

Commentary...

Cancer and me: Back home again

By Jim Williams
Columnist

The working title to this latest submission was, “Cancer and me: Back in the saddle.” After my last submission, “Homeward Bound,” I thought that might be a good place to start once we made the move from the Valley and arrived back home in Sisters. Only problem is, is I don’t feel like I’m back in the saddle.

It has been quite the whirlwind of activity, stress, laughter, tears.

From the day of my return we’ve been evacuated from our home in Crossroads twice. Due to ongoing medical side effects from chemo and radiation, I’ve been in the hospital a total of about five days trying to get my chronic pain under control, and made a trip via ambulance to St. Charles in Bend due to a hemorrhage issue here at home.

In addition, we’ve been working diligently to get our little house ready for fall

and winter. After a couple of years the house has needed some maintenance done so we’ve upgraded appliances, blinds, cleaned the lot as best we could, got lawn and garden tools; you name it, we’ve been working on it, which creates its own frustrations.

My last article expressed my desire to move back to Sisters from the Oregon City area, and the ongoing health issues that made coming back to Sisters our dream. Since my original diagnosis of anal cancer back in September of 2016, I’ve been successfully treated for the cancer, but not without complications. The area radiated had been radiated before, and now I deal with complications of the tissue being damaged, perhaps beyond repair.

Also, just outside the radiation treatment field, a couple of lymph nodes “lit up,” which means they are now early stage, cancerous nodes. This was unexpected. After four rounds of chemo, it was found that the

treatment failed to work, and that I have two more.

The good news is, after moving here my records were all transferred, and we’re working with a doctor who is still upbeat about my prognosis and treatment. That hasn’t exactly been a smooth transition either, but I like my team.

The doctor considers my nodes as a local metastasis that can be treated. I have no spread to any organs, so right now I’m in no danger other than the pain these things are causing, and the treatment we’re going to do. Now, this won’t last forever, so the right treatment approach moving forward is critical.

Due to my genetics, I am eligible and have started an immunotherapy program, with a new immunosuppressant called Keytruda. This isn’t chemo, this is a treatment that allows your own immune system to attack the cancer while leaving most healthy tissue and organs alone. There are some side effects, though. Fatigue is

always an issue with any kind of treatment like this, in addition to others. But, it’s a half-hour treatment every three weeks. If you’ve ever had to go through infusion, you know what a big deal this is.

Due to the continued pain issues we’re dealing with, I’m on various drugs to try and keep that in check. In addition to opioids, I’m on a steroid that has now turned my face into one that resembles a chipmunk. My body weighs 175 pounds, but my face looks like I weigh 300 pounds. Thank goodness we are weaning me off the steroid and I’ll be my more handsome self in a few weeks.

All that being said, we are indeed back home, our real home. We have been so happy with our return that words can’t describe it. Despite the hardships, we made it back and don’t have that first regret. It’s been a lot of work; there’s more to come, but it will have been worth it. I’ve done nothing

but smile when thinking about being home.

All the familiar places are still here. Despite the smoke, the fires, the hospitalizations, evacuations; we are giddy to be back. More importantly, my family is here, my friends. I look forward to seeing you all again as soon as I am able.

Sisters is a unique and wonderful place. In fact it’s hard to believe we’re back, but we are, and we’ll never take it for granted again.

We made the design to come back here because we love it dearly, and I figured with everything else going on, that if I have to die, I want to die here. I didn’t really have a hard time reconciling that. I find a peace and tranquility that I’ve never experienced elsewhere.

This saga appears that it will continue at least for a while, and I hope to chronicle this for you as long as you want to read it — photo to come and perhaps I can help that first person deal with something similar.

Sisters celebrates fresh hops

The seasonal pleasures of fresh hops will be celebrated in one of Sisters’ signature annual events this weekend, as the Sisters Fresh Hop Festival rolls into town.

Beer-lovers will gather at the big tent on the Village Green on Saturday, September 30, from noon to 8 p.m. to sample the wares of some 26 Oregon breweries and enjoy the music of The Brothers Reed.

Fresh hops are straight off the bine, and beer aficionados say the beers created with fresh hops (as opposed to dried hops that can be used year-round) are especially bright and fresh-flavored.

A festival celebrating fresh hops is a beer-lover’s harvest celebration.

Dogs are welcome at Village Green Park, but not in the tent.

The Brothers Reed are an acclaimed folk music duo from Southern Oregon.

For more information visit www.sistersfreshhopfest.com.

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