

# FAMILY AFFAIR

Ballards raise funds to heal local father's heart and lungs

By **Monica M. Walk**  
Special to Action Reporter Media

If hearts could be mended with love, Eric Ballard wouldn't need surgery.

But the chemotherapy and radiation used to fight his Hodgkin's disease — diagnosed 20 years ago when he was just 19 — have ravaged his heart and lungs to the point where his heart requires aortic valve replacement and carotid artery repair. Both lungs need to be replaced.

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So, family and friends are rallying their love and energy into a benefit event on Saturday, Sept. 6, from 3 to 11 p.m. at the Oakfield Conservation Club. The public is encouraged to attend.

The goal is to raise funds to help offset uncovered costs of the medical interventions. While the Ballards are fortunate that the actual surgeries are covered by insurance, the procedures require significant co-pays and considerable travel to and from The Cleveland Clin-

## BALLARD FUNDRAISER

The Fundraiser for Eric Ballard will be held Saturday, Sept. 6, from 3-11 p.m. at Oakfield Conservation Club, W7717 High-bridge Road.

Proceeds will support Eric Ballard's ongoing heart and lung procedures at The Cleveland Clinic in Cleveland, Ohio. Donations to the Ballard's Cleveland Health Fund can be made by check or money order payable to Stephanie Ballard and mailed to P.O. Box 352, Oakfield, WI 53065. To donate or learn more, call Lisa at (920) 251-4315 or Debbie at (920) 922-9284.

ic, as well as extended-stay accommodations for Ballard's wife, Stephanie, and 6-year-old son, Luckson, while Eric is in the

hospital there. "He is always so positive. He says, 'Don't wor-

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SUBMITTED PHOTO  
Eric Ballard with his wife, Stephanie, and son, Luckson, has lost 100 pounds due to heart and lung issues. He relies on oxygen and is unable to leave their home.



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## WEATHER

Five-day forecast Page A6

High today	Low tonight	High tomorrow
<b>85</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>74</b>
Thunderstorms likely	Thunderstorms likely	Chance of storms early; Partly sunny



## INSIDE

**BACK IN THE GAME:** CWC soccer player Cody Zonnefeld beats cancer, returns to team for 2014 season.

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## Ballard

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ry about me, I'm fine," said Lisa Gitter, Ballard's Oakfield-based cousin who organizing the fundraiser with the help of other family members. "It is getting so costly. Stephanie misses work. I said, 'Eric, it is time we help you as a family.'"

Eric Ballard's health path already has included a return of the Hodgkin's lymphoma and a stem cell transplant in 2005. Four years later, heart damage from earlier cancer treatment led to a coronary bypass. And 2010 brought a diagnosis of a bone marrow syndrome called MDS, followed by a bone marrow transplant in 2011 and more chemotherapy.

The next heart repair is expected to take place by early October. The lung transplant, however, is on hold until Ballard is cancer-free for five years.

Stephanie Ballard noted that waiting on the lung transplant is also wise because life expectancy after transplant is generally five to 10 years.

"It's smarter to treat it like patchwork," she said.

"I am OK talking about it," Eric Ballard said of his continued health issues. "I'd rather get it out there and talk about it. Once I know what is going on ... once I know the prognosis ... I keep pushing. My family is more emotional than I am. As long as I know what I have to do, I'm fine."

Eric Ballard's weakening physical state meant quitting his job as a metal

worker at RB Royal Industries last year. The combined heart and lung trouble now keep the life-long Fond du Lac resident homebound and on oxygen. The heart problem impedes his ability to eat, and his wife estimates he has lost about 100 pounds in the past year. Family photos on the wall show a much more robust man.

Stephanie Ballard continues to teach chemistry and earth science at Campbellsport High School where she has been on the faculty staff for 18 years. She also has taught in the UW-Fond du Lac College for Kids and LEAPS program for 15 years.

An Iowa native, Stephanie Ballard laughs while recounting how she came to Campbellsport for a year of teaching experience at the beginning of her career, and stayed — "Trapped," she joked — after being introduced to Eric by her neighbors.

While Luckson enjoyed a year of school at Fond du Lac's Lakeshore Elementary, he will commute with his mother and continue his education in Campbellsport to ease the family's transportation situation.

"The people I work with are so wonderful to me," Stephanie Ballard said, citing a recent class service project dedicated to the Ballards and her colleague's ongoing support. "Campbellsport is so tight-knit. It is a community that takes care of everyone."

Luckson is the high point on the Ballard's hard road of health. The couple adopted him from Haiti in 2010 when Luckson was 2, and Eric was in

remission and feeling very healthy.

"Adoption is difficult," Stephanie Ballard said. "We knew a domestic adoption wouldn't happen due to health. We picked Haiti because of its close proximity, so he could visit when he is older. It has worked out so well. We adore him so much. God put us together."

Luckson, who now enjoys T-ball and soccer, as well as Ninja Turtles and LEGOs, accompanies his parents on the nine-hour trips to Cleveland. "He is such a trouper on those trips," Stephanie said, smiling at her son. "He doesn't like to be away from us for long, and it is better to stay together. He is the best kid you'll ever see. He has a string bag that he packs up with books, markers, the Kindle, and toys for appointments. He is responsible for packing it on his own. He is a very good helper."

Cousin Lisa Gitter hopes the community will come to the fundraiser to support the Ballards. Stephanie Ballard simply hopes the community will support Gitter's efforts.

"She has been really good to our family. ... It is so much work, and so sweet."

While committed to helping, Gitter is realistic about her fundraising goals.

"Anything we make is more than what we have," she said.

Donations to the Ballard's Cleveland Health Fund can be made by check or money order payable to Stephanie Ballard, and mailed to P.O. Box 352, Oakfield, WI 53065