

**By Jan Schultz**

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Sherri Wheeler said son Travis “just smiled” when he walked into their home on July 2 and saw about 30 hats there in the kitchen.

The collegiate, NBA and golf hats were contributed to the young man by people in the community. His aunt, Heidi Wheeler, thought it would be a great welcome home for her nephew. After four weeks in Aurora, Colo., completing the first phase of treatment for Acute Lymphoblastic Leukemia (ALL), just being home was a good feeling, said Sherri.

Travis, 19, a 2012 graduate of Chase County Schools, learned in early June he had ALL, just after completing his first year of college.

ALL is a type of blood cancer. The patient’s bone marrow makes abnormal blood cells instead of normal ones the body needs.

During the last few weeks in May, Sherri said her son told her he felt different, and “real tired.”

Having just started a job working for a farmer, which required early mornings and late nights, Sherri said they just passed it off as getting used to a new work routine.

“He was still going out with friends,” she said, so she and husband Bruce didn’t think much of it. Then, he was out of breath going up the stairs. Maybe it was West Nile or some other type of viral infection, they thought.

Finally, he went to the doctor for a blood test, where it was discovered his white blood cell count was off the charts at about 890,000. The normal count is 10,000, she said.

Doctors at The Children’s Hospital in Aurora said it was the second highest white blood cell count they had ever seen, so he was immediately placed in the ICU.

The “induction of remission” treatments started immediately, and the first four-part phase of chemotherapy concluded last week.

After 11 days (five in the ICU), Travis was able to come back each day for his chemo treatments as an outpatient. He and his parents stayed the rest of the four weeks at the Ronald McDonald House nearby.

This week on Tuesday, Travis returned to Aurora to start the second part of treatment called “consolidation/intensification therapy,” which will take him back to Children’s Hospital each Tuesday over eight weeks for additional chemotherapy.

Sherri said they will likely go out and come back home each Tuesday over the eight-week period.

After that’s done, the third part of treatment will span two to two-and-a-half years, Sherri noted. Called the “maintenance therapy” phase, Travis will receive chemotherapy once a month. Most are able to return to their usual activities during this part of treatment.

Sherri said there are good results expected if they follow the three-year process of treatment faithfully.

Travis fully expects to return to college to complete the second year of his degree in alternative energy at Colby Community College. He’ll have to wait at least six months to do that, however.

He also has to be careful not to over-exert himself or have physical contact with the port that was placed in his chest to receive the treatments. Being around others who are sick also has to be avoided due to his compromised immune system.

“Luckily he also likes X-Box,” his mom smiled.

And one of his greatest loves—fishing—is also okay, she noted, but he has to be cautious of

sun exposure.

“Luckily, he has all those hats,” she said.

How do parents get through such an ordeal affecting their children?

“Family, friends and the Lord,” she said.

“The community has been just amazing,” she said.