

A CAUTIONARY TALE ABOUT COVID-19

After losing eight family members to COVID-19 this spring, Bridgette Eddins has an urgent message for Magna employees.

"It is real and it's nothing to play with," said Eddins, a shop-floor employee at Autosystems America in Plymouth, Michigan. "People are suffering. Our company is making it safe for us. We have to be smart and follow the rules. That means everybody. It's the only way we will get through this together."

Her first loss came on April 30, when her brother Hose Williams died from COVID-19 at the John D. Dingell VA Medical Center in Detroit.

"The last time I talked to him he said 'I'm sick as hell,'" Eddins recalled. "And he told me 'If I go to the hospital, I probably won't come out.'"

Five days later, Williams' wife Chandra, who also caught the virus, died at Detroit's Harper Hospital. In the following days, Eddins lost six cousins in Michigan and Alabama to the disease. Funerals were put on hold indefinitely, making it difficult to say goodbye to loved ones.

Comfort for Eddins came from prayer and talks with her pastor at New Kingdom Missionary Baptist Church in Detroit. She also drew strength from Shawn Bentley, the Autosystems America general manager.

"Shawn reached out during the pandemic," Eddins said. "He'd text or talk and just ask 'How's it going?' and 'Are you ok?' It meant so much and helped me realize I can't build my life being sad.

When she returned to work after the restart, Eddins said she was "leery" at first.

"But then I looked around at what they did to keep us safe and I said, 'We've got it together,' and I felt comfortable," she said.

Eddins, who spent 25 years as a live-in hospice aid to dying patients before joining Magna in 2016, also extended a helping hand to others. She counsels mothers who have lost their children to gun violence, including a Magna employee whose son was shot and killed during the pandemic. Eddins' son Robert, a former defensive end for the NFL's Buffalo Bills, was killed in Detroit in 2016. The murder trial, which was supposed to begin in March, had to be rescheduled due to the pandemic.

Today, Eddins wears a blue surgical mask at work, and a custom mask printed with "memory photos" of Robert, her son Corderro, and her grandson Kellen during her off hours. In keeping with the family tradition, Eddins said she plans to have similar remembrance pillows and blankets made as a tribute to the eight family members lost to COVID-19.

"When I put on that blanket with photos of Robert, I feel his love covers me," she explained. "I'm sure I'll feel the same way about the others I've lost."



BRIDGETTE EDDINS, Shop-floor employee at Autosystems America in Plymouth, Michigan





Bridgette's special memorial masks