



Alton Memorial Health Services Foundation Fund Helps Cancer Patients Like Mark Kelle

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ALTON - Mark Kelle thought he had an abscessed tooth. He was prescribed medication, but soon started having nose bleeds and was sent home from work.

Last September, Kelle ended up in the Emergency Room at Alton Memorial Hospital and had a CAT scan. That's when he found out he didn't have an infection - it was a cancerous tumor in his sinuses.

"When they first told me, I didn't say anything for about three minutes," said the Wood River resident. "I stared and it took me a minute or two to process, then I asked, 'How much time do I have?'"

Kelle was connected with an Ear, Nose, and Throat specialist with Washington University Physicians. He soon had a 10-hour surgery and was hospitalized for a week.

"They had to take skin grafts from my leg to rebuild the upper part of my mouth and cheek," said Kelle. "They told me if I waited any longer to go to the ER, it would have affected my eye."

During his recovery, Kelle lost his job and his insurance. His care team at Alton Memorial learned about his situation and encouraged him to apply for assistance from Alton Memorial Health Services Foundation's Extra Mile Fund. The fund helps patients undergoing treatment at the hospital pay for their essentials so they can focus on treatment, healing, and recovery. The Foundation awarded Kelle \$800 for his rent, which kept a roof over his head.

"Mark is working with a social worker to help him apply for disability and social security, since he doesn't meet the age requirements," said Toni Brummett, a radiation and oncology department nurse at Alton Memorial. "This donation from the Foundation will help to bridge the gap."

Last year, dozens of people donated to the Foundation's first Ribbon of Strength Campaign, which benefits patients like Kelle. They purchased sections of ribbon that were laid out to form a giant purple ribbon, symbolizing support for those undergoing treatment for cancer and in memory of those who lost the battle.

"We were blown away by the incredible response from the community and pleased we have been able to help so many patients because of their donations," said Kristen Ryrie, manager of Foundation and Development for Alton Memorial Health Services Foundation. "We are kicking off the campaign for this year. Donations will be used to pay for patients' utilities, mortgage or rent, car repairs, and gas so they can continue to come to treatments."

To help a cancer patient, visit the Foundation's website and donate to the Ribbon of Strength Campaign by March 10, or contact the Foundation at 618-463-7701.