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Marquette man donates bone marrow to save life

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By DILLON THORNE, Journal Staff Writer

MARQUETTE — A Marquette resident received a call asking him to try to help save a stranger's life. Despite his upcoming marriage and a commitment to the U.S. Army, he decided to try.

Benjamin Snow, 21, will be donating bone marrow Thursday to a man in Kansas whom he has never met or spoken to. Snow only knows the man suffers from leukemia and has a wife and kids.

The marrow donation might not be the most significant event in a chaotic month for Snow. A U.S. Army specialist, Snow was married July 2 and is leaving July 21 for 18 months of Army advanced individual training in California. So why did he decide to donate in the midst of all that?



"It's exciting to know you are going to try and save someone you've never met," Snow said. "If I were in his position and I knew that a person had the opportunity to help save my life, I would want them to do something about it. The family deserves to have a dad, I just hope I can help."

Snow, a recent Northern Michigan University graduate, received a call to donate marrow in December. He registered to be a donor at a bone marrow drive at NMU earlier in 2006. According to NMU's Web site, 150 students registered to donate during the drive.

"I originally got called to donate in December. I matched with a patient with 98 percent compatibility. I agreed to do it, but the patient died before we ever got a chance to set anything up," Snow said. "I got another call a few months after that and once again they matched me up with someone — 99 percent compatible. The odds of even matching one time are pretty rare, but twice is almost unheard of, they told me."

Bone marrow is a soft material in the center of bones responsible for producing red and white blood cells along with other blood components. Donated marrow helps victims fight leukemia, sickle cell anemia and immune deficiency along with other conditions.

Snow will be flying with his mother to the Grand Rapids Blood Center Thursday morning, where he will donate later that day. Doctors will insert special, hollow needles through Snow's lower back to withdraw marrow from his pelvic bones. The recipient in Kansas will have the marrow less than 24 hours after Snow's operation ends.

Snow will spend the night at the hospital for observation, then will be released. All his expenses are being paid by the blood bank.

Snow said his family and friends support him even if they don't necessarily understand why he's donating.

"It's a lot of pain. I was told I wouldn't be able to sit down comfortably for a few days and my lower back could hurt for around a month. But if I can help save a life it's worth it," he said. "With everything else going on, not everyone totally understands why I'm doing it."

If the marrow donation is successful and the recipient recovers, Snow may even get to meet the man he saved.

"If everything goes good, I was told I would most likely get to meet him," Snow said. "He still would have to recover and everything has to go good — I just hope I get to meet him one day."