

The Arnold Sentinel

“Serving the South Loup River Valley”

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He’s “One in a Million”

Arnold teacher Kevin Neth beats the odds and returns home.

By Janet Larreau

Ever since May 2, 2021, Arnold 5th grade teacher Kevin Neth has often made the joke that he found a way to start summer vacation early. It wasn’t an ideal way, but it’s just one example of how he has kept his sense of humor through a harrowing medical journey that started that day. With the school year not yet over, Kevin, 39, started feeling dizzy while doing yard work. He sat down and it passed. He had supper, felt fine, and went to bed. In the early morning on May 3, he got up, felt dizzy, and fell over, taking the dining room chair with him. He was taken to a clinic, where the PA thought he was dehydrated or maybe had a virus of some kind, and was sent home. It was a rough night. He was taken back to the clinic the next day and was then admitted to Broken Bow’s Hospital with pneumonia. On May 5 he started going down hill and was moved to Kearney’s ER. Kevin admitted that there was some tightness in his chest and a cardiac team was brought in. Enzymes indicated a heart attack. Three blockages of 100%, 90%, and 90% were found. A stint was successfully placed in the 100% blockage, but doctors were worried about his lungs and kidneys, as well as the other two blockages. Kearney’s heart surgeon was on vacation, so preparations were made to fly Kevin by helicopter to Omaha. The decision was made to perform quadruple by-pass heart surgery on Monday or Tuesday to wait for the Plavix to get out of his system and to give his lungs time to get

“I hate to spoil the ending, but I lived!”

- Kevin Neth, showing his great sense of humor prior to being interviewed for this story.

stronger. Kevin’s father, Allen, whose own wife had suffered a heart attack, gave Kevin’s wife Jamie a journal early on to document everything that happened. At Omaha, she wrote, “When it was time to go for the night, I held his hand and bent down so I could look at his face. He looked in my eyes and said, ‘You’re standing on my oxygen tube.’ I gasped and looked down. I wasn’t and he laughed.” Due to COVID-19, Jamie was told by the doctor not to wait in the hospital during the surgery. In the early morning hours of May 11, she received a text from Kevin with a thumbs up. The surgery had gone well, but his heart really didn’t like the surgery. A balloon pump and ECMO were helping pump the blood – possibly for two to three days. On May 13 things were going downhill again. The doctors didn’t know what was happening or why. It was possible that Kevin’s heart was fighting against the machines. A doctor from the heart failure team came into ICU in case Kevin needed a heart pump or transplant. The next day, doctors proceeded with looking into a mechanical heart pump or LVAD. There would be more risk because Kevin had not completely recovered from surgery; however, the doctor said he had seen patients recover late from bypass surgery. He just wanted to be ready in case. On May 15 Kevin was still very sick and it was simply a waiting game at that point. Kevin and Jamie’s children, Gracie, age 15, Malachi, 12, and Parker, who was 7 at the time, could not see their father. Jamie wrote in her journal, “Malachi said to me today, ‘I don’t know why God gave dad a heart attack, but maybe He gave dad pneumonia to catch the heart attack.’” On May 16 things started to turn around. On May 24 Kevin was moved out of ICU with a feeding tube. On May 27 his Ejection Fraction (EF) was at 40



Courtesy photo

On his first day home on June 11, it’s an understatement to say that Kevin Neth was happy to be home with his beautiful children (from left) Gracie, Parker, and Malachi. His medical journey started on May 2 and doctors did not expect him to survive.

to 45 percent, meaning he would not have to wear a life vest that would shock his heart if needed, 24/7. And then on June 2 the big day arrived. Kevin was dismissed and driven by Jamie to Kearney for physical therapy. On June 11 – 1 month after his heart surgery – Kevin was dismissed to go home. He said, “The doctors say I’m one in a million. I’d never take betting odds on your surviving.” Kevin, who has been a diabetic for 30 years, sees his doctor multiple times a year. Heart issues run on both sides of the family. As of last week, Kevin said there are good days and bad days, but he’s getting stronger all the time. Joking, he said, “I should be ready to compete in the 2024 Summer Olympics.”

When asked if he would be back in the classroom at the start of this school year, Kevin said, “Absolutely.” The Neth family’s faith is strong. Kevin said it’s important to recognize why difficult things happen in our lives according to scripture, not our own feelings. He cited: 1) For the Glory of God – John 9; 2) Discipline as our Father – Heb. 12; 3) Devil to undo us – Job 1; 4) Natural consequence of sin in our world – Romans 3 & Romans 8. “I’ve wrestled with how God, in his providence, would use this for good, but I trust that he has a plan for my life,” said Kevin. Kevin had the support of family every step of the way. Jamie was by Kevin’s side during visiting hours almost every day and his mother, Peggy, was allowed to stay with him for

three days while Jamie went home. His father, Allen, was in Omaha the entire time, despite the fact that he wasn’t let in to visit his son due to the COVID-19 one visitor rule. He drove Jamie to the hospital every day and picked her up so she wouldn’t have to drive herself. Sadly, Allen passed away on July 17. “My kids were champions. They were not allowed to see me until I was moved back to Good Samaritan at Kearney for rehab,” Kevin said. “My wife did go home to celebrate my daughter’s 15th birthday, which I missed.” In Arnold, the community was rallying behind the family the entire time. “My deck got built, my lawn got mowed, money was raised, bills were waved, meals were

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Time Capsules Placed In City Park’s Pillars

Two time capsules for future generations to find are now encased in cement in the city park’s new entrance pillars. The capsules were lowered into the pillars before being filled with cement – the final step in completing the project that began in the spring. AEDC Director Cheryl Carson and Berni Crow, who both worked with the McGuire family to rename the park in memory of R.E. and L.L. Allen, each created a time capsule. The PVC tubes were sealed and labeled on the outside with the date of July 28, 2021. In Carson’s capsule are newspapers from the summer of 2021, starting with the issue that covered Dennis McGuire and his family coming to Arnold to celebrate the unveiling of the new sign memorializing their ancestors, R.E. and L.L. Allen, who donated land for the park. All following full issues – up to the Harris property burn – are in the capsule, showing what was happening in Arnold this spring and summer and the town’s continued progress. She also included historical pictures of homestead houses and photos taken from a second story, looking east through town before they were torn down; an early photo of R.E. and L.L. Allen in front of their home; miscellaneous information on Arnold; and a

handwritten letter recapping the 2019 floods and the 2020 COVID-19 epidemic. The Crow time capsule contains a two-page story that focuses on family and work. Berni is a retired school teacher who now owns and operates an Airbnb, and husband Dave works in construction. She and Dave placed some items in the capsule that dealt with the pandemic and some trinkets they hand out for both of their businesses. Several photos of their family and their sons’ families were included. Their documents told about the historical signs that Berni has been putting up for the village, including the two signs located on the brick structure where the time capsules are encased. Dave is credited with voluntarily building the structure. “Even though Dennis McGuire wrote the story for the signs at my request (for accuracy), it was still part of my Rotary project and funded by the grants I wrote. I helped edit and worked with him on the marker project and the signs at Winsome Inn & Suites, as well,” said Berni. “We hope that if the capsules are ever found, Arnold is still going strong and a place people can call home as they have for the past 138 years,” said Carson.



Photo/Debbie Connelly

With Paulsen’s waiting in the background ready with cement, Dave Crow lowers a time capsule into one of two entrance pillars at the R.E. and L.L. Allen Memorial City Park. Dave volunteered all of his labor to construct the brick pillars that hold the park’s new sign, designed by Alexandra Weinman Gonzalez.