

SOUTHTOWNSTAR

A CHICAGO SUN-TIMES Publication

Kadner: Two brave women await a gift of life

BY PHIL KADNER pkadner@southtownstar.com May 2, 2013 6:30PM

 Like 1  Tweet 0  0  0  +1 0  Share 1 



Updated: May 3, 2013 7:58AM

Two south suburban women from very different backgrounds are in desperate need of someone to save their lives.

Friends are holding a fundraiser for 19-year-old Josie Nordman, of Homewood, on May 11.

Josie Nordman, a sophomore at Northwestern University, has cystic fibrosis and is on a waiting list for a lung transplant. | Curtis Lehmkuhl~Sun-Times Media

Ads by Google

Mini Transplants

Reduced Intensity Transplants First Pioneered Here, Fred Hutch Docs

SeattleCCA.org/MiniTransplants

The spunky girl who ought to have a bright future needs a double lung transplant.

Only a few miles away in Richton Park, Pamela Carpenter, 58, claims to be No. 1 on the lung transplant waiting list at the University of Chicago Medical Center.

Their backgrounds are as different as the origins of their ailments.

Josie has cystic fibrosis. Pamela has "what they call pulmonary fibrosis, although they put the fancy word 'idiopathic' in front of it, meaning they don't know what caused it," she said.

Pamela's two lungs are functioning at 20 percent of capacity.

Josie's are at 15 percent.

"I don't stray very far from my oxygen tank these days," Carpenter said. "The most I can go is a minute or two and then I need it bad."

SJ Public Relations, a social media and public relations agency for today's complex markets.

But her voice is strong and clear over the telephone and she makes a plea for organ donors.

"One person can save the lives of as many as 25 people through the donation of organs and skin tissue," Carpenter said.

"In the African-American community in particular there's a stigma about organ donations.

"People believe that if they get sick and go to a hospital a doctor will remove their organs before they're dead."

Carpenter laughs, but she knows that ignorance and fear can kill.

Nationwide, there are 117,151 people on waiting lists for organ and tissue transplants, with 5,157 people on waiting lists in Illinois.

In 2012, 6,500 people throughout the nation died waiting. More than 300 of those were in Illinois.

Nordman was trying to live a normal life while going to college and majoring in theater at Northwestern University.

She was diagnosed with cystic fibrosis as an infant.

Yet she managed to graduate in the top 10 of her class at Homewood-Flossmoor High School.

She was a member of Northwestern's equestrian team and loved to ride horses. She received her first horse from the Make-A-Wish Foundation when she was 9 or 10.

She can't ride right now but hopes to be back in the saddle one day.

She was in the hospital last week, which is pretty much a way of life for her now, according to her grandmother, Bobbie Sievering.

But, right now, she's back at Northwestern.

"She's very high on the donor list at the University of Chicago, but because she's so tiny, only 4-feet-9, it is very hard to find suitable donors."

The fundraiser for Josie is scheduled at the Chicago Heights Drama Group Studio Building, 220 W. 202nd St., Chicago Heights, at 7 p.m. May 11.

Tickets are \$25 and can be bought in advance by emailing jfelix@dramagroup.org, or telephoning Tina Zagone at (708) 738-1440.

Northwestern University students also are selling tickets to the fundraising event.

Although covered by health insurance, if she's lucky enough to get a transplant, Josie can expect an additional \$70,000 in uncovered expenses.

April was Organ Donor Awareness Month, so I apologize for being a little late in joining the Donate Life campaign.

But it does seem rather odd to have only one month a year dedicated to raising awareness for this cause.

The original stories about Carpenter and Nordman, written by SouthtownStar reporter Susan DeMar Lafferty, appeared in this newspaper at different times over the past six months.

Articles just like them are written all the time all over the country.

People are battling for their lives, doctors and their medical teams have the knowledge to save them, but they just don't have the stuff essential to perform a miracle: human organs and tissue.

Although medical science has advanced beyond what anyone could have imagined 100 years ago, most of us are still living with superstitions born in the Dark Ages. People are choosing to die and take their organs with them to the grave.

Carpenter and Nordman deserve better than that.

Twice a week for an hour, Carpenter goes to physical therapy at St. James Hospital in Olympia Fields.

"There's not much you can do, but they want you to maintain your heart and blood pressure the best you can so that when the time arrives for that transplant, you're in the best condition you can be in to get it," Carpenter said.

She was first diagnosed with her lung disease in 1992 and was placed on the transplant list in January 2012.

That's a long time waiting for a phone call that means a chance to take a deep breath again.

But if Carpenter feels sorry for herself, she didn't let on during our phone conversation.

"You've got to hold on to hope," she said. "You've got to continue looking toward the future."

Carpenter used to be an active volunteer in her community and at church.

"I can't do much now," she said. "But when I get those new lungs, watch out. I'm going to be a ball of fire."

Nordman could be a great actress. She's already proved to be an inspiration for anyone who has known her.

Organ donation is called the gift of life for a reason.

To rephrase an old saying, you may be able to take it with you, but it ain't going to do you any good.

<http://southtownstarsuntimes.com/19854082-522/kadner-two-brave-women-await-a-gift-of-life.html>

SJ Public Relations, a social media and public relations agency for today's complex markets.