

# No capes and tights, but they are still super heros

Our Unsung Hero Award is given to a young man who at 16 years of age volunteered to endure physical pain to an unknown degree for an unknown period of time for the sake of another.

We felt privileged to meet Fred Ehlers and we believe that those of you who know him are fortunate, indeed.

The soft-spoken and unassuming junior at Farmington High School typified our sense of "hero" by entering an unknown situation, then coming out of it, as his nominator said, "more understanding because of it."

We are printing Martha Ehlers' letter as it came to us because we think she says it all, and says it best.

To quote one of our staff members, "This kid is a real 10."

Well, we had a lot of 10s made known to us over the past six weeks.

WE HOPE to tell you about the woman who took a Vietnamese family into her home at an age when most of us would be thinking about taking things easy.

We hope to tell you about the 93-year-old woman who nominated her son-in-law, and the student who nominated her teacher.

We heard from children who think they have pretty nifty folks. We heard

from husbands who nominated their wives and vice versa.

We hope to meet the family who nominated their baby sitter. We hope to get in touch with a teenager who spends her time away from school in one of our local nursing homes.

Some of the names that came through on the nomination blanks were names that were familiar to us.

One woman in town was nominated several times and some of these nominations carried more than one signature. She belongs to so many organizations we were all familiar with her and some of her work within a week after we had set up shop here.

But the stories the neighbors told us are not the things that come through on standard press releases.

Another name we recognized was one we knew only as a name on a letterhead. This man was nominated by one service club and one service agency in town.

We learned how seriously he takes the word "service" in the organizations he chooses to give his time.

The ball is already rolling to tell you some of their stories.

A THREAD THAT ran through all of your letters and notes told us a great deal of what you believe a hero to be.

Your heroes face a situation of despair with a sense of confidence and optimism.

Their sense of humor is at its best during trying times. And they have conveyed to the nominators that they seem to enjoy being called upon in times of stress.

One young girl called her hero "a dispenser of cheer."

Another nominator called his hero "a pepper-upper."

With those nominees who "can always be counted on," which is a phrase we read numerous times through the nominations, one woman wrote of her

hero, "He seems almost surprised when we say thanks."

Another "Makes everyone around him happy by his positive attitude."

Another hero "just gives us his unruffled smile."

Another "simply gets the job done without worrying about it."

Some of our nominations came in the form of poetry. Never mind if it rhymed. As one of our staff commented, "Count how many people you know you'd bother to compose a poem about."

Thank you for sharing your heroes with us.

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The photo of Dave Ehlers "is the one he would have chosen to have printed in the paper, taken before he got sick," his brother said.

### Our Unsung Hero

# Meet Fred Ehlers

*Editor's note: The staff of the Farmington Observer is pleased to share the following letter received by Martha Ehlers in nomination for "Our Unsung Hero" award.*

Fred was never ready to go after a school program, even when he was just a little boy. The other parents would leave with their children and I would have to look for him.

I'd find him with his teacher, helping her clean up and put away because he didn't want her to have to do it alone.

Now that he's 17, Fred is still helpful and caring; going back to help with registration at junior high school, volunteering to take his little brother along

to the movies, and doing favors for people.

Life goes along on an even keel and nothing happens to rock the boat. Under those circumstances it isn't too difficult to choose to do the right thing most of the time.

But when some are put to a real test, they don't measure up. Last year the testing time came for Fred.

HIS BROTHER, David, 13, had been ill with leukemia for months and, after several relapses, it was obvious that a very serious step would have to be taken if Dave was to have a chance at a healthy life.

All of us in the family had been tested to determine our blood type and antigen compatibility to see if a bone marrow transplant might be possible. An exact match is necessary to ensure the best chance for success.

We were fortunate to have an exact match. It was Fred.

It is difficult to be 16 and faced with a procedure that is painful and unpleasant to say the least. There was never any real doubt in Fred's mind what he would do. He felt that he had to do whatever he could to help Dave.

The transplant was done at Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center in Seattle, Wash. Nearly a liter of bone marrow was drawn from Fred's pelvic bone by a small drill-like knife.

The flesh was punctured several dozen times but because of the repositioning done next to the bone, the aspiration from deep into the bone was actually drawn from well over a hundred places.

DAVE RECEIVED the bone marrow immediately afterward via the blood stream through a small tube called a Hickman catheter into the vein entering the right side of the heart.

Through a process nobody fully understands, the marrow finds its way from the blood to the center of the bones and begins to grow.

Now, the name of the game was waiting and enduring.

At first Fred ached all over. He described his feelings as "being trampled by a herd of buffalo." He walked just five hours after the aspiration was done, went home from the hospital and took a lot of warm baths for several days.

After about a week I kidded Fred one day by saying that he gave such great marrow, the doctors were anxious to use him again for someone else.

I expected a short, "No Way," but he



Fred Ehlers is a 17-year-old honor roll student at Farmington High School and president of the Senior High United Methodist Youth Fellowship at Nardin Park United Methodist Church. He spends Saturdays in computer classes and Wednesday afternoons with his church choir. (Staff photo by Randy Borst)



Music, photography and model railroads are some of Fred Ehlers' hobbies. He is a member of The Celebration Handbell Choir, made up of junior and high school students, who play under the direction of Melvin Rookus in Nardin Park United Methodist Church. (Staff photo by Randy Borst)

to me seriously and said, "Mother, if they really needed me, I'd do it again."

I knew he would.

FRED'S CONTRIBUTION wasn't over. He gave platelets by a process called pheresis about eight times. After missing five weeks of high school, Dave was finally doing well enough that Fred could come home.

Dave was so brave. He fought with an intensity that was so single-mindedly set on living that we all began to dare to hope again. The bone marrow took and began to grow. Dave's strength increased each day.

Then our miracle shattered. The leukemia came back and chemotherapy didn't work anymore. In a month Dave died quietly at home with all of us there.

It is nice to be a hero when things turn out right, but it is very difficult when they go wrong. Losing his brother rocked Fred's world. He had tried so hard.

Fred weathered last summer's terrible struggle and has become deeper and more understanding because of it.

TODAY HE is an honor roll student at Farmington High School and president of the Senior High United Methodist Youth Fellowship at Nardin Park United Methodist Church.

Last month he was chosen with three friends to represent his church at the United Nations Youth Seminar, in April, in Washington D.C. and New York City.

Fred has given of himself more in his 17 short years than most of us are able to do in three score and ten.

MARTHA EHLERS  
36029 Congress Road  
Farmington Hills



Dave and Fred Ehlers spent time sightseeing around Puget Sound before the two entered Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center together in Seattle, Wash. Fred remembers the few days as "the last good times together."

## We're singing your praises now

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|-------------------|------------------|-----------------|
| Debbie Altschuler | Marion Greene    | Charles Shuler  |
| Seymour Barahl    | Barbara Lemanski | Margaret Smith  |
| Don Briggs        | Vera Mingo       | Thomas Spitzig  |
| Blanche Clark     | Reta Mosshammer  | Steve Tretenik  |
| Dean Cobb         | Mary Ellen Orell | Robert VanDorpe |
| Bev Cornell       | Verneta Pilnick  | Adele Zawacki   |
| Fred Ehlers       | George Raymond   |                 |