

## Supporting One of Our Community Members –

### Mark Johnston and Family Benefit September 20

*By Lora Koch*

One of the special things about living in a small community is that it becomes a big community when someone needs care and support – everyone wants to help. This is certainly the case for the Mark and Danielle Johnston family of Panora who both have strong ties to this area.

When Mark was diagnosed with esophageal cancer in December 2014, the word quickly spread resulting in a tremendous outpouring of emotional, spiritual and financial support for the Johnston family.

A special benefit is planned for Sunday, September 20, from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the Panorama High School.

Highlights of the event include freewill donation lunch, silent auction and live entertainment by Sheltered Reality. All the proceeds will assist with the mounting costs of medical care, transportation and other expenses.

“We’ve always lived in a small community where you get to know people,” said Mark. “This is one of the blessings of a small community, when you need support it’s there, and there without asking. We feel very blessed.”

Originally from Bayard, Mark is the son of Denny and Nancy (Meinecke) and the oldest of four boys. His brothers Craig, Steven and Ryan, all live out of state, but Mark always kept his roots in Iowa. A family move from Bayard to Jamaica when Mark was in high school meant he would graduate from Y-J-B in 1989. He went on to receive his bachelor’s degree from Iowa State University, and attended Buena Vista and UNI to achieve both a master’s degree and specialist (superintendent) degree.

After teaching at Maple Valley, Mark came to the Panorama schools in the fall of 2000, teaching high school history, government and psychology. His promotion to principal came during the 2003-04 school year, and he still serves as MS/HS principal for the Panorama district.

Mark’s transfer to Y-J-B high school also meant he would meet his future wife, Danielle, during high school choir. She lived in Yale and is the daughter of Dan and Joan McKinney, who now reside in Panora. Danielle graduated in 1992 and she and Mark were married in 1994.

“We had to cut our honeymoon short, had to get back to coach football,” laughed Mark. His coaching career spanned many years and sports, including MS and HS football, boys and girls MS and HS basketball, and track.

The idea for a benefit for the Johnston family came from their next door neighbor, Dave Grove. Mark and Danielle travel to the Cancer Treatment Center in Chicago every three weeks for treatment, usually staying three days. During the May visit, Mark was admitted to the ICU for pneumonia.

“Dave called and pitched the idea (of a benefit) and asked if we would be open to it,” shared Mark. “It’s really hard to accept help, but it’s also important to let others help. It’s hard to be on the receiving side.”

“Mark, Danielle and the girls have been neighbors of ours since we moved to Panora and Lake Panorama in 2012. Always helpful, always friendly. Truly great people,” said Grove. “Mark’s diagnosis last winter

was a shock to everyone. In talking with many around town, it was obvious we were all looking for a way to help and just needed a place to start.

“It started with a brainstorming exercise back in June and came together with the resources, time and ideas of many; a community project in every sense of the word. Mark and Danielle never asked for help. Yet through their good works over the years, we were inspired to reach out to them when we knew they could.

“The organizers have been overwhelmed by the outpouring of support the families, businesses and groups have already provided to set a great course for the event,” added Grove. “Now we need a great turnout at the benefit on September 20 and the 5K Walk/Run on October 11. Not only to help financially, but to show the Johnston’s we truly care.”

For more information, visit the Benefit for Mark Johnston Facebook page and to volunteer contact Dave Grove at [641-757-9956](tel:641-757-9956). Financial gifts can be made directly to the family at Panora State Bank, Guthrie County State Bank and Farmer’s State Bank. Silent auction donations can be made at Dave Grove’s Edward Jones office in Panora or at Faith Bible Church. Registration forms for the 5K Walk/Run are available now and will be available at the benefit.

The Johnstons – Paige, Mark, Danielle and Emma

