

A young man becomes an essential worker

Written by By Beth Blakeman Associate Editor
Friday, 29 May 2020 03:54



Ben Kruse is an essential worker these days. The 22-year-old pilots a white Honda Civic, which has over 230k miles on it, many of those miles from trips transporting patients who tested positive for COVID-19 to area motels and alternative care facilities.

Kruse is originally from Ethiopia. He was adopted from an Ethiopian orphanage by a Gallup couple and has been living in Gallup for most of his life.

When Dr. Jennie Wei of the Gallup Indian Medical Center saw a need for more vehicles to take people to motels and places such as the Miyamura High School field hospital, she asked one of her contacts if he had any suggestions. Rick Kruse, Ben's uncle, who works in the medical field, said it was hard to respond to other emergencies and also get people to the area motels housing positive COVID-19 patients. So he asked Ben.

Ben started the job on March 24.

The younger Kruse said the first weeks on the job were very slow.

"For a while, it was me doing it by myself. I was doing it seven days a week, 24 hours every day," he said.

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He was outfitted with personal protective equipment and taught how to clean his car after every transport.

An appreciative nurse from the New Mexico Medical Reserve Corps thought it would be a good idea to get a car for the new transport driver. Bernadette Walters, whose husband was in the car business, called around and surprised Kruse with a vehicle.

It's gotten plenty of use.

When the number of positive COVID-19 cases rose in Gallup, Kruse said he got hardly any sleep. He'd be lucky to get three hours a night.

A second driver was hired, and then a third.

"Now there's three of us," he said. "So we break up the week. I work Monday 7 am and end on Wednesday at 3 pm." That's 24 hours a day on call starting Monday at 7 am.

Then he starts his second job, cleaning out bays and the pit at a car wash four days a week.

Kruse, who has also studied at UNM-Gallup to be an Emergency Medical Technician, says he experiences a lot of emotions being a transport driver.

"Usually, I'm very excited. Usually I'm in a pretty good mood about doing it," he said. "I talk to the patients. I hear their stories ... It makes me very sad to hear about people who are just lost in their journey of life."

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He says he gets upset if he finds himself driving a patient who goes to a motel and then leaves to buy alcohol and then he winds up driving them again. He also expresses frustration with people who mess up the motel rooms and destroy things, leaving extra work for health care professionals.

Kruise says he's thrilled about the job, that he never knows what he's going to get.

"I've transported some wild people ... It gives me practice on how to communicate with patients," he said.

One patient who has remained in his mind was a 50-year-old woman who said she could not breathe or move. He transported her twice. She had a history with alcoholism.

When she went to the hospital, she learned her kidneys were shutting down.

"As soon as she saw me she was so happy," he said. "I ended up just taking her on a longer route to get to her destination ... After I took her to the motel, I never saw her after that. I hope she's okay."

Kruise said the thing he really likes about the job is the people he works with.

"The nurses and doctors and security guards are always in a good mood." He said it helps to cheer him up.

By Beth Blakeman
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