

## Widow launches bone marrow drive

By Jessica Hackett  
Easton Journal  
Thu Sep 27, 2007

---

More than five years ago, Bryan Spiegelberg gave Ian Irving a precious gift — he gave Irving the gift of life.

In January 2002, Irving, who had chronic myelogenous leukemia, underwent a stem cell transplant with stem cells Spiegelberg donated. Thanks to his donation, Irving was able to watch his son graduate from high school and move on to college.

Irving's wife, Diane, and his son, David, 22, former Easton residents, hope their efforts will help save someone else's life.

The Ian Irving Memorial Donor Drive will take place at Oliver Ames High School on Saturday, Oct. 6 from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. A simple cheek swab will register donors.

Irving passed away more than a year ago, but he lived for much longer than expected. Before they found out Spiegelberg was a match for Irving, doctors said he had less than two months to live.

"It enabled my husband to live for an extra four years," Diane said. "I decided I can't bring my husband back, but maybe by doing this it can save someone else's life."

Elise Collins, donor center manager at the Dana Farber, Cancer Institute, said donors are entered into the registry through the cheek swab. After registering, donors take an initial blood test and if a recipient is found, the potential donor takes a complete physical exam to confirm they are the correct match. Through the marrow donor program, there are two ways people can donate, Collins said.

She said people can donate their bone marrow or their stem cells. A bone marrow donation is made through a surgical procedure, which Collins said is an outpatient procedure in which



Ian Irving, left, received a stem cell transplant from Bryan Spiegelberg, right, in 2002. The two met in 2003 when this photo was taken. Irving died a year ago, but had several more years thanks to Spiegelberg's donations, says Irving's widow, Diane. Diane Irving is now holding a bone marrow drive in Easton to encourage other donors.

donors can leave the hospital that day and the surgery does not compromise one's immune system.

A stem cell blood donation entails taking injections for one or two days of a drug that stimulates the bone marrow into the blood and the stem cells are collected that way. People can donate more than once, Collins said. She said all medical expenses and hotel stays are paid for through National Marrow Donor Insurance.

Collins said donor drives are important, as they add new donors to the list because people over the age of 60 can not donate their marrow and are taken off of the list. There are about six million donors in the United States and 11 million worldwide. Collins said that figure may seem large, but people who need stem cell or bone marrow transplants need to have a "genetic twin," which is hard to find, Collins said.

"I can't explain how important (these drives) are," Collins said. "There are still patients out there who can not find a donor match. We are always looking for new donors to add to the registration."

Spiegelberg, 33, will fly to Easton Oct. 6 to attend the drive. Spiegelberg said he signed up for the marrow registry through a drive similar to the one that the Dana Farber Cancer Institute will hold in memory of Irving.

"When I was found to be a potential match with Ian, I agreed to do whatever it would take to help him without a second thought," Spiegelberg said.

Spiegelberg and Irving met in August 2003, more than a year after Irving's transplant. He said his family and he will remain lifelong friends with the Irvings.

"I got much more out of the experience than I put in. Being an integral part of extending someone's life is an indescribable feeling. I have also gained very close friends; we feel like the Irvings are family," Spiegelberg said.

Diane said she cannot put into words what Spiegelberg's donation has meant to her family and her.

"You know, I lost my husband, but I gained a family," Diane said.

She said Spiegelberg is modest about his donation, and said he gave her family the gift of time, which cannot be repaid.

"We tried to make the most of every minute we had together," Diane said. "If it wasn't for Bryan, we wouldn't have been able to do that."

Donors must be between the ages of 18 and 60 and in general good health.