

Chaplain's son needs double-lung transplant

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By George Henson

Staff Writer

DALLAS—Jeff Matthies' life is filled with irony—deadly irony.

If he had not been such a hard worker, he would be much closer to a lifesaving double-lung transplant he desperately needs. But if he had lacked drive and perseverance, he probably would have succumbed decades ago to the cystic fibrosis that clogs his lungs.

Now, all his efforts will not save him, but a \$500,000 double-lung transplant might.



Jeff
Matthies of
First
Baptist
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“We have to do the transplant soon, because his lungs’ ability to deliver oxygen will soon start affecting other organs, and then he will no longer be a transplant candidate,” said his father, Alan Matthies, a chaplain at Baylor University Medical Center and Buckner Retirement Village in Dallas.

Jeff Matthies was diagnosed with cystic fibrosis at age 4. Doctors gave him three to four years to live.

His mother, Pam, remembers how her son worked on being a normal boy doing normal boy things.

“He tried everything, even playing football one year. People kept telling me: ‘You’re in denial. You shouldn’t be letting him do these things,’” Mrs. Matthies recalled. But she wanted him to squeeze as much life as possible into what was expected to be a very short time.

Surprisingly, Jeff did relatively well during his childhood years, and as he eclipsed each prognosis, the doctor added a few years without any long-term hope.

“I remember vividly each year as his birthday came around, he would be so excited, and I was bawling while icing a cake, always thinking this might be

his last year," Mrs. Matthies recalled with tears in her eyes.

While Jeff had to go to bed earlier than most teenagers because he tired easily, he still participated in most of the rituals of the teenage years, his mother recalled. At age 18, he moved out on his own and worked a variety of jobs, eventually owning his own barbecue restaurant in Colorado City.

About three and a half years ago, the decline doctors long had predicted began, and in December 2004, he moved back home with his parents.

His condition has worsened to the point that his mucous-filled lungs were working at only 17 percent of their capacity when last tested, a significant decline from another test only 30 days prior.

To get on the transplant list, \$100,000 has to be on hand. Another \$400,000 is needed for the actual surgery.

In August, government assistance will help him with the cost of surgery, but his doctors doubt he will last those months without surgery.

He must wait because when he no longer could work, he filed for medical disability. The monthly stipend he receives through his disability and Social Security put him \$50 beyond the economic limits for Medicare assistance.

His Sunday school class at First Baptist Church in Sunnyvale is trying to help his fund-raising effort through a "progressive garage sale" and a miniature golf tournament.

Darla Paugh, one of the teachers in the class, said Jeff has been an inspiration to the singles in their 20s and 30s, despite his illness. "He's probably the most faithful person there," Paugh said. "It's been a real encouragement to others who think, 'Jeff will be there, and if he can, I can too.'"

The first of the garage sales raised \$1,300, and several more are planned.

Paugh acknowledges it will take an incredible garage sale to make a dent in the huge amount of money Jeff needs. It gives people an opportunity to do what they can, however.

“People will come in and say, ‘How much is this?’ and I’ll tell them ‘\$10,’ and they’ll say, ‘No, I’ll give you \$20.’ It’s kind of like reverse garage saling at times.”

She also recalled a woman “who obviously had a hard life” who came by the garage sale and then left and came back with her children whose hands were filled with their change.

“Those children put their change in the jar out front for people who couldn’t find something they wanted but still wanted to help, and from the way they were dressed, it was obviously a big sacrifice for them,” she said. Paugh thanked the children, offered them a toy and invited the family to church.

Another woman described her anger at God over the death of her husband due to lung cancer, giving Paugh an opportunity to witness. “It’s more than raising money, but a mission, it’s a ministry to the community,” she said.

Alan Matthies and his family expressed gratitude to the church his family joined just last December for their care. He also acknowledged the support he has received through Buckner and especially the other chaplains at Baylor.

“It’s been really good for me to be a part of this department. It’s a source of strength. It’s been the help I need. I feel like it’s the reason God put me here,” he said.

Still, the gravity of his son’s health is sobering. “It’s staring us in the face. The end is getting closer, and it’s getting closer every day,” he said.

An account has been set up with the National Transplant Assistance Fund to help raise money. Contributions are tax- deductible and may be made online at www.transplantfund.org or payable to the NTAF South-Central Double Lung Transplant Fund at 150 North Radnor Chester Road, Suite F-120, Radnor, Pa. 19087. "In honor of Jeffrey Matthies" should be printed in the memo section of mailed checks. If he is not able to use the funds, they will be disbursed to others on the list.

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