

McQuaid pals reunite for charity

Courtney Burns/Catholic Courier

When former Pittsford resident Jon Gieselman went to the emergency room at Mossit Hospital near his Tampa, Fla., home the day after Christmas last year, he thought he had a simple case of mononucleosis.

The 1986 McQuaid Jesuit High School graduate had been feeling run down and had noticed some strange bruising on his body. Blood tests revealed that mononucleosis was not the cause of his ailments.

On Dec. 26, 2002, Gieselman, 34, was diagnosed with chronic myeloid leukemia, and began treatment on the new cancer drug Gleevec that same day.

"It was a horrible thing to find out, and I was shocked," Gieselman said of his diagnosis.

Leukemia is a cancer of the blood-forming cells. It starts in the bone marrow and usually spreads quickly into the blood, according to information provided by American Cancer Society at www.cancer.org. One form of this cancer is chronic myeloid leukemia, which involves a chromosomal abnormality — dubbed the Philadelphia chromosome — in the leukemia cells. Transplantation of bone-marrow stem cells is the most effective treatment for CML and the best chance for curing the disease.

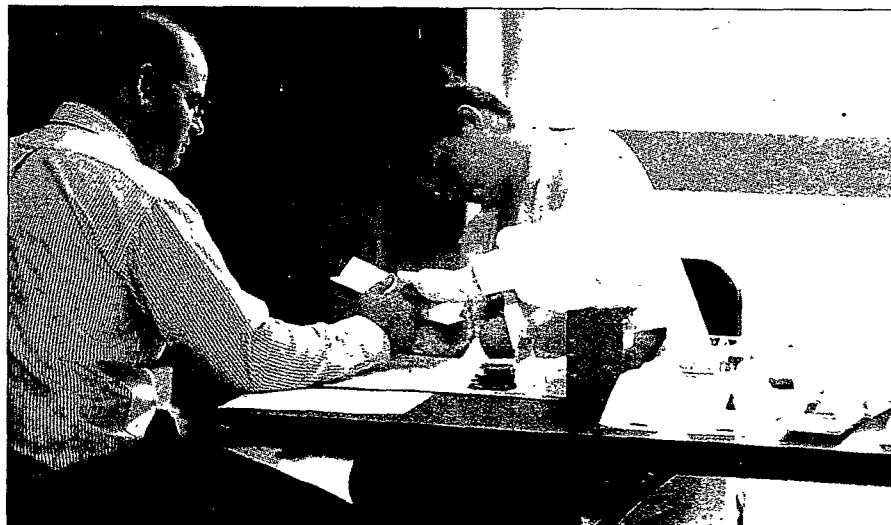
Individuals who need such transplants have the best chance of finding donors among their siblings. If no match is found there, the next place to look is the National Marrow Donor Program, which helps find donors for people who need bone-marrow or blood stem-cell transplants.

None of Gieselman's family members were a match, so he turned to NMDP for help. Luckily, the program found two matches for him. If the drug Gleevec does not kill all of the leukemia cells, he will need to have a transplant, he said.

With the support of his family and friends, and the reassurance that a bone-marrow match is waiting in the wings, Gieselman said he has been able to handle his diagnosis considerably well.

Nevertheless, "this experience has changed me quite a bit," he said.

He said a lot of good has come



Rebecca Gosselin/Catholic Courier

Tatyana Chervonyak takes a blood sample from Peter Hamilton during a June 12 bone-marrow donor registration at Rochester's McQuaid Jesuit High School. The event was organized by McQuaid graduate Eric Hanson, whose former classmate and friend Jon Gieselman was diagnosed with leukemia.

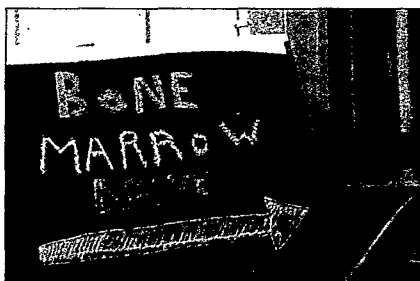
from his ordeal, including a deeper appreciation for his friends and family and cherishing the time he shares with his children. But above all, he said he is overwhelmed with a desire to give back to the cancer community.

It was Pittsford resident Eric Hanson, Gieselman's former McQuaid classmate and best friend of 20 years, who enabled Gieselman to do just that. Hanson, 35, organized and raised the funds for a June 12 bone-marrow registry drive in Gieselman's name at McQuaid.

Hanson, who owns a dental practice in Pittsford, knew Gieselman's diagnosis was serious. He also knew that the drive was the perfect way to show support for his friend and do something to benefit others in need of donors.

"I knew I had to do something for Jon," Hanson said.

Normally a prospective donor must pay a \$65 laboratory fee to reg-



A sign points potential bone-marrow donors to the registration area.

ister with the NMDP. Hanson worked with Gieselman's parents and friends in Pittsford to raise funds for as many as 200 people to register.

"I called and asked for Jon's permission to do this," said Hanson. "I wanted to make sure he was com-

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fortable with using his own obstacle as a means to raise support for other people."

The decision to hold the drive at McQuaid was clear to Gieselman and Hanson, both former members of the school's ski team. Both men stressed that the humanitarian ideals they learned while students at McQuaid were put to action in the drive. They also agreed that it is important to educate more people not only about leukemia but also about the marrow-donor registry.

According to Hanson, the number of patients needing transplants is nearly double the number of prospective donors listed in the registry. And the more people who sign up to be donors, the more lives will be saved, he added.

Sue Paprocki of the American Red Cross and the National Marrow Donor Program said anyone between the ages of 18 and 60 can begin the process of registering to be a donor by giving a blood sample drawn from a prick on the finger. If a match is found, the donor undergoes extensive blood tests, a physical examination and an informational session before the donation is scheduled.

Hanson said 160 people participated in the June 12 drive, and 130 of them were deemed to be acceptable donors.

Tina McCann of Rochester was among those who decided to register as a potential bone-marrow donor during the drive, and said she was glad to do it.

"I felt like I wanted to do something positive," she said.

EDITOR'S NOTE: For more information about the National Marrow Donor Program, call 800/462-7764.

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