

Another milestone for Little Billy Bridges

Learning to ride bicycle another in a long list of miracles for Ellis Von Creveld victim

By BEN LEDBETTER
Staff Writer

Previously held down by an assortment of tubes, Billy Bridges is now free and energetic.

But his energy level could be detrimental to him, his grandmother Helen Barnette said. "He's really been through it," Barnette said about her grandson who used to be attached to nine central lines. "And he'd keep on, keep on like an Eveready battery I guess."

Bridges was born with Ellis Von Creveld disease, and spent the first month of his life in intensive care at the hospital.

The incurable disease is so rare, Barnette said, that the foundation for prevention of the disease, closed.

With his tubes now out, Barnette said Bridges is taking medication to calm him down.

"They want to slow him down because of his lungs," Barnette said. She said he's too active and too impulsive.

Although he has his tubes out, Barnette said there are certain things Bridges still can't do.

Another thing Barnette said needed to be watched was Bridges' weight, which can not dip below 50 pounds.

"This has been the biggest problem," Barnette said.

Bridges is still seeing a series of doctors, most of which were with him from his birth. He is also in outpatient rehabilitation,

and has been receiving similar care at school.

Barnette said she once had 24-hour nurses at the house, but that when down to 18 eventually.

The extra care did not come without a cost.

Barnette said he went through \$2 million worth of insurance when he was first born. Eventually, the insurance company stopped paying.

"Then he fell through a loop-hole because we can't adopt him," Barnette said about her grandson, who along with husband Clarence have been raising him since his birth.

"We had to get lawyers to fight the state to get on Medicaid," Barnette said.

Barnette said she was trying to get Bridges on Medicaid because he was under a lot of doctors, and had an ongoing disease.

"Medicaid didn't want to do it," Barnette said. "They said it cost too much to keep him alive."

The stress had affected Barnette to the point where she had a stroke around 1991, which she said was from the stress of the legal fight with Medicaid.

After a brief sickness, he has resumed his outpatient rehab.

To help find out how he has been doing with his education, Bridges, who will be entering the fourth grade at Township

No. 3 Elementary School, has talked with a child psychologist to gauge his progress.

Barnette, said Bridges, who has been making A's and B's thus far through school, has been doing fine academically.

"It would not be fair to him if this school is not giving him what he needs," Barnette said about a consultation she had with the psychologist's office.

With Bridges' current academic progress in school, Barnette gave him a new bicycle, which is kept at the rehab clinic in Shelby.

Bridges has also been to Florida, and Barnette said that he thrives while he is around an ocean.

"He has a lot of asthma," Barnette said. "He does better on the ocean, right on the ocean, not back from the ocean."

The ocean-cleared Bridges' asthma on the trip.

"I don't know what it is, it just clears it right up," Barnette said about the salt and humidity usually associated with the beach.



BEN LEDBETTER/THE HERALD
Billy Bridges, who recently had a series of tubes removed, spends some time on his swing set at his home in Cleveland County.



BEN LEDBETTER / HERALD
Hilda Goforth, foreground, and Ethel Yarbro man the American Association of Retired People booth at the recent Bethware Fair. Both are members of the AARP Chapter which meets at the King Mountain Senior Center.



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