forum, Dialysis Center Locator, Insurance Consultation, GFR Calculator and more.

One popular website feature is the Your First Day on Dialysis video. Produced exclusively by DaVita.com, the video shows what the dialysis process is like for first-time patients.

There is also a monthly DaVita.com newsletter that informs people about what's new on the website. Sign up for the newsletter at www.davita.com.

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