

Church plans benefit for Sublimity man

By Denise Ruttan

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One man of faith taught the youths of a whole community to grow along their journeys to God.

Now, nearing the closing steps of his own journey, Ed Cooney's parish family is giving back to the Sublimity man who touched their lives.

Cooney, 48, was diagnosed Sept. 18 with pancreatic cancer, now in stage four. His family made the decision to start home hospice care last week.

Before the diagnosis, it was a long summer for his family of worrying about his weight loss and exhaustion, wondering what was wrong.

"He started feeling ill in January last year," said his wife, Rosemary Cooney. "Pancreatic cancer can be hard to diagnose. He had all kinds of tests this summer."

Ed Cooney is the music teacher for kindergartners through eighth graders at St. Mary Catholic School in Stayton and leads music ministry at Regis High School. Community members know him as a man with a heart for service.

"Ed has been a huge part of the Catholic community. He is a man of deep faith and conviction," Regis principal Doug Ierardi said. "He worked constantly to try and bring the youth of these parishes to a closer, more personal relationship with God. He had an impact on his own parish, both schools and the wider vicariate."

Ed Cooney is the music director, religious education director and mixed-choir leader at St. Boniface Catholic Church in Sublimity, as well as a part-time youth leader for the Santiam vicariate, which encompasses parishes in Stayton, Jordan, Scio, Shaw and Sublimity, and missions in Detroit and Mill City. Much of that was volunteer work.

"He's always been really active in our church, ever since I met him," Rosemary Cooney said. "He's a strong, faith-filled man. Even through his illness, he wants people to come closer to supporting the church. He fills a lot of roles."

The couple, who have been married 24 years, met at college. Ed's conviction was what

Support the Cooneys

A benefit concert featuring Christian/folk singer Maria Bulkow is set for 3 p.m. Sunday at St. Boniface Church, 375 SE Church St., Sublimity. Concert tickets are \$25 and \$10 per person for assigned seating. Tickets are available at the St. Boniface parish office, after each mass at St. Boniface and at the Regis High School office.

Also from 3 to 6 p.m., a spaghetti dinner is available in the parish hall. Adults are \$8, students and seniors are \$6 and children 12 to 4 are \$5; children under 3 are free.

There is also an account that has been established at West Coast Bank under the name Cooney Family Benefit Account.

For updates on Ed's progress, go to his family's Web site at www.caringbridge.org/visit/edcooney.

Rosemary noticed first about him.

"He caught my eye," Rosemary Cooney said.

The couple has two children — Catharine, a student at the University of Portland, and Olivia, a junior at Regis. Rosemary said they have been handling the situation with maturity.

"They're strong, faith-filled kids," Rosemary said. "Everyone has their own journey to make."

As soon as his home parish in Sublimity learned of Ed's diagnosis, a group has gathered on Tuesday evenings to pray the rosary for Ed.

Rosemary's coworkers at Jeld-Wen Windows and Doors organize meals for the family. St. Mary School is holding a fundraiser selling butter braids and the Regis High School football team cleaned the family's house one day.

"There's a lot of prayers, visits, notes and cards, anything we can do to lift his spirits," St. Mary principal Rick Schindler said.

A committee is also organizing a concert and spaghetti dinner Sunday to benefit the Cooney family.

Father Irudayaraj Amalanathan, known to his parishioners as Father Amal, said the outpouring of concern from the community shows how many lives Ed touched.

"The parish has stepped up because we feel we're part of his family," Father Amal said.

Fellow parishioners know him for his beautiful voice and ability to make people laugh, Father Amal said.

"He's very personable and sociable with kids and he can get down to their level," Father Amal said. "He can interact with them and get them engaged."

It has been difficult for the children at St. Mary to learn about Cooney's condition, Schindler said.

"We tell the truth about what he's facing and answer any questions they have," Schindler said. "Everyone has questions, from preschool through eighth grade. Kids have different levels of how they process it."

St. Boniface administrative assistant Kim Zuber works with Cooney. As a person of faith, she said it's difficult to understand God's plan in times like these.

"God has a plan for all of us and we sometimes just don't understand why and what," Zuber said. "We hope our journey on Earth will lead us to a better place."

And she hopes the programs and ministries Cooney started will be seeds of faith for the future.

"He started so many good things. I hope people will continue his good work," Zuber said.

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