

Lifelong illness claims Aurora teen

By Justina Wang
STAFF WRITER

Since he arrived in Aurora, 16-year-old Diego Alvarez had provided plenty of reasons to believe in long-shot hopes.

Diagnosed at 4 months old with cystic fibrosis, an incurable and progressive genetic disease, Diego had a heap of misfortunes, to be sure. His family came from Mexico City in 2005 to visit relatives and research better treatment. Weeks after he arrived in Aurora, he caught a virus that infected his lungs and left him too sick to travel.

But in times of trouble, small miracles seemed at work.

When his family found themselves with few connections in a strange country, local advocates from Aurora's League of United Latin American Citizens council and Centro Cristo Rey reached out. With their help and some

press, sympathetic community members touched by the Alvarez's story stepped up with donations totaling nearly \$75,000.

Then, when University Medical Center in Tucson, Ariz., appeared to be the hospital that would perform a double-lung transplant, a doctor heard about his case and offered to do the procedure at Loyola University Medical Center in Maywood.

And when Diego's legal status — the family's tourist visa expired last May — disqualified him for the transplant at Loyola, an ethics board decided not only to accept him, but to put his name at the top of the list.

So after he came down with pneumonia last month, and even after he then contracted chicken pox while in the hospital, hope was not an unreasonable thought. But on Monday evening, the teen who loved to draw

died at Loyola after spending his life overcoming odds.

"We all knew what the situation was, but we weren't ready for this to come so soon," said Marisela Rodriguez-Garcia, who has served as a spokesperson and translator for the family. "Given his circumstances, and given how advanced this disease was, he was living a semi-normal life."

Before the pneumonia, Diego had been living at home, undergoing his inhalation treatments as he waited for a donor. Though his body was the size of an 11-year-old, he had gained weight and strength, Rodriguez-Garcia said.

After he caught the virus, his condition worsened and doctors inserted a breathing tube last week.

Though they're grieving, Diego's family wants to make sure community members know how

thankful they are for the support.

They've listed Diego as a donor, trying to help others with his usable organs.

And they want to give long-shot hopes to other children with his disease — the money they raised for his procedure, after helping to pay for funeral costs, will go to cystic fibrosis foundations.

Diego is survived by his mother, Sylvia; his father, Diego; sister Brenda, 19; and brother Edgar, 8. The family is planning to move back to Mexico after the funeral services.

Visitation will be from 2 to 8 p.m. Thursday at Daleiden Mortuary, 220 N. Lake St., Aurora. A funeral Mass will be held at 9 a.m. Friday at St. Rita of Cascia Church, 750 Old Indian Trail, Aurora.

Diego's body will be shipped to Mexico City for burial.

For the Record

The Beacon News tries to be accurate and fair in every story it publishes. When a mistake occurs, we want to fix it. To report errors, call Associate Editor John Russell at 844-5902.

■ A story Tuesday about the Wal-Mart proposal in North Aurora, incorrectly identified Village President John Hansen as Mark Hansen. The Committee of the Whole meeting was held Monday night.

Recent Deaths

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- Alvarez, Diego Daniel**, 15, Aurora
- Busby, Theda A.**, 76, formerly St. Charles
- Casper, Cecelia M.**, 71, Yorkville
- Foltz, Riley D.**, 70, Montgomery
- Grant, William F. Sr.**, 74, Sandwich
- Kindelberger, Esther**, 78, formerly Aurora
- Palmer, Julia C.**, 93, Aurora
- Pavlak, Sharon L.**, 61, Oswego

Keepsakes items

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FAMILY

From page A1

Police say a member of the family in that SUV is responsible, but they have said Christopher Vaughn isn't a suspect now.

Since the slayings, Susan Phillips, Kimberly's mother, and a number of family and friends have maintained Kimberly wouldn't do such a thing. Family also have said they don't believe Christopher is capable of such violence.

Now the Vaughns and Philippses, both of the St. Charles area, say through representatives they're leaving the investigation up to detectives in the Chicago area as they prepare to bury their loved ones in St. Charles, Mo., where Kimberly and Christopher met, married and started their family.

It was Kimberly's mother who last week suggested to Christopher that her daughter and children be buried at home.

Services are being planned at

New Hope Presbyterian Church in St. Charles, where Kimberly and her parents were founding members and the couple's three children were baptized.

"Kimberly's parents, Del and Susan Phillips, remain active members of our congregation and have been surrounded by the love and support of this faith community in the face of this unspeakable tragedy," New Hope's pastor, the Rev. Christopher Q. James, said in a statement.

In a recent interview, Kimberly's mother said the congregation and prayer have been sources of strength, as they were for her daughter, who made sure her children attended Sunday school classes over the years.

"This is home," Susan Phillips said in a weekend interview. Church members, she said, stopped by the family's home as a show of support.

Visitation will be from 3 to 8 p.m. Friday at Baue Funeral Home in St. Charles. A memorial service is planned for 1 p.m. Saturday at New Hope Presbyterian Church.

TICKETS

From page A1

not revenue generation," Ergo wrote in an e-mail response. "While \$1.3 million is certainly a significant amount of money, traffic ticket fines are not one of our major revenue sources. ... If this revenue source does not perform to expectations in 2007, it will not negatively impact other city operations."

Ergo said the city maintains a balance in its operations fund that allows the budget to handle inconsistent revenue sources, such as traffic tickets.

Aurora police union president Wayne Biles did not return calls for this story, although he has said in the past that there is no union-organized effort to write fewer tickets.

"There has been no change in our commitment to serve and protect the citizens of Aurora," Biles wrote in a recent letter to the editor. "Contrary to what The Beacon News inferred, we

are busier than ever, making more traffic stops than last year and having more contacts with the public."

Numbers released by the city, however, show traffic stops — not just tickets — are down about 10 percent from Jan. 1 to May 19.

In addition to the commission's proposed subpoena powers, Biles also outlined three other union concerns:

■ The department is 18 officers below full strength.

■ Long-established procedures have been abruptly changed.

■ Attempts to communicate concerns to management have not been successful.

Police leadership said they have started to address some of those concerns, including hiring 16 people this month — their largest class in years. Otherwise, they believe their officers are out there doing the right things.

"We still think the officers are out there doing a hell of a job," said Cmdr. Mike Gillofo.

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CROSBY

From page A1

I pulled out my old trumpet, the one I played all the way through high school, and suggested it was the first step to someday joining Bon Jovi's band.

Week after week after week, he faithfully toted that thing to and from school. What a good boy, his proud mama thought — until she found out it was all a charade, that he had stopped taking lessons a month earlier but was too scared to tell me.

Undeterred, two years later I dragged the trumpet out of the basement again for my third offspring — a girl who had no aspirations to rock 'n' roll or ESPN greatness. I was elated: She played all the way through eighth grade, and I wanted badly to believe it wasn't because of the cute red-headed boy who occupied first chair.

As it turns out, that was the musical pinnacle in our family. Child 4 admitted years later he never blew one note during all those beginner band concerts. Children 5 and 6, having learned well from their siblings, didn't even bother bringing home the note about the introductory band meetings.

All of which left poor mom feeling a miserable failure.

That's why, when Jamie and Jason Palmer came in last week to talk about the Fox Valley Academy of Music Performance, I saw a chance for vindication — by becoming a cheerleader for this couple's efforts to foster an orchestra, along with vital youth programs, in the Fox Valley.

I'll start off by stating that the advantages of music in early-childhood development — particularly speech — are well-documented. But music also can help children learn math because when kids learn rhythm, they are also learning ratios, fractions and proportions.

And research also suggests music not only enhances social skills, it seems to help improve the ability to reason abstractly, which is probably why so many engineers, technical designers and CEOs are practicing musicians.

Want to help?

American Voices, the second Fox Valley Philharmonic concert, will begin at 7 p.m. July 1 at West Aurora High School. Tickets are \$15, or \$10 for students and seniors. Call (630) 879-8018 or visit www.fyso.com. Donations can be sent to Fox Valley Academy of Music Performance, 420 W. Downer Place, Aurora, IL 60506.

In addition, most teachers will tell you music encourages self-expression and self-confidence. And it teaches kids how to work in a school environment without resorting to violent or other bad behavior. (How many fistfights have you seen in the music room?)

I could go on and on, but I won't — except to say that years of trumpet benefited my own career. Music is about rhythm and movement and expression. As far as I'm concerned, all three are vital for anyone who wants to be a serious writer.

The problem is, funding cuts have dilapidated many music programs in our schools, not just here in the Fox Valley, but all across the nation. That, in turn, hurts all of us — for if we are not fostering an appreciation of music at a young age, we certainly can't expect it to blossom in our communities on any level.

And then there's the passion that music fosters ... passion that is evident in the Palmers, who are pouring their hearts and souls — not to mention their own dollars — into keeping the academy and the fledgling Fox Valley Philharmonic alive.

Pure and simple, they need help ASAP. Make plans for your family to attend *American Voices*, the second Fox Valley Philharmonic concert. Or even better, make a donation to the Fox Valley Academy of Music Performance.

It's a great way to help make this community a better place to live — not to mention appeasing a little parental guilt.

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