

MS fight

New treatment helps resident

BY BILL COUTANT
STAFF WRITER

For Sandy Altschul and his family, the battle with multiple sclerosis has taken some unusual turns — and it seems the latest one is for the better.

The 37-year-old Farmington resident and father of three has benefited from a new treatment for the disease. Although not a cure, the new treatment has made it possible for Altschul to live with MS knowing that the potentially debilitating effects may have been slowed. "I may very well hold at this level," he said.

That note of optimism is typical for Altschul, who until his bout with the illness, had worked long hours over the years as a firefighter, EMS technician and independent businessman in his company, Systems Medical Services.

But for a man who is used to operating at a high energy level, the realization that he had MS — a disease that affects the brain and spinal cord causing partial or complete paralysis and fatigue — was a shock.

"It was frustrating," he said. "That might have been putting it mildly. What had started as a problem with 'what I thought was an eyelash in my eye' turned out to be optic neuritis, a condition typical in MS sufferers."

Ironically, Altschul, who with his wife Julie, had led a full, active life until his problem went beyond a minor eye irritation, had been an active volunteer in helping the Multiple Sclerosis Society with benefits and events since 1986.

On the night before

Thanksgiving of 1988, he first had trouble with vision in his left eye. In August of 1989 he had problems with his right eye. Then in the winter of 1990, Altschul found the answer to his fatigue, eye problems and loss of function at times in his extremities. He went to his doctor thinking a pinched nerve might be the cause of his troubles and was told that he probably had MS.

"I was shocked," he said. "I asked them why they didn't tell me this before."

That's when Altschul took part in a University of Michigan program that treats the optic neuritis with steroid injections and then drugs. The results of that study, published in the latest edition of "The New England Journal of Medicine" confirmed what Dr. Jonathan D. Trobe of U-M's W. K. Kellogg Eye Center had hoped: The treatment lowered the risk of patients developing MS and its more extreme symptoms and allowed Altschul to lead a somewhat normal life.

"He's learned to know when to rest and when to take it easy," Altschul's wife Julie said. "It's something that's there that you have to cope with."

Altschul admits that when he and his wife first learned that he had MS, they took it hard.

"We cried in each other's arms," he said.

But because the couple had already set up their businesses so they could work at home and be with their children (Jennifer, 11, David, 8, and Emily, 2), they found that if Sandy's condition were bad, Julie, who suffers from arthritis, could do more work, and vice versa.



SHARON LEMIEUX/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Things are looking up: For Sandy Altschul and his daughter Emily, a new treatment for an eye condition associated with multiple sclerosis has allowed him to live much the same as he had before the problem was identified.

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"When I have bad days and she has bad days, it's interesting around here," he said.

If Altschul seems almost too accepting of his fate, it is probably a combination of his desire to take on new challenges and his experience in the health-care field and as a volunteer for MS.

"I was an EMS provider for 17

years," he said. "I've seen some of everything."

In fact, Altschul was one of the first people on the scene at the flight 255 disaster at Metro Airport in August of 1987.

"When you see something like that, it has an effect on you," he said. "Everything changes."

U-M study brings good news

A study at the University of Michigan under the direction of Dr. Jonathan D. Trobe found that a new treatment for optic neuritis significantly reduces the chances of that condition developing into multiple sclerosis.

A group of about 400 patients were used in the test begun in February of 1990. It is the first controlled treatment trial to have neurologic information on a large number of optic neuritis patients followed carefully for at least two years. In previous trials which used methylprednisolone and prednisone alone,

patients with optic neuritis and multiple sclerosis did recover faster from attacks than did untreated patients, but the impact of treatment on long-term development of MS was not examined.

Patients with a new diagnosis of optic neuritis and who within eight days received the treatments had only a 7.5 percent chance of developing definite multiple sclerosis within two years as compared to a 16.7 percent chance for patients with the same diagnosis who were treated with placebo pills or prednisone alone.

POLICE/FIRE CALLS

Listed below are some of the Farmington-area police incidents, fire calls and court cases reported during the past week.

FIRES

A kitchen fire in an apartment at the Mulrond Apartments on Highland in Farmington Hills at about 5:39 p.m. Dec. 22 resulted in \$10,000 in damage to contents.

Farmington Hills firefighters from Station 1 responded, putting the fire out and ventilating the building.

VANDALISM

The rear windshield of a 1987 Plymouth Voyager parked on Ramblewood in Farmington Hills Dec. 25-26 was smashed causing \$250 in damage.

Both door windows on a white 1989 Ford tractor parked on Industrial Park in Farmington Hills Dec. 23 were smashed causing \$300 in damage.

A vanity mirror was broken, the backs of two chairs were cut and a

telephone receiver was submerged in a toilet bowl in a room at the Knights Inn on Grand River in Farmington Hills Dec. 26-27 causing \$200 in damage.

A sketched (320) was stolen after the windshield of a Jeep parked at the Merchant Co. on Research in Farmington Hills Dec. 24-27 was smashed causing \$325 in damage.

AUTO THEFT

A burgundy 1988 Mercury Marquis worth \$5,000 was stolen from Wheeler Drive in Farmington Hills Dec. 23.

A white 1993 GMC Jimmy worth \$20,000 was stolen from the Radisson Hotel on Grand River in Farmington Hills Dec. 24 and recovered Dec. 24 on Grandville in Detroit. The door lock had been punched and the radio and tires had been stolen.

A silver and gray 1991 Chevy Lumina worth \$10,000 was stolen from the Clarion Hotel on 12 Mile in Farmington Hills Dec. 23-24.

A red 1994 GMC Jimmy worth \$25,000 was stolen from the Holiday Inn on 10 Mile in Farmington Hills Dec. 27-29.

BREAK-IN

A 2-foot by 6-foot glass panel was broken during a break-in at a house on Scituate in Farmington Hills Dec. 21-23 causing \$200 in damage. Nothing was reported missing.

A break-in at a house on Farmington Street in Farmington Hills Dec. 25 caused \$140 in damage to the kitchen window and resulted in the theft of \$1,603 worth of items including a Jazman classical guitar (\$400), four children's videos (\$80) and \$100 in Christmas ornaments.

EMBEZZLEMENT

False receipts and petty cash vouchers totaling \$44,742.04 were submitted to the Atlantic Mortgage Corp., which manages the Village Green Apartments, from Jan. 21, 1992 to Dec. 28, 1993.

OBITUARIES

DIANE K. "ROSIE" WENNER

Mrs. Wenner, 53, of Brighton, formerly of Farmington, died Dec. 24.

Born in Grayling, Mrs. Wenner was a member of the Millard Presbyterian Church and the National Association of Tax Practitioners.

Survivors include her husband, Harry; son, David; daughters, Tracey Peterson and Krista Wenner; mother, Maxine H. Seeley.

Services were held at the Keen Funeral Home, Brighton, with the Rev. John Harris officiating. Burial was in Highland Cemetery, Ypsilanti.

Memorials may be made to the charity of the donor's choice.

FRANK LEROY ANDERSON

Mr. Anderson, 65, of Farmington died Dec. 27 in University Hospital, Ann Arbor.

Born in Cambridge Springs, Pa., Mr. Anderson was a tool and die maker. He was a member of DAV, Farmington Elks and the American Legion. He was a World War II Navy veteran.

CHARLENE E. JONES

Mrs. Jones, 70, of Detroit, formerly of Farmington and Texas, died Dec. 27 in Oakland Hospital, Madison Heights.

Born in Collinsville, Texas, Mrs. Jones was a homemaker. Survivors include her husband, Donald; son, Dan; daughter, Pam Boone; sister, Kathleen Kemp; brothers, Frankie and Charles Taylor; five grandchildren and nine great-grandchildren.

Services were Dec. 28 at the Thayer-Rock Funeral Home, Farmington, with the Rev. Edward Mattox of Forest Park Baptist Church officiating.

Burial was in South Lyon Cem-

etery. Memorials may be made to the Make-A-Wish Foundation.

He is survived by his wife, Helen V. Novak of Canton; one son, Gregory Novak; three stepsons, Richard Skrzypek of Highland, Lawrence Skrzypek of Detroit and Kenneth Skrzypek of Westland; one daughter, Cindy Bahkne of Roseville; nine grandchildren and one sister, Ethel Brancalone of Detroit.

The Rev. John F. Hall officiated the service. Memorial contributions may be given to the church in the form of Mass offerings. Arrangements were made by Vermeulen Memorial Trust 100 Funeral Home.

ARTHUR S. NOVAK

Services for Arthur S. Novak, 80, of Canton were Tuesday, Dec. 28, at St. Richard Catholic Church. Burial was in St. Hedwig Cemetery, Dearborn Heights.

He was born Oct. 24, 1913, in Farmington Hills. He died Wednesday, Dec. 22, in Farmington Hills. He retired from Chrysler Corp. in 1974 after 40 years as a new car repairman. He was a member of St. Richard Catholic Church in Westland.

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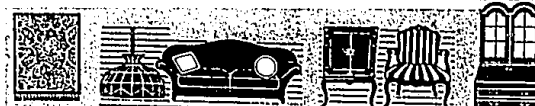
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