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Steve Cummings: First Lumbee Bone Marrow Donor, Calls It Answered Prayer



Steve Cummings

Steve Cummings of Pembroke will become the first Lumbee Indian to be a Bone Marrow Donor sometime during the month of May. "Because of the confidentiality of the American Red Cross," Mr. Cummings stated, "I am unable to tell you anything other than that it will be some time in May. I know that the recipient is a 28 year old male. That is all I know about him personally."

Receiving personal information about the person in need is not important to Steve Cummings. What is important to him is the opportunity to help someone else. "It is exciting to be a donor," Cummings said. "To have an opportunity to save another human life is an answer to prayer. I believe it is God's will. And I am expecting a full recovery for the recipient." Medically speaking, the match for Cummings and the patient is a "miracle match." The only uncertainty seems to be if the patient can live long enough to receive the transplant.

The patient has acute leukemia and is in critical condition. These medical facts do not cause Cummings' faith to waiver. "There is no question in my mind about this. I have prayed for God to give me the opportunity to be a donor....I wish I didn't have to donate....I wish there was no one who needed a transplant....But that is wishful thinking. There are many people out there who are in need of a bone marrow transplant. And I consider it a privilege to be able to donate.... I can't describe the feeling that you have when you realize that you are the one who can save this person," Cummings continued.

The match between Cummings and the patient is considered a perfect match. It is the same as being a twin, Cummings explained. All the tests that are required to become a donor have been perfect matches. There are three major tests required to become a donor. The first is a simple procedure, the HLA tissue typing. It requires the drawing of two tablespoons of blood. The second test is the DR typing and the third is MLC typing where the donor's blood and the patient's blood is mixed to see if the blood matches.

The unique tissue characteristics of an individual's bone marrow are inherited in the same way one inherits skin, eye and hair color. This means that when no matching sister or brother is available, the best chance of finding a matched marrow donor is with someone from the same racial background.

Cummings explained the procedure for donating bone marrow. "Donating bone marrow does not mean that you donate bone. It means that you donate marrow, this is very similar in appearance to blood." Cummings will go to North Carolina Baptist Hospital in Winston-Salem to donate the marrow. He will be there the first day for interviews and further tests. He will donate the next morning and, if everything goes well, he will return to his motel room for the night late the same afternoon. "It involves approximately three days in time. But the satis-

faction of saving a life is more important than time." Bone marrow will live for twelve hours outside the body, so the transplant will take place immediately following the donation. The procedure does require anesthesia and some discomfort because the marrow is drawn from the hip with a needle, the large pelvic bone. The procedure takes anywhere from 45 minutes to one and half hours.

Cummings said that he decided to become a donor because of his upbringing. "As long as I can remember," he said, "my father has donated blood. He taught me respect for life and to do anything I could to help others. I have been donating blood since I was 18 years old. Later I began to donate phereses (platelets), the ingredient in the blood that causes it to coagulate. I was asked if I wanted to be placed on the registry for possible bone marrow donation, and I said yes."

That was in 1990 and on February 23 the initial matching began. From that testing, Cummings was placed in the international registry and the rest will soon be history.

Cummings would like to see many other Indian people become donors. He encourages other Indians to go for the initial testing. "There are certain gene factors prevalent among Indians that makes the need for Indian donors greater. There is a great need to get more Indians in the registry."

Bone marrow replenishes itself within two weeks. And there is some pain involved in donating, but Cummings believes that discomfort is a small price to pay to save another life.

Cummings said that the opportunity provided for him has given him a totally new perspective on life. "Little problems aren't that important when you consider the great need of others, especially people who are struggling for life. This experience has opened my eyes to a lot of things. We need more Christians with a perspective on life...a perspective to extend life and give of ourselves to others."

"I believe that the reason the number of Native Americans who are on the registry for marrow donations is the fear of the pain that may be involved and a lack of knowledge. These two things prevent people from tissue typing. I hope that I can be used by God to help dispel some of this fear and lack of knowledge of what being a donor really means. It means that this person (in need of a transplant to live) really needs you. We need some faithful commitments from Christians and not just shallow concern."

Cummings is now considering the importance of being an organ donor. "I look at this opportunity as a miracle for life and an answer to prayer. I am humbled by the opportunity and solicit your prayers for the patient."

While Cummings admits he is curious about the patient, he said: "I am placing all my faith in God. I would rather know that he was saved than to know his name. The greatest reward for me would be to know that he is saved."

Cummings will have the opportunity a year after the transplant to meet the patient.

Cummings is not only the first Lumbee to become a donor, but also the first employee with the State of North Carolina. He is employed with the Department of Corrections as a Corrections Officers at Wagram. He hopes also that other state employees will become donors.

He is the son of Fred and Voncille Cummings of Pembroke and is married to the former Darlene Tyler. He is the father of two children, Holly and Tyler.

The National Marrow Donor Program, a network of transplant donor centers and collection centers, maintain a computerized data bank available tissue-typed donors nation wide. Persons interested in the program may contact the NMDP at 1-800-654-1247 or contact the Share Life Program (H.B. Bullard, spokesperson) at 738-7335.

Nominations Being Accepted for LRDA Service Awards

Lumbee Regional Development Association will accept nominations for their service awards through May 14.

The Henry Berry Lowrie Award will be presented to an individual who has provided outstanding leadership and worked toward the betterment of the Lumbee community. Candidates must be Lumbee Indian and may reside outside the service area.

Criteria for this award: a person who worked diligently against racial injustices; demonstrated pride in Indian heritage and culture; an advocate for Lumbee people under a dominate society; served as a guiding force showing the real meaning of Indianness and freedom; symbolizes the hopes and aspirations of all Lumbees and is a hero to all Lumbees.

The Distinguished Service Award will be presented to an individual who has provided outstanding leadership and worked toward the betterment of the Lumbee community. Candidates must be Lumbee Indian and may reside outside the service area.

Criteria for this award: worked toward the betterment of the Indian community; promoted social, economic, educational and political equality for Indian people; created an awareness of Indian issues and concerns; efforts and accomplishments have touched the lives of many Indian people; contributed efforts creating a more unified Indian community.

Business Person of the Year Award will be awarded to a business person who helped improve the economic atmosphere of the Lumbee community. Criteria for this award: created

job opportunities for Indian people; helped distinguish Lumbees as competent businesspersons or entrepreneurs; procured resources for Indian owned businesses; serviced as a positive role model for Indian businesses; demonstrated success as an Indian business person in the Indian community.

The Advancement of Education Award will be presented to an individual who has provided outstanding leadership and helped improve opportunities for Indian students.

Criteria for this award: work in education has impacted the lives of many people; and advocate for Indian education; improved the quality of education for Indian people; demonstrated that education is the drive that enable one to ascertain the maximum benefits of Indian aspirations; assisted schools in developing programs which enhances the education of Indian people.

Indian Student of the Year Award will be presented to student who have portrayed a positive role model for other Indian youths. This award will be presented in three categories: middle school, high school and post secondary.

Criteria includes: demonstrated creativity and leadership in promoting understanding and appreciation of the heritage of Lumbee people in an educational setting; participated actively in student activities in a leadership role; participated in education and/or community activities which presented a positive role model for other Lumbee students and promoted an appreciation for American Indian culture by the general student body; demonstrated a strong educational

commitment and search for personal excellence as evidenced by academic success; full time student in middle school, high school or post secondary school and is 21 years of age or under.

Lumbee Elder of the Year Award will be presented to a person who has demonstrated a life-long commitment to the advancement of Lumbee people. Criteria for this award: promoted understanding and appreciation of Lumbee heritage in an educational community setting; demonstrated a life long commitment and contributions to the advancement of Lumbee people and the community; served as a positive role model; contributed significantly to the Indian community through

social, civic, educational, religious or political activities; must be 60 years of age or older.

Hamilton McMillian Award will be presented to a non-Indian who has made contributions that will have a long-lasting impact on the lives of the Lumbee people.

Criteria: helped to eradicate injustice done toward Lumbee people;

worked toward lifting Lumbees out of poverty; helped to enhance an understanding of Lumbee culture and heritage; demonstrated compassion toward Lumbee people; contributions made by the nominee will have a long-lasting impact on the lives of Lumbee people.

Nomination forms are available at the offices of LRDA and further information on these awards may be obtained by calling Wanda Locklear at 521-8602.

Report From N.C. House District 85

Since my last report on the activities in the North Carolina Legislature affecting District 85, I have been quite busy. As more and more bills leave committees and arrive on the floor for debate, our daily legislative sessions are getting longer and longer. I filed several bills including an agency bill to remove the word "state" from the North Carolina State Indian Housing Authority. That bill has passed the House and is now in the Senate. In addition, I filed a bill at the request of the Robeson County Commissioners that would repeal an old outdated Robeson Revolving Fund statute dating from 1945.

This bill is also now before the Senate. As the chairman of a Judiciary II Subcommittee, much work has gone into revising the juvenile law to protect children more effectively from abuse, neglect and dependency. Our work on this bill will be reported to the full Judiciary Committee sometime within the next two weeks.

The deadline for local bills, those affecting 15 counties or less, and public bills not affecting finance or appropriations has passed. This means more bills will be coming out of committee and fewer bills will be filed. This translates into more and longer House sessions. It was refreshing to attend the Robeson County and Hoke County Democratic Party Conventions on Saturday, April 17th. Both were informative and enlightening. It is always rewarding to see the democratic process in action.

I have had many comments concerning the four-laning of NC-74. As the schedule is now, the first work is to be done on NC-74 between I-95 and the Columbus County line. The state already owns the right-of-way in that area and work can begin there much sooner than on the western section. Construction on that section between I-95 and Maxton is scheduled to begin in 1999. However, that may be moved up sooner. The exact route west of I-95 hasn't been solidified yet, but most of it is proposed to be south of the present NC-74.

Now that Robeson County has its own member on the State Board of Transportation, Major David Green of Parkton, we can expect that he will do all he can to speed the construction on NC-74. The delegation has had several groups visiting the legislature from Robeson, Hoke and Scotland Counties and we enjoy having them. It is through visits such as these that we are able to become more informed about the concerns of citizens and groups in the district.

If you or your group plans to be in the Raleigh area, do not hesitate to come by and visit with your legislators. Give us a call in advance so that we may try and schedule time to meet with you. Our committee meetings consume most of our time. However, we will make every effort to arrange to meet with you. Don't forget you can always drop us a line. Ronnie Sutton Representative.



(Front) Bobby Dean Locklear, Chairman of the County Commissioners; Noah Woods, County Commissioner; Milton Hunt, Mayor of Pembroke; Tony McGirt, Store Manager; (Back) James Lynn Conyers, Supervisor. They are shown at the Open House of the new Pizza Hut in Pembroke Wednesday April 21, 1993. (Photos by John R. Brayboy).



Kim Jacobs, Brandi Thomas, Ginger, and Darlene Brayboy; Some of the employees of the new Pizza Hut in Pembroke