



Around Pleasanton

by Jeb Bing

Ski slope fall seen as miracle

I doubt that many of us who have fallen on the ski slopes and cracked a rib, as I have, ever think of those mishaps as miracles. But Steve Yeffa does, and with good reason. Steve and his family were on a ski trip to Tahoe five years ago when the accident happened. Although there's usually not much anyone can do for a cracked rib other than wait out the healing process with a few pain pills, Steve's wife Becky was concerned by the unusual discomfort it was causing and insisted they stop at ValleyCare's emergency room when back in Pleasanton. There, an X-ray showed that Steve had fractured a couple of ribs. Since one was directly over Steve's spleen, a full CT scan was ordered. The results were stunning. Besides the fractures, the scan also showed for the first time a hard cyst on his right kidney, which Dr. Robert Mandiberg explained was a tumor with a 99 percent chance of being malignant. On April 2, 2003, Steve had a radical right nephrectomy. His right kidney was removed and because it was an early Stage 1 cancer that had not yet spread, he went home a week later with a clean bill of health, although regular tests were necessary for the next five years.

On Tuesday, April 15, Steve's surgeon at ValleyCare, Dr. Bernard Schmidt, called with final test results that showed there was no evidence of any cancer, that Steve's other kidney was functioning well, and he could consider himself cured.

Steve talked about his experience last Sunday at a celebration party he and Becky held at the Veterans Memorial Building downtown for 120 of their friends, business associates and medical professionals from ValleyCare, including Drs. Mandiberg and Schmidt. Calling it a "Party for the Cure," the Yeffas also used the occasion to celebrate their 50th birthdays, which occur this year. Instead of gifts, those who came donated to the Kidney Cancer Association, with several thousand dollars raised. There was one exception: at the end of his remarks Steve asked Becky to come to the stage where he presented her with a 1-carat

diamond as a symbol of her being his "rock." Without the cure, Steve said he probably wouldn't have made it to the party. The Yeffas' neighbor, Rich Gluck, fought kidney cancer for five years, but died two years ago. Steve's aunt died of cancer just recently. The big "C," in fact, was on the minds of others at Sunday's party who have also passed the coveted cancer-free mark or have theirs in remission.

Steve's five-year odyssey began with the CT scan. Although faced with uncertainty, he views his miracle as a "stroke of luck—the hand of God pushing me over." The ski mishap tipped him off to the cancer before it had a chance to spread. He was surrounded by people of great faith, a kind of familial support, as he describes it, that caused him to go out and try new things. He became Scoutmaster of the new Troop 908 in Pleasanton, and under his leadership, 908 has become the largest Scout troop in Northern California. He also moved to a new position as chief financial officer of Cartridge World, an Emeryville-based licensed remanufacturer of ink jet and laser toner cartridges that now has 1,650 stores in 61 countries. He was part of a management team that bought out the company's Australian founders 2-1/2 years ago, enabling its faster growth. Stepping down recently as Scoutmaster, Yeffa serves the troop as an Eagle Scout mentor. Among those I've seen him helping is his son Dan, 18, a senior at Foothill High School, who built the free-standing outdoor directory at the entryway to the Trinity Lutheran Church campus on Hopyard Road, which the family attends.

The Yeffas' daughter, Katie, 22, will graduate from Fresno State University next month with an education degree and the Dean's Medal as the top student in her class. With Katie planning a career in teaching and Dan heading off to archaeology studies at UC Davis, the Yeffas, who will soon be empty nesters, plan to spend more time buoying the spirits and caring for others who are dealing with cancer—help that Steve Yeffa found so overwhelming and welcome during his own trip to wellness. ■

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About the Cover

When the Weekly asked for photos of look-alike mothers and daughters, staff email inboxes filled with submissions. Jennifer Harris and daughter Kendall, 5, were the first to send in a photo. We chose the top 10 finalists, which are featured on page 10, but it is up to readers to decide who takes home first place. Vote for your favorite online at www.PleasantonWeekly.com by May 4. Cover design by Manuel Valenzuela.

Vol. IX, Number 13

The Pleasanton Weekly is published weekly by Embarcadero Publishing Co., 5506 Sunol Blvd., Suite 100, Pleasanton, CA 94566; (925) 600-0840. USPS 020407. The Pleasanton Weekly is mailed free upon request to homes and apartments in Pleasanton. Voluntary subscriptions at \$30 per year (\$50 for two years) are welcome from Pleasanton residents. Subscription rate for businesses and for residents of other communities is \$40 per year. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Pleasanton Weekly, 5506 Sunol Blvd., Suite 100, Pleasanton, CA 94566. © 2007 by Embarcadero Publishing Co. All rights reserved. Reproduction without permission is strictly prohibited.