

Ware River News

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Former Ware resident donating kidney to ailing brother Donations being sought from community

By Pattianna Harootian

Special to the News

Ware - While many of us are juggling holiday parties, rushing to get our holiday cards in the mail, and scrambling to finish last minute shopping, local resident, Steven Estridge, is trying to remain positive while he awaits the transplant of his sister Melissa Estridge's kidney. Steven and his siblings, Michele Wagner (formerly Estridge) and Melissa Estridge, grew up in Ware and graduated from Ware High School. Steven also has a sister, Nikki Estridge, who attends Monson High School, a stepsister, Carrie Wilkinson, who graduated from Monson High School, and two stepbrothers, Ray and Mike Jacques. Steven lives with his stepfather, Tom Jacques, and his mother, Sharon Estridge, who works as a certified nursing aide at Palmer Healthcare and Personal Touch Healthcare in Palmer, while also caring for Steven. Steven's father, Steven Sr. Estridge, is a truck driver for Ryder and lives in Monson with Steven's stepmother, Pamela Estridge.

Steven's selfless family and friends, and many people, who didn't even know Steven personally but heard about his plight through Facebook, emails, and word of mouth, were tested to see if they were matches to be kidney donors, as 29-year-old Steven has stage 5 kidney failure. Two of his sisters, Michele and Melissa, were matches and Steven was forced to make an agonizing decision as to which sister's kidney to use.

In 1998 Steven, then a BMX Dirt Jumper sponsored by Loose Clothing of Westfield and Eastern Border of Worcester, fell from approximately fifteen feet in the air, while practicing his "dirt jumping," and punctured his pancreas when his stomach landed hard on the bike's handlebars. Hospitalized, a central line was put into his chest, which caused septic shock blood poisoning. Steven was put into a medically induced coma and given high doses of antibiotics, which saved his life but caused kidney failure. After 17 days in the intensive care unit, Steven was on daily dialysis for a minimum of 6 hours a day, for over 2 months. After a grueling recovery, with his family by his side, his kidneys miraculously recovered to functioning at about fifty percent and Steven was able to live a relatively normal life until recently. He now has only about seven percent kidney function and awaits the transplant of one of his sister Melissa's kidneys.

Throughout their ordeal, one of the most sobering things Steven and his family has learned is that after receiving a kidney transplant, a patient must take immunosuppressive drugs for the rest of their life, at a cost of \$19,000.00 annually. Insurance only covers these drugs for three years. Without these drugs, the body will reject the organ and the

patient will have to go on dialysis, which most insurances do cover, but costs \$77,000.00 annually. For more information and to support legislation to improve organ transplantation, go to: <http://www.americantransplantfoundation.org/>.

Steven and his family's initial relief and excitement of two of his sisters being donor matches was quickly replaced with more stress and anxiety as they try to figure out how he will pay for the immunosuppressive drugs, and many other related expenses. Steven, due to his illness, had to leave his job as a truck driver for All Parts Racing in Ware, and will likely not be strong enough to return to work for several months after the transplant.

This has been an extreme hardship on the family emotionally and financially. Before Steven can be cleared for a transplant, he has to be free of any medical problems, as anything that can cause an infection after the transplant could be life threatening. As a result, his medical bills are piling up. Steven's sister Melissa will be taking a leave of absence from work and traveling from Nashville, Tennessee for her surgery to have one of her kidney's removed. Steven's sister Michele will be traveling from San Diego, and leaving behind her 2 daughters, both under the age of 7, to be here to help and support her family. When Michele was asked about her brother she said, "My heart breaks for him. Everything is about money right now-how much this and that cost and the added stress is so unhealthy for him, especially in his condition. I don't want Steven's financial issues to determine his self-worth. He is such a hard worker and it's killing him feeling so helpless and dependent on others. He needs to focus on what is most important now and that is getting well."

Donations to assist the family with related expenses can be made at Country Bank, 155 West St., Ware, MA 01082, or at any Country Bank Branch Location, to the Steven Estridge Benefit Fund and checks (made out to the Steven Estridge Benefit Fund) can be mailed to: Sharon Estridge, PO BOX 621, Ware, MA 01082. You can also donate on-line at: www.giveforward.com/stevensarmy.

The family is also in the preliminary stages of planning a benefit and would be incredibly grateful to anyone who can help. If you can donate anything for the benefit: time, items to be raffled, food, a venue, entertainment, or anything else, please contact Steven's sister Michele at: mtbikerbaby@yahoo.com or 858-337-3138.