

Hello again! This is Derek Firenze with your local news and commentary for Wednesday, May 29, 2024 beamed in from *The Jefferson County Beacon* for KPTZ 91.9 FM in Port Townsend, Washington.

“Being of service” and “self-care” are concepts so commonplace that the power they bely can be forgotten. Not so, though, for a group of locals undergoing gender-affirming top surgery who are finding support amongst themselves to be transformative. Local craftsman Lou Geraghty is one month in and hopefully halfway through a hiatus from work to recover from his own surgery. Thankfully, he’s not alone. Recently, there have been quite a few folks who have “topped-off” as Geraghty put it, during a recent interview with *The Beacon*, noting that there’s been a succession of people getting these surgeries done closely together.

Top surgery, also known as chest reconstruction, is a surgical procedure by which a transgender or non-binary person’s physical appearance is changed to align with the gender with which they identify. This shared experience is being passed through our community in a chain of mutual aid. Prior to his surgery, Geraghty had two friends within the last year and a half that he knew close enough to feel comfortable helping them through their own recovery from surgery which included spending time with them, picking up groceries, and things as little and yet large as laughing together by their beds. Even more recently, another experience offered Geraghty direct insight in the lead-up to his own operation with one person getting the same surgery only twenty days ahead who shared tools from the trials.

One of the most challenging aspects anyone faces after a major surgery is staying stuck on the sidelines. Thankfully, friends provided a meal train for Geraghty, bringing food by on a daily basis and checking in to see that he was holding it up. Before recovery even began though, Geraghty already had folks offering aid. The person who drove him to and from the operation had top surgery a year and a half ago, so Geraghty trusted them to have the right mindset during those critical moments. While Geraghty traveled many miles for the operation with his friend, their journey goes back even further, as the same individual helped him practice giving himself testosterone. Geraghty said he’d known for as long as he can remember that he didn’t want to have female breasts, and last July he began taking testosterone as a first step toward medical assistance to affirm his truth.

At the end of the summer, he took a trip to reconnect with friends and volunteer at a festival he’s attended over the years which helped bring him back to himself. When returned, he realized it was time to get top surgery. Jefferson Healthcare does not currently offer top surgery, which put six ferries between Geraghty and the multiple appointments he needed. Our local hospital does, however, have two doctors who specialize in these operations. With the hospital and its services soon to be expanding, it’s possible others may not have to travel so far.

Jackie Levin, the Transgender Care Navigator for Jefferson Healthcare said that there is interest in providing this surgery locally. Levin said Dr. Luqman, who specialty in top surgery has not been utilized locally, anticipates that once the new surgical center is completed, he can determine if the hospital can offer the procedure, which includes the wrap-around services needed from pre-operative education, training the surgical team, ordering surgical supplies and equipment, and patient care through the post-operative recovery period.

Medical treatments like top surgery have been studied for many years and can be life-saving. Since 1975, more than 2,000 scientific studies have examined gender-affirming care. Supported by over 30 leading medical associations, including the World Health Organization and the American Medical Association, gender-affirming care has also been shown to be effective at reducing suicide rates amongst people that face a much higher risk of suicide than the general population.

Transgender people all too often face aggression from society in both the micro forms like pronoun misuse to the macro forms of transphobia, as well as barriers to health care which can include a lack of provider knowledge and sometimes even refusal of care. Geraghty told me that before having the gender-affirming top surgery, walking around as a person who identifies one way and can present in other ways could be very uncomfortable at times, and was not authentic to the way he felt on the inside. To have the gender-affirming care was a way to take steps towards presenting more authentically. And now that he's been through it, he wants to carry what he's learned forward to others. Geraghty said that he'll be sharing his experience with those who come after, noting that he now feels more confident showing up for people who need the care and support because he's been through it and can be more sensitive to what folks are going through.

KPTZ 91.9 FM brings you local news at noon and 5 Monday through Friday and at noon on Saturday, partnering on Wednesday to bring you stories from jeffcobeacon.com. You can submit ideas to The Beacon through info@jeffcobeacon.com. This is Derek Firenze. Thanks for listening.