

# Bill's goal: Buy drugs in bulk

BY PAUL R. PACE  
STAFF WRITER

Area seniors are hopping the bus to Windsor, Canada, to get their prescription drugs.

It makes sense, say local lawmakers; the cost for some of the more popular drugs is 50 percent less in Canada.

The popular cholesterol-lowering drug Lipitor, for example, would cost around \$118 without prescription coverage in Michigan. In Windsor, it's about \$63.

State Rep. Aldo Vagnozzi (D-Farmington Hills) introduced a bill in the House last week called the Great Lakes Alliance for Affordable Drugs Act.

It's goal: Pulling in nearby states to buy drugs in bulk and provide savings to the underinsured or uninsured, Vagnozzi said.

Already, Vermont and Wisconsin are proposing such a program to save money on increasing drug costs.

"We shouldn't have residents driving to Canada for prescription drugs," Vagnozzi said. "We need to reduce costs so citizens don't have to choose between paying bills or getting pills."

Granhall has proposed a similar plan, but it would only benefit Medicaid clients.

Vagnozzi held a town meeting about the subject Wednesday at Farmington Hills City Hall.

Also in attendance was State Rep. David Woodward (D-Royal Oak), who introduced a bill last year laying out a plan for bulk drug purchases among states.

The plan is to negotiate substantial rebates from drug companies and quantity discounts from drug retailers.

"The pharmaceutical industry is the most profitable business in the world," Vagnozzi said.

"They are even given grants to do research, so what they use is part of our money," he said. "We deserve fair drug prices."

Woodward said drug companies don't like the proposal because they say their money goes back into research.

"They argue it impedes their ability for new drugs," he said. Woodward said other entities such as insurance companies conduct price negotiations with companies to lower drug costs.

At the meeting, people who belong to the local chapter of the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill said they are worried about the proposal.

Fred Cummins, president of the Oakland County chapter, said he wanted to make sure the program would not force drug companies to play hardball and withdraw selling certain drugs if a price deal can't be reached.

"My concern is we will be bargaining away access," he said.

He pointed out the NAMI opposes the policy of states pooling together buying power with drug companies.

Cummins said some generic drugs don't always work as well as the brand drugs.

Vagnozzi responded, "I'm sure if that issue came up the state wouldn't do something that would hurt the people."

He noted he gets around five phone calls a day from people encouraging him to pursue the proposal.

The representative said more town hall meetings will be held on the topic. No date was set.

Vagnozzi's Lansing office number is (517) 474-3655. pace20e@hometownlife.com | (248) 477-5450



Hockey Has Heart started with the Farmington Hills PeeWee Shamrocks hockey team, of which Terry Gould's son is a member.

## Hockey shows heart by helping local dad

BY JONI HUBBARD  
STAFF WRITER

A degenerative heart defect may have taken Terry Gould's physical strength, but it's done little or nothing to his positive outlook.

Diagnosed 10 years ago with idiopathic cardiomyopathy, Gould now stays alive with the aid of a temporary artificial heart pump. He's waiting for a heart transplant, at the top of the list.

The call could come at any time. While the waiting is hard, Gould said he believes that soon his life will be a whole lot different - and better - than it is now.

"There two statues," he explained during a phone interview Thursday. "A-1, you're in the hospital and can't leave. B-1, which I am, you're still at the top of the list, but you're able to leave the hospital."

His pump is considered a bridge to transplant, the final step in a journey that has included two open heart surgeries, removal of his thyroid and implantation of an internal defibrillator.

Gould's wife Patrice and three oldest children, along with several other family members, have been trained to work with the equipment, which has to be pumped man-



Terry Gould

ually if the batteries fail. Gould isn't allowed to drive and must be accompanied by family care-givers wherever he goes. Still, he tries to never miss his 12-year-old son's hockey games.

"I get so much enjoyment out of watching my son," Gould said. "I love going to his games."

Not surprisingly, medical expenses have skyrocketed for the 50-year-old father of five.

And the transplant is expected to cost in excess of \$500,000, some of which will not be covered by insurance.

The family will get some help from an upcoming fundraiser organized by friends who are associated with the PeeWee Shamrocks hockey team. Manager Kathleen O'Malley first suggested the team hold a raffle to raise funds, and when she approached the Farmington Hills Hockey Association's board, that one small idea exploded.

Coaches, managers and parents came together to form "Hockey Has Heart," a non-profit foundation that will not only provide help for the

Gould family, but other hockey families going through tough times.

The group created a three-part fund-raising plan that includes a Banquet Gala on March 21 at Laurel Manor in Livonia, featuring a sit-down dinner, live and silent auctions and entertainment by the band Ultraviolet.

Raffle drawing prizes include a 2003 Dodge Ram Hemi Quad Cab Pickup truck, Sony Large Screen HDTV and IBM ThinkPad.

The first annual Family Fun day will be held on March 22, which is championship weekend for Farmington Hills Hockey. Kick off activities currently include the selling of paper hearts for \$1 to paper the hockey arena and a benefit at Rio Bravo on March 16, where 20 percent of the proceeds will go to Hockey Has Heart.

Area merchants are being asked to donate items that can be auctioned off in theme baskets, and raffle tickets are available for \$100. All donations of goods and services are tax deductible and cash donations can be made to CDS Foundation.

Hockey Has Heart is a 501c-3 organization. For more information, contact hockeyhasheart@nol.com or visit [www.hockeyhasheart.com](http://www.hockeyhasheart.com)

## Botsford combines reading, fitness

To help celebrate Reading Month, Botsford Elementary will hold its first-ever Reading, Feeding and Fitness Night on Thursday, March 20, from 6:30-8 p.m.

Fitness USA, which will provide testing of body fat and blood pressure, will give away

two passes for unlimited use of their facilities - one for two weeks and the other for one month. Mrs. Vaughn will lead exercises in the gym, and teachers will be reading their favorite books in the Media Center.

Westborn Market is donating fruit and vegetables for taste

tests and give children who meet their March reading goal coupons redeemable for a piece of fresh fruit. Students will be able to enter a raffle for free books and other prizes. MC Sporting Goods will also donate \$5 in coupons to any child who visits all of the activities.

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