

Life in LAMORINDA

Quest for Answers Leads to Awareness of Deadly Gas

By Jennifer Wake



Simi-Wilson with her daughter, Gabby, and cat, Roxy, sit outside their home in Lafayette Photo Jennifer Wake

This past summer, after learning of her aunt's cancer diagnosis, 7-year-old Gabby Wilson set up a lemonade stand near her home in Lafayette to raise money for research. Two weeks later, events took a terrible turn. Gabby was diagnosed with a rare form of lung cancer.

"It was so eerie," said Dana Simi-Wilson, Gabby's mother. "In August she had her picture in the paper because of the lemonade sale for her aunt, then two weeks later she was diagnosed."

After Gabby's diagnosis (which is so rare that only about 10 cases are reported worldwide each year) she had one lung removed and started her recovery. Dana began searching for answers.

"Since her diagnosis I have been looking into the causes of lung cancer," she said. "It is pretty scary what I found: Radon -- a gas produced in the earth that seeps into homes -- is the second leading cause of lung cancer behind cigarette smoking."

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) states that exposure to radon is the number one cause of lung cancer among non-smokers, and estimates that radon causes more than 20,000 lung cancer deaths in the country each year.

The EPA describes radon as "a naturally occurring radioactive gas released in rock, soil, and water from the natural decay of uranium." While levels in outdoor air pose a relatively low threat to human health, radon can accumulate to dangerous levels inside buildings. "You can't see, smell, or taste it, but an elevated radon level in

your home may be affecting the health of your family," the agency noted.

The California Department of Health Services estimates the number of California homes exceeding the EPA's recommended radiation threshold of 4 picocuries (pCi/L) is roughly one percent, or approximately 100,000 homes.

Although Gabby's doctors could not pinpoint the exact cause of the cancer, Dana has taken steps to ensure that radon will not be a future risk factor. After learning that the U.S. Surgeon General recommends all homes in the United States be tested for radon, Dana tested her home for the gas, asked friends and family to test their homes, and teamed up with California's Radon action office to give away free test kits from her office at Freskos Realty in Lafayette.

"I am just a local mom trying to save someone else the horror we have been through," Dana said. "I did not find high levels of radon in my house but will test again in the spring. Everyone I am close to has tested their homes and are waiting for the results. They listened because they had never heard about it before, and because it is so easy to test."

According to the EPA,

testing your house for radon is as easy as "opening a package, placing a radon detector in a designated area, and, after a set number of days, sending the detector back to a lab for analysis." The lab will then inform you of your radon test results. If your house has a radon problem, there are technicians trained to fix the problem, which usually involves patching cracks or openings where the radon gas can enter the home.

Testing should be done in every household since two homes right next to each other can have vastly different radon levels.

Dana is also concerned about schools. "That will be my next target."

As for Gabby, she now tells everyone about radon. "She said she wants to tell everyone so they don't have hurt lungs like she does," Dana said. "It's amazing what a 7-year-old can do."

Free radon testing kits are available at Freskos Realty (3451 Plaza Way in Lafayette) while supplies last. Radon test kits are also available at many home improvement or hardware stores, or can be ordered from the National Safety Council (NSC) Web site at www.nsc.org/issues/radon or radon testing companies.

Are You Ready for the Treeline Triathlon?

By Lee Borrowman

Did your New Year's resolution include getting into shape? Or perhaps your Bucket List reads, "Compete in a triathlon!" The 2nd annual Moraga Treeline Triathlon will be held on April 26, 2008, and this year Moraga Parks and Recreation and Race Director Carl Martin are offering a Triathlon Training Program.

The six-week course is for beginners and pros alike, and gets you started on a thirteen-week training program. Topics will include endurance training, interval training, swim form, bike training, running regimens and nutrition. Martin, a veteran triathlete, explains his training philosophy: "I call it my 4D philosophy. The 4 D's are dedication, discipline, determination and desire. I triangulate the first three (correlating it to the "tri" pyramid of swim, bike and run) with the desire component in the middle. My goal in the training class is to re-program the mind (the computer) that runs the machine (the body). The electricity that runs the whole thing is the desire, so we will spend time talking about motivation and inspiration."

According to Martin, the first two days of the course will be focused on swimming; one day on form and efficiency, the other on cardio conditioning and building endurance. The third and fourth classes will focus on cycling, with a discussion of bike fit and riding form. Martin will bring in two experts for a demonstration and fitting, and the following week participants will work on building miles and take a long ride together. The final two days will be about running, endurance and will tie the whole package together.



"Interspersed throughout the six classes, we'll talk about stretching, breathing, rest, avoiding injury and a host of other topics," says Martin. "I've put together a lot of content that expands far beyond just triathlon training. It's more like six personal training sessions that have a triathlon focus. Participants must come prepared to learn and sweat because it's a very hands' on program that includes a minimum of 45 minutes cardio each of the six classes."

Class meets at the Soda Center utilizing the pool, Campo track and outlying areas for training and conditioning; six Saturdays starting this week (1/26-3/1), 8:00am-9:30am. The cost of the course is \$82. For more information or to register on-line go to: http://moraga.ca.us/production/moraga_recreation_programs.php

Friends and neighbors, Treeline Triathlon Race Director Carl Martin claims, "I can turn anyone into a triathlete in thirteen weeks." Big words, says yours truly! Not one to back away from a challenge, Martin has accepted the most daunting assignment of his athletic career -- turning this out-of-shape, over-forty mom, with a dubious lack of athletic prowess, into a triathlete (okay, maybe not a competitive triathlete -- just crossing the finish line will be good enough for me). We'll see you in training, and out there at the Treeline Triathlon on April 26!

For more information on the Moraga Treeline Triathlon, go to <http://www.moragatri.com>

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