

Orchard Market's cancer survivor

By Grant Berry

David Hart, Jr. has been working at Orchard Market since June, 2004, shortly after he graduated from Fruitport High School. When David was hired, he went straight to work in the meat department. "A friend of mine was working in the meat department at the time, and he didn't want the job any more," David said. "He recommended the job to me, I got hired, and they stuck me in the meat department." In his tenure, David has mostly been used as a meat wrapper, stocker and cleanup help.



David has thrived in the meat department, though. Earlier this year, he was promoted to a full-time meat cutter apprentice, a position he eagerly accepted. However, just a few months into his training, David was diagnosed with cancer. "I knew something was wrong from the beginning," he said. "I had a feeling it was cancer. I expected the worst, but it was still surreal getting the diagnosis."

David discovered the mass in mid-May. On June 11, he was diagnosed, and on June 13 he had surgery to remove the mass. After the successful surgery, David underwent three weeks of radiation treatments. In all, David missed more than a month of work. "It was boring," he said. "Time went slow. But when I was off, I learned to enjoy the little things I do like going to work and working on sports projects."

David is a huge sports fan. He enjoys logging statistics for his favorite sports teams. He is a perennial season ticket-holder for the Muskegon Lumberjacks. At each home game, he can be heard cheering for his team, or can be seen dancing the Cotton-Eyed Joe. In addition, David follows the University of Michigan football and basketball programs, and is also a big fan of the Detroit Red Wings, Pistons, Lions, and Tigers. Sadly, because of his illness, David had to pass up on an opportunity to fulfill a lifelong dream. "I had a chance to see the Tigers play at Wrigley Field this year," he said. "But because of my treatments, I couldn't go. Oh well, maybe I'll get another chance someday."

David also enjoys singing karaoke with his friends at local karaoke destinations in the Muskegon area. He gave up on karaoke before his surgery, but has since picked it up again. "When you have a lot of free time, you start analyzing your life and your decisions. I started singing again because it's something I really enjoy."

During his convalescence, David moved back with his parents briefly while recovering from surgery. "He was a good patient," said Deb Hart, David's mother. "He didn't complain too much." David's parents were quite surprised when they learned of David's diagnosis. "We never expected something like that," Deb said. "Because you never want anything bad to happen to your kids. You don't want your kids to go through something like that. But we have our faith in God and we knew He would get us through this."

Since his surgery, David has been rebuilding and strengthening relationships with friends and family. He joined a Bible study group at Fellowship Reformed Church with his father, David Hart, Sr. "It's a father/son thing that we do together," David said.

David has now been cleared of cancer and is living cancer free. He must have blood work done four times per year, and have an annual chest x-ray and CAT scan, but other than that, he is a living, breathing cancer survivor.

Orchard Market is thrilled to have David back to resume his work as a meat cutter apprentice. "He's a great asset, a hard worker, and we're glad to have him back," said Orchard's meat department manager. "But most of all, we're all glad that he's healthy and that he beat this thing."

With his health fully restored and his treatments behind him, David has a renewed vitality for life. He can be seen and heard on weekends singing karaoke with his friends. He went to a Detroit Tigers regular season game and to an ALDS playoff game. "It wasn't Wrigley," he said, "but I got to see the Tigers beat the White Sox in a pennant race and beat the Oakland A's in a playoff game."

Unfortunately, David missed the Muskegon Lumberjacks off-season summer scrimmage game. But like a true fan, David keeps scores and statistics for the team for his own personal posterity. In addition, David can be seen at all Lumberjack home games cheering for his team or dancing the Cotton-Eyed Joe.

Fruitport Area News • December 2012 • Page 9

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