

HEALTH

Donating blood: Give a little, get a lot

Watsonville resident uses freak accident to motivate community to donate

By Ashleigh Papp

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WATSONVILLE » What's in a drop of blood?

According to Capt. Danny Lucas, a long time member of the Watsonville Fire Department — a lot.

Over his 35-year career as a firefighter, Lucas regularly donated his time and blood at local donation events. "I think I had donated a total of something like 8 gallons," he said in a recent article posted to the Red Cross blog. Each blood donation yields about one pint of blood (the average body holds about 10 pints) — this means that Lucas had visited a blood donation center more than 60 times to give blood over the years.

But one day, a freak accident turned the tables and forced him to be on the receiving end. "I never thought I would have my own moment of need," Lucas said in the blog.

That moment came in November 2019, when Lucas and a few family members ventured out on a hunting trip in the wilderness of Montana. A stray bullet struck Lucas in the thigh unexpectedly, shattering his femur artery, a major lifeline for blood delivery.

With miles in between their location and the nearest hospital, and insufficient cell phone reception, Lucas' fellow hunters used a belt as a tourniquet. They drove



DAN COYRO — SANTA CRUZ SENTINEL FILE

Watsonville Fire Capt. Danny Lucas and his dog "Stella."

to an area where they could call an ambulance and Lucas was rushed to the nearest hospital. While recovering, he received 24 units of blood — worth roughly 24 people's blood donations — along with more than a handful of other infusions and an eventual leg amputation.

According to the Red Cross website, someone in America needs a blood transfusion every two seconds. Each drop of blood, or about one cubic millimeter, contains 4-6 million cells required for the body to function normally, as stated by the American Society of Hematology. They're broken into four different groups: plasma, red blood cells, white blood cells and platelets.

Plasma is the liquid, filled with water and some solids, such as sugars and fats. Red blood cells actu-

ally make blood red and hold a protein called hemoglobin, which moves oxygen from your lungs to the rest of your body and brings back carbon dioxide.

White blood cells make up only about 1% of blood, but pack a mean punch — they're responsible for your body's immune response, helping to protect against illnesses. And platelets are little pieces of tissue that help the blood to clot, or stop flowing, usually as a result of an injury. All of these items together make up your blood, an essential ingredient to life.

Nearly three months after the accident and receiving an emergency blood transfusion, Lucas is on the mend and learning how to exist with one less limb. As he spends time at home recovering mentally and physically from this injury, he is using this wake-up

call experience as an opportunity to motivate community members to consider donating blood at the local event.

Friday, you'll have the chance to donate many drops (about a pint) of blood at a drive from 12:30-5:30 p.m. at the Pajaro Valley Health Trust Hall, 85 Nielson St. Watsonville. The event is hosted by the Central Coast Chapter of the American Red Cross.

To those who are able to participate in the local blood drive, the Red Cross recommends making an appointment in advance online to complete the necessary paperwork, and hydrating ahead of the blood donation.

According to Michele Averill, CEO of the Central Coast Chapter of the American Red Cross, taking the time to donate blood can be vital to helping others survive accidents, such as Lucas', as well as emergency surgeries, cancer treatments. "Lucas' story has helped to educate the community about what they can do to help save a life," she said.

If you go

What: Donate blood with the Central Coast Chapter of the American Red Cross.

When: 12:30-5:30 p.m. Friday.

Where: Pajaro Valley Health Trust Hall, 85 Nielson St., Watsonville.

Information: redcross-blood.org.