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STEPHEN'S JOURNEY

Over the years, I've asked hundreds of superintendents why they stay in this crazy business. Oftentimes, the answer is, "I love to work outside in the sunshine."

But, we all know the cloudless sky we yearn for is a double-edged sword: the sun gives joy and growth and life... but it can also take it away.

Last month, it took the life of Stephen Best, a Texas golf course superintendent who adored his job, his wife Cheryl and his two young children. He cared about his profession and served as president of the North Texas GCSA. He was a community leader who was named Rotarian of the Year in his hometown of Keller. He was a man of faith for whom church involvement was a rewarding commitment. For fun, he ran marathons.

But he couldn't outrun skin cancer.

In 2007, Best had a cancerous mole removed from his back and thought he was "clean." He decided not to do the semi-annual melanoma checks his doctor had suggested. He regretted that. The cancer metastasized and in February 2010 a tumor attacked his brain. He was in a coma for two weeks. When he woke up, his world had changed forever.

For an amazing year and a half, his family, friends, superintendent buddies, church and the team at Sky Creek Ranch GC pulled together around him. Our wonderful pals at the Wee One Foundation helped financially. The support was remarkable and the chemo and radiation worked for a while, but cancer is a ruthless, relentless bastard. He died October 16.

Stephen was not the first in our business to fall victim to skin cancer... but I wish to God he'd be the last. He had the same wish and he spread the word among his North Texas col-

leagues and others around the nation. He wrote a tremendous article for his chapter publication describing his ordeal and gives wonderful specific information about skin cancer prevention and detection, but here – in his words – is his bottom-line advice:

"I recommend the following actions to take care of yourself and your family properly in the event of an unexpected medical emergency:

- Purchase life insurance as soon as you can, if you don't already have

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it. Once you are diagnosed with a life-threatening illness, you will not be able to obtain it. Get it done.

- Make a will or set up a trust. Don't leave the disposition of your assets to a court-appointed authority.

• Stay on top of your health. If it were not for my dedication to running, I would not be able to survive the rigors of my treatment.

- Get your annual physicals. I have skipped annual physicals in the past. Trust me, that attitude does not work. I want to know everything now so I have a better chance at survival.

- When you see a dermatologist make sure he's a skin cancer specialist.

"Skin cancer, if detected early, is very treatable. I encourage you to take my poor choices (lack of proper skin care in my early career and follow-up) and my good choices (faith, fellowship, and family) to heart. I am on a mission to spread the awareness of skin cancer not only to all of you but to a lot more. I am hoping to someday have a foundation that is as big as some of the others out there. It has

become personal to me and I hope you all take this seriously."

The foundation he mentions above hasn't been formalized yet, but his friend Brian Cloud, the GCSAA regional rep for the area, describes it this way: "Stephen and I talked about (it) before his death. We were going to work to install sunscreen stations in as many golf course break rooms as we possibly could. We were going to start in DFW, expand to Texas, and eventually work around the U.S. We

were going to put his photo next to them with a brief review of his story. He loved the idea and we were going to move forward together once he was well enough. Needless to say, we were never able to get started. But, I am going to honor my friend and get it going in 2012. I may only get a few stations going in 2012 but will eventually get enough installed to make a difference and create some awareness."

Why wait for Brian? If Stephen's story touches you, get started on your "Stephen Station" now. His life may have ended, but his spirit can live on with every case of skin cancer we prevent. Please, do it today.

Lastly, Stephen's entire article, "My Journey with Skin Cancer," along with more info about skin cancer and a video I shot with Stan Zontek of the USGA Green Section about his cancer experiences can be found on our website. There is also a downloadable PDF called "Stephen Best's Story" you can put near your new or existing sunscreen station. **GCI**