

Fenton family receives news of 'miracle' Match found for toddler's bone marrow transplant

By [Kevin Carbery](#)

Monday, July 2, 2007 1:39 PM CDT



A match has been found for 16-month-old Braxton Birlew's bone marrow transplant.

Saturday, June 23, 2007, will be a night hard to forget for the Birlew family of Fenton.

Not only did friends of the family put on a benefit for the Birlews to help them with medical bills, but they also learned that a match had been found for a bone marrow transplant for 16-month-old Braxton Birlew.

"We're thrilled to have a donor," Heather Birlew, Braxton's mother, said. "It's absolutely a miracle. It's a perfect match. They said, normally, they don't have a perfect match."

Braxton is gravely ill with Wiskott-Aldrich syndrome, an immunity deficiency disease he has had since birth. The only known cure is a bone marrow transplant.

As time has passed, Braxton's condition has worsened. Doctors had recently told the Birlews that Braxton had only eight months to live if a matching donor could not be found. Kathy Pfeffer, a family friend who helped organize the benefit, spoke of the significance of the news.

"The doctors are shocked," she said. "We needed someone between 18 and 23. We found a young man, 23. He was found through the Bone Marrow Registry."

"They're not allowed to tell us where it's coming from until a year after the operation. At that point, it's up to the donor to have his name released."

What it means is, the donor is giving Braxton a chance--a good one--to live, Heather said.

"He will be going in, in a couple of weeks, to start chemotherapy," she explained. "Then, he'll go through the bone marrow transplant.

"He should be fine. He'll be in (Children's Hospital) for about eight weeks."

The benefit took place at the High Ridge Elks Lodge. It went beyond the organizers' expectations, Pfeffer said.

"We raised over \$10,000," Pfeffer said. "We had 381 people show up. Donations are still coming to me to help with the medical bills."

The other benefit organizers were Amy and Kristy Green. A disc jockey supplied music for the event, which included a silent auction, raffles and 50/50 drawings.

Due to his condition, Braxton has had to receive blood transfusions every other week at Children's Hospital.

Along with the good news of finding a matching bone marrow donor, family members also know they must contend with paying for the transplant operation, which costs \$1 million. With the possibility of there being a need for more than one transplant operation, the Birlews will be facing astronomical medical bills, even with insurance paying 80 percent of the costs.

Still, Heather said she and her husband, Curtis, could not be happier for their little boy. They have three other children, Ashley, 9, Andrew, 7, and Bryce, 4 months.

"It's a great relief to find a matching donor," Heather said. "We'll still be in debt, but, now, he should survive."

Pfeffer said that efforts to assist the Birlews with the medical bills will continue. A barbecue fund-raiser is in the works, she said.

Donations for the family may be made to the Braxton Birlew Donation Fund through the Maritz Corp. US Bank branch or mailed to Pfeffer at 1927 Waybridge Lane, Fenton, Mo. 63026.

In addition, Birlew family friends are also going ahead with plans to have a bone marrow drive on July 29 at a site to be determined even though Braxton has his donor in place, Pfeffer said.

"Please remember, there are still a lot of people who need bone marrow transplants," she said. "They still need miracles."

As the cost to do bone marrow testing is expensive, Pfeffer said she is trying to find a corporate sponsor to help pay for the bone marrow drive.

For more information, contact Pfeffer at 636-343-8636 or 1-866-590-1946.

"I want to thank Kathy Pfeffer and Kristy and Amy Green and their families for helping with the benefit," Heather said. "And, thank you to everybody who helped."