

## **Local Cancer Patient Overwhelmed and Humbled by Support**

There are certain days in your life you never forget. Dates you can instantly remember where you were or what you were doing.

Tuesday, July 17, 2007 is one of those days for Joseph Nelson.

That's the day the 36-year-old Hanover resident got the results of a biopsy that confirmed he had astrocytoma – a type of brain tumor. To make matters worse, it's also the day fire severely damaged his home, leaving it unlivable.

“The fire department called about our house as we were driving to get the results of my biopsy,” says Nelson, who has a wife and three children, ages 19, 12 and 9. “Like the saying goes, when it rains it pours.”

The beginnings of Nelson's unimaginable ordeal started over the summer when he suffered a seizure while helping set up his brother-in-law's pool. Rushed to the hospital, he would later learn that he had suffered 10 grand mal seizures that day. He didn't regain consciousness until four days later.

“The doctors told me I was lucky to be alive,” he says.

With no other symptoms other than the seizures, Nelson's doctors ran a number of tests to find out what was wrong. The diagnosis was soon made: he had a brain tumor. Over the next six weeks Nelson underwent 36 radiation treatments in an attempt to shrink the tumor, which was deemed inoperable because of its location in the brain. Unfortunately, the treatments didn't work and the tumor only grew larger.

During his treatments, Nelson discovered what many other cancer patients do – that the physical impact of having cancer is only one part of their ordeal. Like many patients, Nelson had to stop working during his treatments and recovery. For some, this can lead to unexpected and often overwhelming financial issues. Even for patients with insurance, the cost of cancer care can deplete a family's resources and strain their ability to cope at an already stressful time.

Luckily for Nelson and many other patients at the York Cancer Center, there is the Cancer Patient Help Fund.

Created in 1995, this fund helps lessen the financial impact on individuals and families by making money available for everyday expenses such as rent, utilities, groceries and transportation. By easing this burden, the fund allows patients to focus their energy on the important task of healing. In 2006 alone, the fund helped more than 200 families and spent \$379,000.

The fund is supported through contributions from the community and fundraising events, including an annual bike hike, a golf tournament and a Christmas event. The fund receives no state or federal money and relies solely on donations from individuals and businesses to provide assistance to patients.

For Nelson, the fund has proven to be a financial lifeline.

“Not only was I dealing with the cancer treatments, but I also had to deal with the fact that my family had no home because of the fire,” he says. “Though the Patient Help Fund we received help with rent for a temporary home, food, gas, utilities...even Christmas presents for the kids.”

For Nelson, who prides himself on being a strong man, the level of assistance that he received was humbling.

“The support my family received was phenomenal,” says Nelson simply. “I couldn’t believe how many people there were out there that care...they really went overboard.”

It’s support he’s determined to repay.

“I just want to say God bless to everyone,” he says. “I wish I could give back as much as I’ve been given. When I’m well again, that’s what I plan on doing.”