

"Not ready to die"

Needham, MA By Steven Ryan
GateHouse News Service
Wed Aug 01, 2007, 05:14 PM EDT

Angelo Terrazzino's sister, Tina Delano, described it as Murphy's Law — when one thing goes wrong, everything does.

Last July, Terrazzino, of Mason Road, who was 51 at the time, was just laid off from his job as a service manager at a Wellesley car dealership. Despite not believing he was depressed, a family member thought he was when he would often appear tired and weak.

Then it got worse.



Angelo Terrazzino with wife Barbara are Needham resident, has leukemia and needs a bone marrow donor. His family is spearheading a drive that could help to find a match.

"I woke up with a terrible sinus infection," Terrazzino said. "I couldn't move my head, it was so bad. I then developed a cough ... I didn't want to go [to the hospital] and I thought I'd sleep it off for a few days."

Terrazzino's wife, Barbara, convinced him otherwise, taking him to Beth Israel Deaconess Hospital-Needham. He was diagnosed with acute myelogenous leukemia. This form of leukemia is characterized by a rapid spike in abnormal blood cells in the bone marrow, which interferes with the production of normal blood cells.

"I totally lost my breath and almost fell off my chair," said Barbara Terrazzino. "Everyone I knew with leukemia died."

Despite being told to get all his affairs in order, Terrazzino wasn't ready to give up.

"When [the doctor] came back in the room, I said 'Are we going to beat this? I'm not ready to die,'" he said.



A year later, upon first glance, Terrazzino, who is built like a football player, looks healthy, but has only been home from the hospital — where he spent three months — for a few weeks. A father of four, he has a lot to look forward to in the next six months. His 29-year-old daughter is expecting her first child in January, and his oldest son is getting married in three weeks.

But after undergoing several rounds of chemotherapy, his doctors want to avoid more, feeling his body might not be able to take it. Instead, they're hoping for a stem cell transplant, which requires a bone marrow donor. The procedure would help increase his red blood cell count.

Terrazzino's sisters and sister-in-law, who dubbed their efforts Angels for Angelo, are working to find a match, which is based on Terrazzino's DNA. They'll be holding a drive in Needham on Aug. 26 at the VFW post on Junction Street, while also holding drives in Medford, Franklin and Abington.

There are 10 DNA markers used to find a match, regardless of blood type. Doctors are hoping to find an 8-out-of-10, if not a 9-out-of-10, match for Terrazzino, whose Sicilian background makes finding a donor difficult.

Delano said doctors are hoping to find a match by the winter, since the slightest cold — with Terrazzino's depleted immune system — could be lethal. Doctors initially thought they found a match from a German individual, but that potential donor declined, at least for the time being.

"We're in dire need to find someone," Delano said.

At the drives, folks will provide DNA samples through a cotton swab applied to the inside of the cheek. If they match, the donor will be given drugs to increase his or her level of stem cells and later undergo a procedure resembling a blood transfusion.

"It's a very simple process," Barbara Terrazzino said. "The donor would be first considered for Angelo and then put on an international registry. Chances are you won't be called, but it's an easy way to save someone's life."

Terrazzino joked he wants to get on the international registry, but that doctors no longer want his blood.

"If I knew this before, I would've done it," Terrazzino said. "It doesn't cost money, it just takes their time to help somebody — if not me, than someone else who needs it."

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