

Benefit for Joe Benavides' heart transplant Friday

by Regan Kohler

SPOONER – A benefit for Joe Benavides, who is in line for a new heart and kidney, will be held Friday, Sept. 24, from 4-7 p.m. at St. Francis de Sales Catholic church, Spooner.

Benavides moved to Spooner from Rice Lake after marrying his wife, Nancy; they met through her father, who worked with Joe, and had their first date at Becky's Food & Spirits.

"We met in December and got married in April," Nancy Benavides said.

Both are retired, he from technology support at Rice Lake Weighing Systems, and she from teaching second grade and working in the Spooner Elementary School library. They have been married for five years.

Benavides suffers from congestive heart failure, a condition in which the heart cannot pump enough blood to the body's other organs, causing people to become short of breath and tire easily.

"I've had heart problems for quite awhile," Benavides said. "There's no circulation in the rest of your body if the heart isn't pumping right."

Benavides had been wearing a pacemaker because his heart had been going out of rhythm, and the last two years saw the disease worsen. He was barely able to walk from his bedroom to the living room couch. In January, he went to the University of Minnesota Medical Center, Fairview, where he was implanted with a left ventricle assist device. The LVAD, which is called HeartMate II, was attached to the bottom of Benavides' heart's left ventricle, and it runs over the top of the heart, to get circulation going.

"They superglue that tube in there," he said.

The LVAD is designed to bridge the gap from the problem to a new heart, and Benavides was placed on a waiting list for a transplant. Though there is the option to remain on the LVAD for life, Benavides chose to have a new heart, rather than being "plugged in" all the time.

"Some people have chosen to keep them," he said of the LVAD. "I would like to have a real, good heart."

In the meantime, he added, "I'm doing quite a bit better."

The LVAD runs on batteries, and Benavides carries the equipment in a shoulder bag wherever he goes. The batteries are charged at night, he said, as they run 12-14 hours. Benavides said it took a couple of weeks to get used to all the sounds, as there are different alerts. His wife, Nancy, said the hospital has a coordinator who trained them before he left, and who is on duty 24 hours a day, seven days a week, for any questions or problems.

"They said no question is stupid," she said.

If the pump stops and cannot be restarted within 10 minutes, Benavides has to be flown to Fairview by helicopter, as a blood clot could get stuck in the pump.

"It's a critical thing that the pump stays on all the time," he said.

The hardest part of having the LVAD, Benavides said, was learning to use it, but his background in technology helped.

"The knowing that you're eventually going to get a new heart keeps you going," he added.

The university has a support group for people on the LVAD or having received a heart transplant, called Second Chance, which Joe and Nancy Benavides both said has been great.

"They [those with transplants] can tell you exactly what's going to happen," Joe Benavides said. "And they hold no punches!"

His wife added that "they were like, 'Been there, done that!'"

Also, Benavides said that after an appointment there in August, he saw three people at the hospital who had gotten transplants, which kept him going.

"What an inspiration that is when you're at this stage and you see somebody that's got a new heart," he said.

The wait can be very long, however. Benavides said one girl he met had been on the list for 18 months, and another man did not qualify for a transplant, so had been on the LVAD for six years.

Benavides also needs a new kidney, as heart failure affects the other organs by the lack of blood flow.

"My kidneys happen to be in line," he said.

The doctors prefer the heart and kidney come from the same donor, as there is the possibility of the body rejecting one or the other, which could mean a longer wait. The heart also has to be the right size for the person in need. Benavides said the blood type has to match the antibodies in the new heart, which takes awhile. He said there are regions in which, if the person needing the transplant lives in one, he or she will receive it first. If there is no match, he said, then the heart is shipped to a different region.

"They only have about 3,000 hearts available a year," he said, adding that the chances of getting one within the first year are really low.

In contrast, finding a kidney is easier, he said, as the person can often receive one from a relative. His wife added that if the organs can't be obtained from the



Joe and Nancy Benavides, Spooner, with one of his woodworking creations that will be up for silent auction at a benefit Friday, Sept. 24, at the St. Francis de Sales Catholic Church. Joe Benavides is in line for heart and kidney transplants, as he suffers from congestive heart failure. – Photo by Regan Kohler

same donor, the doctors will take the heart, and then look for a different kidney donor.

The good part about the transplant, Nancy Benavides said, is that the recovery period will be quicker than after her husband had the LVAD implanted, as the body is in better condition. The fact that Fairview has done over 700 heart transplants is also a positive thing, she said.

When the heart comes in, Joe Benavides said, he will have a two-hour time period in which to get to

Fairview, so he will need to be flown out.

Both Joe and Nancy Benavides said they have had wonderful support from family and friends, and Nancy said it was interesting because in March former Vice President Dick Cheney had an LVAD implanted. Because of her husband's LVAD, many people in the area were familiar with this procedure by the time Cheney had his done, and commented, "That's what Joe's got," she said.

A group of their friends, including former teacher Joan Fitzgerald, St. Francis de Sales' Father Ed Anderson, Knights of Columbus member Bill Holden and Pastor Jim Faunce-Zimmerman of the Namekagon Congregational Church, Earl, which Nancy Benavides attends, organized the benefit this Friday, to help with expenses not covered by insurance. Joe Benavides said that one of his medications costs \$50 just for one pill, and after the transplant, he will be on antirejection medication for life. There will be a spaghetti dinner, with a freewill donation, music, and a silent auction with many items.

"There's all kinds of stuff coming in," Nancy Benavides said.

Joe Benavides is a woodworker, creating designs on the computer and then placing the chip in a machine which carves out the designs. Cribbage boards are one of his specialties, and signs.

"A lot of hunters like signs for their hunting shack," he said.

Some of Benavides' woodworking will be up for auction at the benefit.

Other items include a dinner with the couple from Benavides sister, who is a chef, prepared at her log cabin in Cameron; photography by Dave Herrick; and much more.

The Catholic and Namekagon Congregational churches are co-sponsoring the benefit.

2008 SURE crop disaster deadline Sept. 30

SPOONER — The deadline to submit USDA Farm Service Agency 2008 Supplemental Revenue Assistance Payment program applications is Thursday, Sept. 30. No late filing provisions apply for this 2008 crop disaster program.

Producers who suffered crop production losses due to natural disasters during the 2008 crop year, currently have the opportunity to sign up for the program have until close of business, Sept. 30. Since the implementation of the SURE program, Wisconsin has made \$60 million in payments to producers for crop losses due to disasters.

To qualify for SURE, a producer must have a farming interest physically located in a county that was declared a primary disaster county or contiguous county by the

agriculture secretary under a Secretarial Disaster Designation. Regardless of a Secretarial Disaster Designation, individual producers may also be eligible for SURE if the actual production on the farm is less than 50 percent of the normal production on the farm due to a natural disaster. For SURE, a farm is defined as all crops in which a producer had an interest nationwide.

SURE provides crop disaster assistance payments to eligible producers on farms that have incurred crop production or crop quality losses.

To schedule an appointment to sign up for SURE or more information on the new program, please contact your local FSA county office or visit www.fsa.usda.gov. — from FSA

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