

A mother's dream come true

Local boy with rare medical condition headed to prom

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Lance McCartney, of Macomb Township, is pictured with Chippewa Valley junior Bianca Jijika, left, Chippewa senior Maiya Hulin and his mother, Kathleen, on April 22. (Photo by Thomas Franz)

MACOMB TOWNSHIP — Before he was born, Lance McCartney was already facing drastic odds against him.

He was diagnosed with trisomy 18, a condition resulting from a chromosomal abnormality, when his mother, Kathleen, was 26 weeks pregnant with him.

Approximately 50 percent of babies with the condition are stillborn, and only 10 percent survive to see their first birthday.

For boys, the odds of surviving to 1 year old are less than 1 percent.

At the time of the diagnosis, Kathleen wasn't sure if Lance would make it to birth, and if he did survive, she grieved that he would not be able to have a girlfriend, go to prom or get married.

Now 9 years old, Lance has not only beaten the odds of survival, he will be able to accomplish one of his mother's dreams for him, thanks to the help of two Chippewa Valley High School students.

Maiya Hulin, a senior, and Bianca Jijika, a junior, asked Lance to the school's prom, which is on May 8.

"I thought when these girls asked him to prom, it was really touching to me because I always grieved when I found out the news about Lance that he would never marry or graduate, so this is a big deal," McCartney said. "It was totally unexpected and unwarranted, so it was really a nice surprise."

Hulin and Jijika take dance classes taught by McCartney, who is a Macomb Township resident.

The students befriended McCartney on Facebook, and after seeing photos of Lance on McCartney's profile, they began talking about taking him to prom.

Their prom proposal to Lance took place in early April, when they brought him signs, flowers and balloons during a cosmic bowling outing.

"I thought it was awesome; I couldn't believe it," McCartney said.

Their proposal was featured on Chippewa's school newspaper website.

"Our friends think it's cute," Hulin said. "We've gotten a pretty good reaction overall."

Heading off to prom is another milestone that McCartney wasn't sure Lance would reach.

Lance began his life in hospice care, while his mother sought comfort care for her son with no invasive procedures. His hospice care ended at age 3.

"I put him in school at age 6 months, yet he was in hospice, so I was always having a contradicting way of living," McCartney said. "I was never sure which direction I was going, but I let him lead the way, and here he is. He's had no surgeries and no interventions."

Lance is unable to verbally communicate because of his condition, but through nonverbal means, he is able to show that he comprehends what is said and taught to him.

McCartney said doctors have told her that 90 percent of children with trisomy 18 have heart problems, but Lance's heart is balanced perfectly.

Lance requires a small amount of oxygen, and he had a feeding tube put in at age 7 to help him grow and maintain a healthy weight, which he did immediately.

For three hours every day, Lance walks with the assistance of his mother and his walking device. The device gives him nearly full range of motion with his arms and legs, which will help for prom festivities.

"He loves music and dancing," McCartney said. "He loves people and loves parties. We're always playing music and he loves it."