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## 'Davids Fight' aids colon-cancer screens

BY ESTELA VILLANUEVA-WHITMAN • REGISTER CORRESPONDENT • FEBRUARY 24, 2010

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At age 38, David McCluskey of West Des Moines was busy in medical sales and starting a family. Getting sick was the furthest thing from his mind.

Doctors were floored when he was diagnosed with stage II rectal cancer, but luckily caught it early enough to treat.

"I figured I was too young to get cancer," said McCluskey. "The thought didn't even cross my mind."

The post-surgery months brought chemotherapy and radiation, but they led to connections that changed McCluskey's life and many others. Cancer-free for three years, he's become an advocate for colorectal cancer awareness, forming a nonprofit foundation and appearing as Mr. July in the 2010 Colondar, a national fundraiser for The Colon Club.

Patients with colorectal cancer often don't recognize the symptoms.



ANDREA MELENDEZ / REGISTER PHOTOS

Davids Fight, which raises awareness of colon cancer and helps pay for colonoscopies, is named after David Kinman, who died of cancer at age 37. Founders are Braedi Kinman, left, with her son,



McCluskey had blood in his stool and narrow bowel movements. He felt bloated and tired. After three months, he finally found time to see his family physician, who recommended a colonoscopy - a move that saved McCluskey's life. It detected a tumor that was surgically removed the following day.

Weeks later in his oncologist's waiting room, McCluskey spotted another young man, David Kinman, who was diagnosed with stage IV rectal cancer. The two formed a quick bond - both were athletic, had young sons and wanted to support others coping with cancer.

Kinman died a few months later, at age 37. In his

honor, McCluskey's family and Kinman's wife, Braedi, founded Davids Fight, which raises awareness for early detection and helps pay for colonoscopies for uninsured and underinsured lowans.

The foundation has since helped six patients - none diagnosed with cancer.

"I'm glad we're not finding any cancer," McCluskey said. "What I'd really like to do is give these people peace of mind."

Carol Frazell, care coordinator at John Stoddard Cancer Center, said she's referred patients to the foundation who were unable to afford colonoscopies. McCluskey is a great representative for the cause, she added.

"When people see a young person who's gone through this, whole and healthy again, it's inspiring to them," she said.

According to the National Cancer Institute, colorectal cancer is the second-leading cause of cancer death, with about 15,000 young people diagnosed annually. With proper screening, more than 90 percent of deaths could be prevented.

Colonoscopies are recommended at age 50 unless other signs are present, such as a change in bowel habits, fatigue, blood in stool or bloating.

Braedi Kinman said working with McCluskey on Davids Fight was the perfect fit. She didn't have time to run a foundation by herself and knew having a survivor tell his story would be powerful.

"When my David and I were going through this four years ago, there just weren't a lot of resources. Being a

Cole, 4, and David and Winonah McCluskey, with their son, Nick, 7.



Cancer survivor David McCluskey — aka Mr. July on the 2010 Colondar fundraising calendar — and his wife, Winonah, take active roles in promoting awareness of colon cancer. David was diagnosed with the disease at age 38 but now is cancer-free.

## Info

For information on Davids Fight or to purchase a Colondar, call (515) 559-4789 or go to [www.DavidsFight.org](http://www.DavidsFight.org).

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young couple, I had to look outside to different cities that had support groups," she said.

Through Davids Fight, she's fielded questions and given support to other caregivers.

McCluskey's wife, Winonah, stressed the need to listen to your body and see a doctor if something's wrong.

"We look at it that there's a reason why this happened to him. I know several people who have had colonoscopies who probably wouldn't have because they know what happened to David. It's definitely made people think and be aware," she said.

On the heels of last year's "Helping Hits" fundraiser, McCluskey is already planning this year's big event: a 5K race, "Get Your Rear in Gear." Presented by the Iowa Clinic, it will be Oct. 9 at Raccoon River Park in West Des Moines.

"We'll go year to year, as long as there's a need," McCluskey said.

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