

ALS family gives because it has received

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By Annalisa Michalski

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CHURCHLAND

One man's trash is another man's treasure. And in Tom Bailey's case, the treasure is more precious than gold: it's an expression of love and goodwill.

On July 19, the Bailey, Buxbaum, Delinger, Farmer, Hartsell, Imel, Jones, Sasser, Smith, Speidell and Tynch families - all Tom's local relatives - gathered loads of clothing and household items and hosted a yard sale in the Baileys' Hatton Point neighborhood. The family donated every cent of the proceeds, which totaled over \$1,200, to the ALS Association in Tom's honor.

"Tom's going into his fifth year with ALS, and his survival is due in a very large part to the care of his wife," says Tom's sister, Phyllis Speidell of Portsmouth.

Tom's wife, Linda, in turn shares the credit with others. For her, the yard sale was just a small step toward paying back. Every detail Linda tells of Tom's ALS journey is punctuated with gratitude for the kindness and assistance the family has received.

"I can't say enough nice things about what our family, friends and community have done to help out," Linda said. She reels off a list of those who have

contributed, including the ALS Association, local ALS family support groups, the Muscular Dystrophy Association, Hampton's VA hospital, the University of Virginia, friends, neighbors and the couple's home church, St. Christopher Episcopal on Cedar Lane.

ALS is amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, also known as Lou Gehrig's disease. It is one of more than 60 conditions that fall under the umbrella term "muscular dystrophy." ALS is a degenerative disease that affects the body's motor neurons. Its first sign is often muscle weakness in the arms and legs or difficulty swallowing. There is no cure for the disease, but some relief is available. Tom's treatment includes twice-weekly physical therapy. There is one prescription drug approved by the FDA for this use with several others currently in trial.

For Tom, whose physical movement is now limited mostly to his head and neck, technological breakthroughs have helped restore a measure of independence. He has a computer set-up that uses an infrared beam and a reflective patch on his glasses to translate head movements into mouse movements. In this way, Tom has been able to continue using a computer even though he lost

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Prize, 17 yrs. old, and playing his dream has been in America learning in school and attending

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PHOTO BY ANNALISA MICHALSKI

Yard sale in Hatton Point in Portsmouth was to benefit ALS.

Continued from previous page

his ability to move his hands. A related technology is used for patients who no longer have head movement, a mouse can be controlled with eye movement.

One awareness and fundraising event that is a perennial favorite for Tom's family is ALSA's Walk to Defeat ALS. "Tom's Team" plans to participate in the local chapter's annual walk again this

fall. It will launch from Neptune Park in Virginia Beach on Oct. 19. (For information or to register, visit www.alsa.org.)

Between now and then, Tom and his family know there is much to be done but just as much to be thankful for.

"I feel like the guy in that cell phone commercial," Linda laughs. "We have a whole network behind us."

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Meet Summer