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Just the Facts

Tuesday, December 6, 2022

Hoopeston's only locally-owned daily news publication!
 P.O. Box 441, Hoopeston IL 60942 www.justthefacts.net

Faith keeps Steve Baker strong during rare leukemia, treatment

As Hoopeston's water superintendent, Steve Baker is no stranger to sticky situations. Over the course of his career, he's been in holes repairing large water main breaks, spent sleepless nights looking for a solution to a department problem and been threatened with death when shutting off a customer's water for nonpayment.

His latest situation is more formidable.

In May, Baker was diagnosed with T-cell prolymphocytic leukemia, (T-PLL) a very rare and aggressive form of leukemia. In this cancer, T-cells - a type of white blood cell that protects the body from infection - have out-of-control growth. The cells mutate and can travel throughout the body, where they can affect bone marrow, spleen,



Steve Baker, Hoopeston Water Superintendent, and the chocolate cake wishing him well on his medical treatment.

liver, lymph nodes and sometimes, skin.

The start of this journey started out innocuously enough for Baker. He had blood drawn for his semiannual checkup for diabetes and went about his day.

On April 28, Baker had a full schedule for his workday, including a meeting of area water treatment workers, that also included training, provided by Illinois Environmental Protection Agency personnel.

The direction of his day changed drastically when he received a call from his doctor, telling him to immediately go to Carle Hoopeston Regional Medical Center to have another blood draw because his white blood count was at 50,000, far higher than the range for an adult male

See LEUKEMIA on other side

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Leukemia continued from other side

of 5,000 to 10,000.

The following week, he went to Carle Foundation Hospital in Urbana for a bone marrow biopsy. “The doctor said, “If you don’t do chemo, you won’t be here next year,” Baker said. He was scheduled to receive chemo three times a week for 12 weeks, but treatment was stopped after three weeks. “The doctor told me if it continued, my immune system would be shot.”

At this point, Baker saw a doctor from University of Chicago Medical Center, where a new treatment plan was devised. Baker was put on a stem cell registry - Be the Match - to find a suitable donor. One was found in Europe. The cells were harvested and frozen, setting his treatment plan in motion.

On November 15, Baker and his wife, Lynn, went to the University of Chicago Medical Center, where he started a new seven-day regimen of chemotherapy. He was scheduled to receive stem cells on November 27 and will then have a second round of chemo that will work with the stem cells as they multiply. With this chemo, “They bring you buckets and buckets of ice,” Baker said, because the medicine can cause mouth and throat sores.

After spending three weeks in the hospital, and if everything goes according to plan, the Bakers will move to

an apartment close to the hospital, where they will stay for three months. That was scheduled to happen December 6. They should return to Hoopeston in early March.

T-PLL usually affects people age 30 and older. At 66, Baker is a few years older than the median age when the disease is diagnosed, which is 61.

There are myriad forms of leukemia. Many, like T-PLL, aren’t known unless someone is has it or knows someone who has been diagnosed with it.

Baker had never heard of his type of leukemia, nor the registry that provided the donor with the stem cells that may save his life. “I had no idea (there was a registry),” he said. “We gotta make people aware of it.”

Information on the registry and how to become a donor is available at bethematch.org.

Asked what the worst part of this experience is, “It’s hard to say,” Baker answered. “I’m trying to stay positive.”

He is not looking forward to mouth and throat sores and he is aware there is a 40 percent chance the treatment will not be successful. “I’m putting my trust in God. I read the bible everyday. That’s what I believe.

“I wouldn’t wish this on nobody,” he said, but, “I’ve seen crazy things happen since this started.” While he lost

his hair during chemo, he did not have other side effects, like vomiting Another positive is that he and his siblings - he is one of 18 children - have gotten closer, including a sister with whom he hadn’t spoken in a while. “We’re talking,” he said, smiling.

On the Sunday before he left for Chicago, the members of New Beginnings of Hoopeston, covered him in prayer. They, and others in the community, continue to pray for his health.

On November 10, Baker and his men - Richard Cappellano, Colin Carswell and Chaz Landers - along with water committee chairman Stephen Eyrich - gathered at the water plant to eat a little cake and tell stories on each other on Baker’s last day of work before going to Chicago.

Whether he will return remains to be seen. He is currently on short term disability for the treatment and will not be able to return to work for at least six months afterwards.

Baker tried to turn in his keys to his staff, but they were having none of that. “We wouldn’t take his keys,” Landers said.

Cappellano is serving as the licensed operator in charge

Briefly

At the library

Upcoming events at Hoopeston Public Library include: **Littles at the Library** will NOT be held Tuesday, Dec. 6.

Kids STEAM Lab, 3:30-4:30 p.m. Thursday.
Christmas Ornament adult craft, 1 p.m. Monday, Dec. 12. Pre-registration is recommended, but walk-ins will be welcome.

For more information on library programs, call (217) 283-6711 or visit 110 N. Fourth St.

Other numbers listed for HPD

Chief Chris Kelnhofer is reporting that some callers have been unable to contact the police department on the regular (217) 283-5196 number. If that happens, residents may call (217) 283-5197 or (217) 283-5370.

For emergencies, residents are reminded to call 9-1-1.

Weather

Mostly cloudy, chance of rain today, tonight. High 45, low 35. Tomorrow, mostly cloudy. High 48, low 34.

For real time Hoopeston weather, visit justthefacts.net/weather/.

of the department during Baker’s absence.

Baker has been with the City of Hoopeston since 1974. He first worked for the cemetery department. At the end of the mowing season, he was set to be laid off, but then Cemetery Sexton Squire Osborn talked to Water Supt. Charlie Nicholls, who brought him to the water department. He started on September 1, 1979 and became full time on October 8 of that year.

Classifieds

HELP WANTED

Hoopeston Public Library is seeking a dependable individual to shovel and salt sidewalks this winter. Must be able and available to keep walks clear for library operating hours, 10-6, Monday-Friday, and 10-3, Saturdays. Contact Library Director Tricia Freeland, 217-283-6711.

First Christian Church has immediate opening for a secretary, Tuesday-Thursday 8 am-noon. Send a Resume to FCC, PO Box 115, Hoopeston, IL. 60942

Fast Lanes is looking for a breakfast waitress. Apply in person. No phone calls.

City of Hoopeston Police Department is taking applications for certified police officers/part time certification is recognized. Applications will be ongoing; no deadline applies for certified officers.

Cade's Heating and Air seeks a HVAC service/ installer tech. IL DR license required and Freon license preferred. Must have mechanical ability. HVAC experience preferred. send resume to: ramcade@frontier.com:101 E Penn St. Hoopeston, Starting pay based on experience.

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