

# C-M grad battles cancer of 'unknown origin'

*Three tumors require intense chemotherapy*

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Even though Matt Alterio has a family history of cancer, the pain in his right shoulder was no cause for alarm.

Or so he thought.

Today, the 1990 Canon-McMillan High School graduate is undergoing an intensive chemotherapy regimen for bile duct cancer at the Hillman Cancer Center in Pittsburgh. He is scheduled to complete his required six cycles of three-week treatments in March, with two or three more cycles a strong possibility.

"Technically it's a cancer of unknown origin," Alterio said last week in a telephone conversation from his Ross Township home. "When they diagnosed me, even when I was in the hospital, cancer never even crossed my mind. It was out of left field."

Alterio, 39, has three tumors: one in his liver, one near his adrenal gland and one near the aorta. They are all connected by body tissue.

When Alterio first sought an answer for his shoulder pain, his physician thought it was muscular. He didn't believe that, so he visited Dr. Eugene Hamel, a surgeon on staff at Canonsburg General Hospital. Tests ordered by Hamel revealed an extremely low-functioning gall bladder. Alterio had the organ removed.

Unfortunately, the surgery did nothing to alleviate his pain, which occurred primarily when he would lie down. The cancer was finally discovered when Hamel ordered a deep sonogram and CT scan on



Matt Alterio of Ross Township, formerly of Canonsburg, recently returned to work on a limited basis at Sing Sing, a dueling piano bar at the Waterfront in Homestead, after being diagnosed with cancer in October.

## Mark your calendar

A fundraiser for Matt Alterio of Ross Township will be held Sunday, beginning at 5 p.m., at Sing Sing, a dueling piano bar at the Waterfront in Homestead. A 1990 graduate of Canon-McMillan High School, Alterio was diagnosed with bile duct cancer in October. Admission is \$25 and includes a buffet and drink. For more information, call Sing Sing at 412-461-7426.

we do. We rally around each other."

Alterio said he may do a couple songs during the evening. "We take requests from the crowd," he said. "It's very therapeutic for me."

It's the second fundraiser being held for Alterio. Before moving back to the area four years ago, Alterio lived and worked in Erie, and on Dec. 6, a fundraiser there drew nearly 300 people.

"Matt is so inspirational," Peggy Alterio said. "He keeps me up. He has such a positive attitude. He's so strong, which I think will get him through."

That's not to say it hasn't been frustrating. Alterio gets extremely nauseated, and the chemotherapy makes him very tired.

"It comes out of the blue," he said.

Plus, he has just a patch of hair remaining on the back of his head, which means he can no longer tease his dad and brothers, all of who went bald in their mid-30s.

"I had a decent head of hair going. I was hoping I could get through this without losing any hair," Alterio said. "Comparatively speaking, it's not too bad."

Alterio's liver.

"When Dr. Hamel went in to do the gall bladder surgery, he didn't see anything," Alterio said. "One doctor I'm dealing with now said the cancer was nowhere near where he was at."

Alterio, son of Mike and Peggy Alterio of Canonsburg, returned to work on a very limited basis just two weeks ago for the first time since his

diagnosis. He performs at Sing Sing, a dueling piano bar at the Waterfront in Homestead, and on Sunday, a benefit will be held there in his honor.

"I'm very flattered they want to do this for me," Alterio said. "There's going to be a lot of musicians there. A lot of friends are coming from South Carolina, New York and Michigan. There's a small group that does what

## Snuff: Backpack campaign targets children, smokeless tobacco

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In a March 26, 2010, article, *The Wall Street Journal* reported that even though many groups, including the American Council on Science and Health, argue that smokeless tobacco is less harmful, federal rules prohibit companies from marketing the products as safer alternatives to cigarettes.

However, Rutledge-Falcione said

that drinking an 8-ounce bottle of NicLite, which was originally introduced as a homeopathic product, is equal to smoking two cigarettes.

"It's not a tobacco product, so there's no age restriction," she said, noting that the water is available in a variety of flavors.

To drive its point home, WCHP has paired the smokeless tobacco products with their look-alikes in the clear

backpack. The outer packaging for Camel Snus, for example, is similar to that of Ice Breakers Frost and is shaped like a cell phone. The spitless tobacco is available in Robust, Winterchill, Frost and Mellow. Likewise, Stonewall is a dissolvable tobacco product that's packaged inside and out to resemble Eclipse or Trident gum. It, too, comes in a variety of flavors.

Lindsey Smith, program manager for

WCHP, said spitless tobacco options make it possible to "smoke" where it's either illegal, such as indoors, or impractical. "Tobacco companies are trying to push the markers," she said. "You can still get your nicotine fix. You can still get the same high."

Rutledge-Falcione said the state is impressed with the backpack tool kit and is encouraging WCHP to go national with the program.