

Feeling the power of prayer

Kevan Schooler hadn't been in the hospital since he was 6 years old; at 49, he was fighting for his life

Nancy Koger

The son of educators in O'Donnell, Kevan Schooler graduated from high school and went to McMurry University for three years. In his third year in college, working for Furr's Supermarkets as an assistant manager, he realized that he was making almost as much as his teacher mother, and decided to go to El Paso to work.

His time in El Paso did have a positive outcome because he met Connie, who became his wife. They moved to Big Spring and he worked as branch manager for Zee Medical Supplies. The original plan was to establish the branch office in Abilene, but Kevan convinced the management that Big Spring was a more central location.

"We've loved it ever since we got here," Connie and Kevan agree.

"We increased the population of Big Spring quite a bit by moving here. We had twin daughters, Leela and Emmalee, and later her parents moved back here, as well as two sets of cousins," Kevan said.

When the medical company closed, Schooler worked for Harris Lumber for about 12 years.

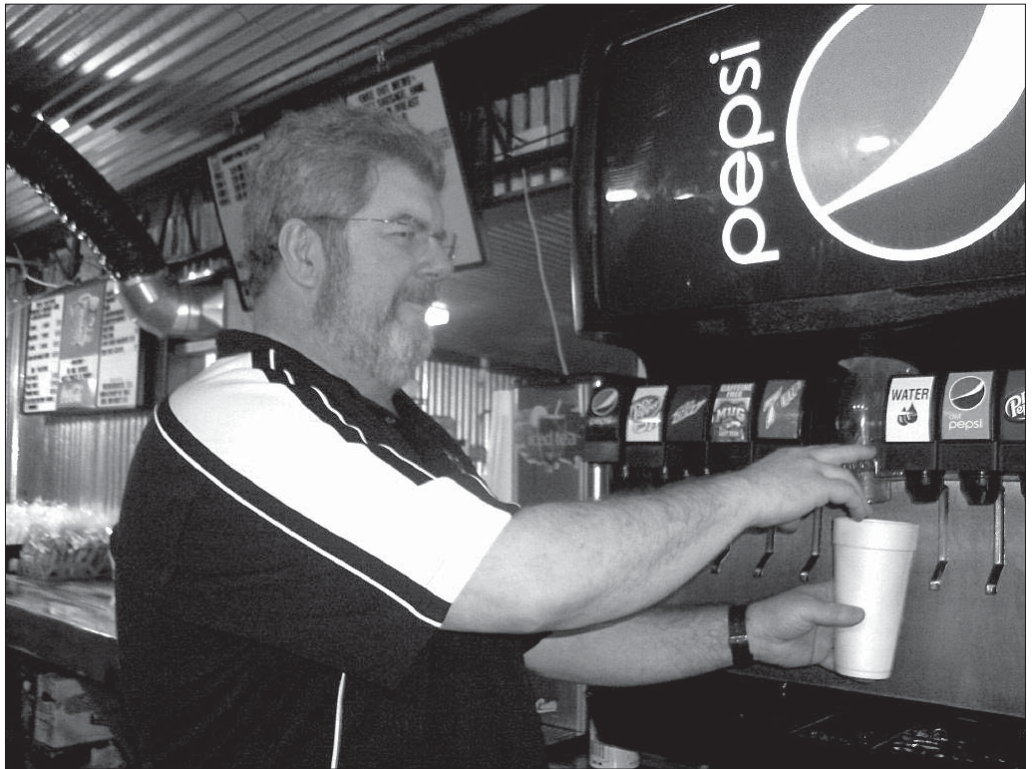
"That's where people recognize me from," he explained.

Leaving Harris, he spent three years working for Pepsi.

"Everyone says that with colon cancer you don't have symptoms, but I did. I was tired

all the time and just couldn't function well at my job," he said. He felt bad enough that he asked Connie to make him a doctor's appointment.

In October 2009, at the age of 49, a year shy of the recommended age to have a colonoscopy, Kevan went in for a complete physical. Dr. Manuel Carrasco



ordered several tests and sent Schooler to Dr. Ladd Hoffman for a colonoscopy. After that test, he was given a CT scan, which confirmed the diagnosis of colon cancer.

Hoping to avoid a colostomy, Hoffman referred him to Dr. Karen Carr at Texas Oncology in Midland. In November and December he

underwent four rounds of chemotherapy, followed in February by 25 daily doses of radiation. During this treatment, Kevan continued working at Pepsi.

On April 12, seeing that the prior treatment had not rid him of the cancer, Dr. Hoffman removed about 15 inches of his colon and did a colon resection, requiring six and half hours.

"Dr. Hoffman did not want to do a colostomy; he was almost in tears when he told me that it was necessary," says Connie.

Schooler praises the surgeon.

"He's a fantastic surgeon, a fantastic doctor; we should do everything we can to keep him here. He's a man of faith."

Both Kevan and Connie assert that the widespread support group they had around them — their family, the Pathmaker Sunday school class and friends from childhood through adult life helped them through the ordeal.

"We could feel the power of prayer," they said.

Schooler got out of the hospital on April 21, had

50 staples removed the next day and celebrated his 50th birthday the day after that. Recovery seemed imminent but two days later, while changing the ostomy, they discovered that two stitches had given way.

The doctor got him into the operating room the next day, and found that his small intestine had twisted. The burst stitches seemed providential in causing the second surgery.

His recovery continued.

"The care at Scenic Mountain was excellent; I want that known," Schooler reiterated.

The company Schooler worked for closed its Big Spring plant so he found himself without a job or insurance. He is now

on an expensive self insurance because, to get other insurance, he will have to test cancer-free for 10 years.

Following the last surgery, Kevan had eight rounds of chemotherapy to prevent recurrence of the cancer.

"The pathology report indicated that the tests caught this at stage 2 to 3, just in time before it spread to any other parts of the body," the grateful patient said.

"We had helped with registration at Relay For Life for several years and been on a team at church," Kevan said.

"Last year, my goal at Relay was to walk a whole survivor lap, but I couldn't quite manage it. I did get a purple shirt."

The message Kevan wishes to convey is if anyone has a family history of colon cancer — or feels any symptoms — he or she should not wait until the recommended age to get a screening.

"I hadn't been in the hospital since I'd had my tonsils out at age 6, was almost never sick, and had no history of this in my family," he explained.

Now, Kevan is attending Howard College, hoping to complete that degree he started years ago, and working part-time at Hog Heaven BBQ.

If he had not had a colonoscopy when he did, he might not be looking to the future with such hope.

