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County Board's McBride stays positive despite brain tumor

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LOCAL NEWS

As DuPage County Board members wrangle over the county's usual funding, zoning and regulatory issues, member Jerry "J.R." **McBride** has been fighting his own battle.

That fight is against an extremely rare tumor in his brain stem - a type of growth that comprises less than 1 percent of all brain tumors and is usually found in children. For the first time since his May 10 surgery, **McBride**, 40, attended last week's board meeting. Left incredibly weak after the 10-hour procedure, he spent six weeks building up enough strength to resume normal activities.

"When they go in there with the combination of medication, it just zaps the energy out of you," he said.

The surgery marked **McBride's** third bout with the tumor, which doctors first discovered seven years ago. They were able to remove all but 3 percent, and assured **McBride** that it was highly unlikely to reappear.

But the tumor did come back, and **McBride** underwent another surgery in 2003. This time, doctors were able to remove all of the growth.

Before discovering the first two tumors, **McBride** was unable to look to the right with his right eye. So when he experienced the same symptom last January, he immediately scheduled an appointment and discovered the tumor was back.

At first, doctors tried to cut off its blood flow with radiation. But when **McBride's** eye still hadn't improved by April, an MRI revealed the tumor was growing.

The third surgery left **McBride** drained of strength, barely able to brush his teeth, shave or shower. After almost two months, he said he still has difficulty with his balance and that recovery of his eye movement is slow.

Frequent visits and prayers from friends and interaction with his five children, ages 10 to 19, and his wife, Becky, helped **McBride** endure the weeks before and after the surgery, he said.

"Thank God that I've got everyone else around me, rallying me, pushing me," he said. "The power of prayer is amazing as you are sitting in the operating room, waiting to go under. You can truly feel the prayers that are with you."

The family took another blow just after **McBride's** surgery, when

Becky's father lost his battle with pancreatic cancer. With help from his wife, **McBride** was able to climb the stage and give the eulogy at the funeral.

Becky said it was extremely difficult for the children to see their 6-foot-4-inch, 225-pound father so weak after the surgery.

"I think it's real hard for the kids to see their dad in such a weakened state when he's so strong," she said. "He's the head of the household. When he has a real lack of energy, it's hard for them to see."

Having to fight a tumor for a third time is disheartening, Becky said. But she said her husband was able to retain a sense of humor and positive attitude that brought the family through.

"After having gone through it two times, he had always said, 'I don't know if I can do this a third time,'" she said. "(But) he would rather have it be him, than one of the kids or someone else close to him."

Born in Oak Park, **McBride** has been married to Becky for 20 years and has lived in Glen Ellyn for 15 years. He is in his 17th year of employment at **McBride** Insurance Agency, a company founded by his father in 1983.

His family is a member of St. Petronille Parish in Glen Ellyn and Immaculate Conception Parish in Chicago.

In the 2006 March primary, **McBride** won the Republican spot on the fall ballot for the four-year term in District 4, defeating incumbent Grant Eckhoff.

But he joined the County Board early, only two months after that, when County Board Chairman Robert Schillerstrom appointed him in May to finish the term of late board member John Noel. He has stayed on the board, winning a four-year term in November.

Chairman of the public transit committee, **McBride** is also a member of the stormwater, transportation, legislative and health and human services committees.

Sporting a black patch over his right eye, **McBride** resumed his seat at the County Board meeting June 26. His fellow board members had decorated the three long desks in the board chambers with blue and orange stickers bearing his nickname, "J.R."

"One of the reasons I ran in DuPage County was because people are so unbelievably kind to you," he said. "I wouldn't wish (the tumor) on my worst enemy, but I've come out a better man each time."

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