

# Financial aid could help a little girl hear

By Bill Camper  
staff writer

For the first time in eight years, there is a ray of hope and an aura of excitement surrounding a young Redford Township girl who has been deaf since birth.

Family and friends of 9-year-old Kristen Armstrong hope that a relatively new, medically approved surgical procedure, called a cochlear implant, will free her from a silent world.

However, in order to make this dream come true, her parents, David and Judy, both 31 and graduates of Thurston High School, are faced with a huge expense they cannot meet alone.

The total cost to have the operation done is about \$11,000, Judy said. "The hospital cost of \$7,000 will be covered by our insurance company and then there's the air fare to Los Angeles where the surgery will be done."

In a last resort effort to obtain finan-

cial help, they are pleading their case publicly.

"WE HAVE written several organizations to ask for help with some of the expenses involved," said Judy. "We have received modest contributions from a church group through my husband's friend and from the Redford Union Oral Hearing Impaired Program parent group of which I am a member. Our church, the Covenant Community Church in Redford, is sponsoring a love offering to raise money for Kristen."

"However, we're still facing about \$4,000 for a medical evaluation, the audiologist and the surgeon's fee. We have to take Kristen to Los Angeles to the only place in the country where this operation is performed on children at the House Ear Institute by Dr. William House."

"Arrangements have been made with Dr. House and his associates to begin a three-day evaluation June 27 with surgery scheduled for the end of that

week," Judy said. "A second trip is required four weeks later for rehabilitation."

At that time we will find out when we will have to make a third or fourth trip for a check on Kristen's progress.

"We may have to make about two or three trips a year to Los Angeles," she said. "The most inexpensive round-trip rate for three of us is \$784, not including transportation and food in Los Angeles. Our hotel accommodations will be provided by the Westin Hotel firm."

"My husband has been a carpenter for the Detroit Westin for the past two years and part of his employment benefits provide for free accommodations at hotels in the chain and there is one, the Bonaventure, in Los Angeles."

"BUT WE don't have a lot of money and the everyday cost of living is making it difficult for us to meet these additional expenses for Kristen," Judy said. "My husband was laid off for 13 months before he began work at the

Westin and I make a little money babysitting at home."

"I've written 10 letters in an effort to seek financial assistance, but we honestly don't know where else to go for help so we turned to the media. Our hope is that someone will read about our situation and offer a suggestion as to where we may be able to obtain financial assistance."

"This is the first opportunity I've had to thank those who donated money to help Kristen and our entire family is very grateful," said Judy.

She said her family would accept private contributions. She requested that all such donations be in the form of checks or money orders made out to David and Judy Armstrong and mailed to the Observer office, 36251 Schoolcraft Road, Livonia 48150.

"We have opened a special account at a local bank for the contributions to Kristen," Judy said.

Kristen has been profoundly deaf, the worst form of deafness, because of an inoperable cochlea since birth, Judy said. Dr. House will perform a cochlear implant and he is the only doctor in the country who does such an operation on children, she said.

THE SURGICAL procedure involves implanting a device behind Kristen's ear, Judy said. It will enable her to respond to many environmental sounds and some level of speech, she said.

"Currently, Kristen does not respond to any sound even with the use of the best hearing aids available," Judy said. "With this implant, our daughter will lead a more normal life. Even if every word is not understood, she will at least be able to respond to danger signals

and other sounds that would make her life easier to cope with."

"She would come out of the world of total silence, a dream come true for her and all those who love her so. Life is a little frustrating for her now because I know she has so much stored up inside that she wants to express, but can't."

"We have to limit her activities somewhat, but I try to give her as much independence as possible," said Judy. "She'll have a lot more freedom with the implant and it will be an exciting, heartwarming experience for all of us to see her respond to our voices without first having to touch her to gain her attention."

## Alcohol leading cause of traffic fatalities

Drunk driving has become so prevalent that police forces around the country have launched strict crackdown programs, and the courts have started doling out stronger punishments to those found guilty.

Half of auto fatalities involve alcohol, which is the reason for the tougher programs, the Automotive Information Council (AIC) of Southfield said.

Some believe that drinking beer or

wine does not cause a problem, but AIC points out that a 12-ounce bottle of beer or a five-ounce glass of wine contain the same amount of alcohol as a shot of whiskey.

That means that a person who weighs 140 pounds could be declared legally under-the-influence in most states after consuming six ounces of liquor or the equivalent in beer or wine during a four-hour cocktail party. The

effect varies up and down by body weight.

The body burns off only about three-fourths of a drink in an hour, so only time can return the drinker to sobriety.

The theory that strong coffee can speed up sobriety is debunked by authorities, giving rise to the saying that the practice only results "in a wide-awake drunk."

A driver doesn't have to be legally

drunk to make mistakes behind the wheel. The 140-pounder can be considered impaired after three drinks in two hours and that could cause errors in judgment and could lead to an accident.

Eight top race and rally drivers took a controlled test to see how alcohol affected their driving performance. The best of the pros made 22 mistakes when impaired and 42 when intoxicated.

## Should you lease or buy your car?

Consumers looking for a way to cut their monthly auto transportation costs may wonder whether leasing a new car would be cheaper than buying. While leasing is generally more expensive for most consumers over the long run, the Southfield-based Automotive Information Council (AIC) said leasing can be cheaper for some individuals eligible for business transportation tax exemptions and can have other advantages for consumers as well.

Advantages include elimination of the down payment. For the same

amount of money paid on a new-car monthly loan installment, many consumers may find they can lease a more luxurious auto.

With leasing, though, ownership of the vehicle stays with the leasing company. When the contract runs out, the renter does not own the car, and it can't be used for a trade-in on a new car.

There are two basic types of leases. The first is called an open-end lease. It usually has the lowest monthly payments, but the person leasing the car

will be liable for additional payments at the end of the contract if the car is not worth the amount stated in the lease, AIC said.

The other kind of lease is called

closed-end or walk-away. Payments usually are higher than open-end leases. However, the consumer does not have to make up the difference if the car sells for less than was expected at the end of the lease.



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