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'I thought I'd be dead'

By **CHRIS KREPICH**
Press Enterprise Writer

Buckhorn woman feeling 'blessed' to have survived three years after diagnosis of terminal lung cancer



Press Enterprise/Keith Haupt

STEPHANIE HANEY talks about living with lung cancer at the Hemlock Township municipal building where she works.

BUCKHORN — Stephanie Haney didn't expect to live to age 42.

When diagnosed with stage-four lung cancer three years ago, she believed she had about two years because that's how long many others with the disease survived.

Doctors never estimated how long she had, and she never asked.

"I was really counting that two-year clock," she said. "I was really worried. I thought I'd be dead by now."

But now after that date has come and gone, Haney sometimes almost forgets she has a deadly cancer, and the last year just flew by.

With the help of medication, a motivation to live for her two young daughters, and a determination to gain more funding and awareness for the disease, Haney looks and feels as

good as ever.

She's lost some weight as a result of her medication, but she's not wasting away due to the illness. Her hair has grown back after chemotherapy.

The medication she now takes causes a rash on her face, and she has a small collapse in her lung that she barely notices.

Small prices to pay, she says, to lead a relatively normal life.

"I don't mind having a stable disease," Haney said. "I will be in treatment forever."

Careful about future

She saw her youngest daughter start kindergarten, something she didn't think she'd get to do.

"Clearly, I'm blessed," she said. "I responded to the drugs and they've had such an impact."

Haney said her case is unusual because a 39-year-old woman who never smoked and doesn't have a family history of the disease isn't supposed to get lung cancer.

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Cancer 'At any moment, it could grow'

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And she's lived longer than many others in the same situation.

But because she looks fine and goes about her normal activities, people tend to forget her illness is terminal.

"I have to be careful how I plan for the future," she said.

Living with the disease rather than a remission keeps it real for her, and serves as a reminder that she must do what she wants to do now before it's too late.

'Remember me'

As a result, Haney is much busier these days.

She has focused much of her attention on her family and on acting as an advocate for lung cancer.

Haney, Hemlock Township's manager, knows her time with daughters Libby, 7, and Allie, 5, is limited.

So she wants to make sure she's around long enough for her girls to remember their mother, and learn some valuable lessons such as fighting for what they believe in.

"I feel I'm building memories and a history for them to have memories of me," she said. "Now I feel my younger daughter will actually remember me."

At 7, Libby is now becoming more aware of what lung cancer means.

She recently said she's worried for her mother because so many others die from the disease, Haney said.

"Which floored me," she said. "Apparently, she knows now it's a bad thing, which gives me some guilt."

'Make an imprint'

Her medication is keeping the cancer at bay, but that could change.

"At any moment, it could grow," she said. "With some people, they're gone in three months once the tide turns."

But as long as there are new therapies and drugs for Haney to turn to as others become ineffective, there's still hope for more time.

Haney now takes one Tarceva pill a day and goes to Lehigh Valley Hospital in Allentown every three weeks for an infusion of Avastin.

The patient quickly turned into an activist

BUCKHORN — Soon after her lung-cancer diagnosis, **Stephanie Haney** began fighting for more research funding and raising awareness.

But it's been an uphill battle since lung cancer has the stigma of being a smokers' disease.

Haney, though, said she's living proof the illness is not limited to smokers.

In 2008, she organized a local "Free to Breathe" walk and raised \$12,000.

"One problem with lung cancer is that the patients aren't around that long to fight for themselves," she said. "The families are grieving, so there's no network of people to scream, and it's important to me to expand that."

So Haney has concentrated on getting more than just local friends and family involved in the cause.

For example, she took two friends from State College and Dallas to a national conference this spring.

The pill costs about \$4,000 a month, and the infusion about \$21,000 a session, she said.

All but the travel and copays are covered by insurance.

She is scheduled to participate in a clinical trial that will target a rare mutation of her cancer that doctors discovered.

About 80 percent of patients who have taken the trial drug so far have responded well, she said, but it's not known how long any benefits may last.

"I've resigned myself to knowing I'm not going to retire or be here in 10 years," she said. "I can accept that as long as I get enough time with my daughters to make an imprint."

A lot of the friends she's made around the country are now gone because of the cancer.

National model

A committee now oversees the walk and continues to raise about \$15,000 a year.

"Team Haney" serves as a model for the National Lung Cancer Partnership because no other national "Free to Breathe" walks even approach that amount, she said.

Haney also writes a blog about her experiences, and is frequently called upon to participate at national conventions and events.

In January, Haney traveled to Washington, D.C., to act as a grant reviewer for the Department of Defense when it decided to allocate funding for lung-cancer research for the first time.

November is Lung Cancer Awareness month, and Team Haney recently held a walk.

By Chris Krepich

'Regret it'

Haney recently fulfilled a life-long dream by purchasing a horse.

As a child, it was all she ever wanted until she was old enough to realize the expense involved.

When her daughters attended a pony camp, she became interested again, and even leased a horse she considered buying for a while.

After attending the funeral of a young woman who died of colon cancer and who loved horses, Haney decided she had to have one.

"Not one day do I regret it," she said. "My daughters love it."

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