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Man would breathe easier with city's help

Raising money to help defray living expenses in Toronto

By Tom Gavey

The Intelligencer

The best thing Bill McPhee's hometown can do for him is send him away.

The 35-year-old Belleville man needs a double lung transplant and to be eligible he must move to Toronto.

McPhee and his family, he says, have tried to hold out but now they're going public with their need for help to raise the money it will take to live in Toronto, possibly for as long as a year.

"I've been trying to avoid this but now it's to the point where it's do or die," the Jackson Avenue man says, surrounded by three of his four children and wife Deborah. His plight is obvious, with an ever-present air tank and little energy during a short interview.

McPhee's Belleville doctor, Dr. D.F. Lisowski, says he's an excellent candidate for a transplant, but one of the requirements is that he live within one hour of Toronto General Hospital.

His troubles began about 20 years ago, he says, when he fell ill at a summer camp and was treated with penicillin. Unfortunately, no one knew at the time that McPhee was allergic to the drug.

Lisowski says what resulted was something of a medical mystery, but McPhee developed Stevens-Johnson Syndrome as a result of the allergy and from there pulmonary fibrosis was diagnosed. The doctor says the connection between McPhee's allergy and his lung disease remains a mystery.

McPhee says doctors have given him, at best, two years to live without a double lung transplant. The average time, he says, that a person waits for a transplant once on the list is one year.

He estimates it will cost him and his wife \$20,000 to live in Toronto for a year while an aunt cares for their four children, Barbara, 14, William, 13, Jonathan, 9 and Michelle, 5.

McPhee has never been able to work because of his steadily deteriorating health but his situation has worsened considerably over the past five years. Since then he's been dependent on oxygen and more and more susceptible to infections. OHIP pays for his oxygen and medication but he's afraid he'll lose his home if he doesn't raise money for the move and the expected rent and living expenses.

"When I first got the oxygen I didn't go out because people stared. Then I said to hell with it, I couldn't be a prisoner in my own home. Now, I'm

lucky if I can get up the energy to go sit outside or go for a drive," says McPhee.

He adds what energy he has is needed simply to breathe.

This week a trust fund was opened at the Bayshore Credit Union in Belleville for donations. Cheques can be made out to the William McPhee Trust Fund and the account number is 0006312.

McPhee says he's been told a lung transplant is a "50-50 deal."

"There are no guarantees, but it has to be better than this. This is no kind of life. They say a lung transplant lasts about five years but it would be five years of breathing normally," he says.

His doctor says McPhee's condition is chronic and will only worsen over time. His only hope is the lung transplant.

"It's a requirement that the patient be within an hour of the transplant centre because of the time elements involved," transplant social worker Maureen O'Dell stresses in a letter to McPhee.

Meanwhile, Lisowski says McPhee has reached a critical juncture.

"I think he's an excellent candidate for a transplant and I think it's quite appropriate to raise funds," he says.



Intelligencer photo by Frank O'Connor

The McPhee family (from left) William, Michelle, Bill, Deborah and Jonathan.

McPHEE, Bill