

# Community Rallies to Support Two Local Girls Fighting Serious Illnesses

By Bethany Prange

THE INDEPENDENT

Over the last several months, Monroe County residents have rallied to support two local girls facing serious medical conditions.

On Oct. 29, word spread rapidly throughout Monroe County that a 5-year-old Kindergartner at Zahnw Elementary had been diagnosed with acute myeloid leukemia, a rare form of cancer.

The condition would require the child, Elsa Wiemerslage, to undergo months of treatment at SSM Cardinal Glennon Children's Hospital, followed by a bone marrow transplant.

Elsa's father, Kevin Wiemerslage, is an EMT in both Monroe County and O'Fallon-Shiloh, and a firefighter for Berkley Fire Department. He was also a firefighter for the Fairview Heights Fire Department for nine years.

Elsa's mother, Adrienne Norbury Wiemerslage, is a special education teacher at High Mount School in Swansea. At the time of Elsa's diagnosis, Adrienne was pregnant with the couple's third child. The baby, a boy named Eli, was born on Nov. 27. Thankfully, Eli's cord blood was a bone marrow match for Elsa.

Though each of Elsa's siblings had only a 25 percent



**Elsa Wiemerslage**

chance of being a match, her sister, Claire, was also found to be a match.

"The doctors couldn't believe it," Kevin Wiemerslage said. "They'll use Eli's cord blood to do the bone marrow

transplant. They're hoping to send her home for her birthday on Feb. 8, and then bring her back in for the bone marrow transplant."

If Elsa's blood counts improve enough, she may be able to celebrate her sixth birthday at the family's home in the Quail Ridge subdivision in Waterloo.

She will have to return to the hospital to prep for the bone marrow transplant, which is currently scheduled for Feb. 10.

Once the transplant is completed, Elsa will have to spend



**Audrey Stanley**

100 days away from her siblings – a precaution that will be extremely hard on the family, Kevin Wiemerslage said.

"We did meet with the bone marrow doctor the other day and they won't let her go back to school until January of next year," Kevin Wiemerslage said. "Her length of stay in the hospital depends on how well she recovers from it. They're thinking five to six weeks, and then she'll be in a Cardinal Glennon apartment for about two months."

Despite the physical toll of undergoing chemotherapy, Elsa has responded positively

to her treatments.

"The doctors are saying she's right where she should be," Kevin Wiemerslage said.

Since the diagnosis, scout troops, schools, daycares and businesses have rallied to show their support for Elsa and her family.

"It's been incredible, just all the support," Kevin Wiemerslage said.

Neighbors Nicole and Mike Walter organized a "Light the Town Orange for Elsa" drive shortly after Elsa's diagnosis. Local businesses sold orange light bulbs and on Nov. 8, Waterloo residents turned on their orange porch lights in honor of Elsa.

In mid-December, friends and community volunteers organized a bone marrow drive in Elsa's honor at the O'Fallon firehouse. A blood drive in scheduled to be held from 3:30 to 7:30 p.m. Feb. 4 at Zahnw Elementary, 301 Hamacher Street in Waterloo.

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