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Deerwood restaurant pitches in to help popular employee and his fiancee facing huge medical bills

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Provided by the Borger family
Saturday's benefit at the Deerwood Loop will aid Brett Borger and his fiancee Heather Gauvin, pictured with their sons Kaydon (left), 6, and Bishop, 5.

Brett Borger is a popular employee at the Loop restaurant in Deerwood, where for almost six years he's been known for his enthusiastic greetings to customers and his ready smile as he clears tables and delivers food.

Lately, though, he'd confided to a few people that he wasn't feeling well — but he just had to press on until Saturday.

That was the date of a fundraiser at the restaurant for Borger's fiancee, Heather Gauvin, who had a kidney removed after being diagnosed with kidney cancer.

The fundraiser will go on as scheduled, though its scope has expanded: Last week, Borger also was hospitalized after complaining of chest pain. After doctors discovered an infection, he went through open-heart surgery Tuesday.

All day Saturday, 20 percent of the restaurants proceeds will be reserved to help pay the bills of Borger and Gauvin, neither of whom had health insurance.

Mike Schneider, founder and owner of the Loop, said it's a cruel setback for one of the most memorable employees the chain has had in its 34 years. He said when people find out what he does for a living, they'll often tell him about the guy at the Deerwood Loop.

Customer Randy Davidson, whose family has a regular Saturday lunch at the restaurant, said he's never seen a restaurant worker so solicitous.

A while back, when Borger heard Davidson was moving to a new house, he offered to help him on his day off. Free. Davidson had to insist on paying him.

Since Borger fell ill, Davidson has visited him in the hospital three times. They've shared some stories.

"I think he had some tough situations early in his life," Davidson said. "And when he re-examined how he was going to live his life, he just decided to be a giving, caring person."

Bryan Greene, another regular customer, said he's gotten to know Borger as well. "That's his role in life: To be happy, and to make sure everybody else is as well."

Borger's fiancee, Gauvin, said he's always been that way. "That's him. He gets a little sad, but for the most part he's always smiling."

He's 42, she's 35, and they have two sons: Kaydon, 6, and Bishop, 5.

Gauvin is a dental assistant. She said health insurance wasn't available through her employer and while the Loop offers group health insurance, the family figured that was too expensive to fit in their budget. So, too, she said, was anything she could find through the Affordable Care Act.

Besides, she thought they were invincible. "I never worried about health insurance. I thought I was healthy," she said.

During the Christmas holidays, though, she was diagnosed with kidney cancer and had a kidney removed. She still needs further tests.

Borger and Gauvin sold a car and motorcycle, and he took on extra shifts, since she was out of work for months. After he started feeling ill, she persuaded him to go to the hospital, where he was diagnosed with his heart problem.

She said he went through surgery well, and is breathing on his own and taking short walks in the hospital hallways with his sons.

"He's back to his normal self," she said. "At first he was groggy and had the tube down his throat so he couldn't talk. But now that they've got it out, he's talking. He's making jokes. Lots of jokes. He's funny now. Back to normal."