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Colona man awaits liver transplant

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COLONA -- Each year, Karla Erichsen of Colona puts up a Christmas village, complete with lighted brick houses, miniature people and snow-covered trees.

This year, she's hoping that Christmas village and other donated prizes at a benefit will bring in enough money to keep her parents at the bedside of her brother, Matthew Lannan, 29, of Colona. Since fall, Mr. Lannan has been in and out of University of Illinois-Chicago hospitals and is now at the top of a waiting list for a new liver.

"That's going to be a whole new lease on life," Ms. Erichsen said. "It just kills me that someone has to die in order for him to live."

The journey to Chicago began with a two-car traffic accident in May 2003. The air bag deployed on impact, leaving bruises on Mr. Lannan's torso. A month later, Mr. Lannan went into the hospital for what the doctors called pancreatitis, Ms. Erichsen said.

From then until fall, he was in the hospital about every month. He was jaundiced, and in 2004, he was diagnosed with non-alcoholic fatty liver.

The news was a shock. Mr. Lannan, then 27, had been an active political science/law student at the University of Tennessee until 2002, when he had come down with a severe respiratory illness. He had planned on going back to school before the accident occurred, she said.

On Halloween, Mr. Lannan's liver and kidneys both failed. A cyst on his pancreas had caused his liver to increase to six times its normal size. He was rushed to Chicago and remained hospitalized until the Friday before Thanksgiving. He came home, but was re-admitted within days.

He has been on a ventilator for three weeks as of Friday and also has pneumonia, Ms. Erichsen said. "They've had him kind of sedated," she said. "He just wants to come home."

Right now, he's at the top of the regional donor list for a new liver, she said. Despite his rare AB-negative blood type, a new liver could come quickly for Mr. Lannan. The key is that he must be stable for 24 hours before the transplant can be done.

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With stays at hospitals, visiting nurses at home, medications and procedures, bills have started to pile up. That's why Ms. Erichsen decided to have a benefit. Otherwise, she said, it will get harder for her parents to stay in Chicago with Mr. Lannan.

The benefit starts at 1 p.m. Jan. 15 at the Green Rock-Colona American Legion, Post 1233, at 312 Broadway Drive. Raffle prizes include several NASCAR diecast models, an Isabel Bloom piece, a crystal oil lamp from Diamonds on the Avenue, a limited edition Quad City Mallards bobblehead set, a gold watch from Sable's, Harley-Davidson memorabilia and several gift baskets. There will also be a 50/50 drawing and a \$500 raffle drawing. The karaoke machine will be on in the afternoon, and the band Erra will play late 1970s and '80s music from 8 p.m. to midnight. Azteca will provide food, and plates will be \$5 for adults and \$3 for kids. Donations also will be accepted under the Matthew Lannan account at any IH Mississippi Valley Credit Union.

The hardest part for Mr. Lannan is not being able to spend time with his son, Christian, who is 8. "What he liked to do was take Christian fishing when he had him," Ms. Erichsen said.

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