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3 Time Pancake Day Race Winner and Former Record Holder Passes Away

A stem-cell transplant that had seemed to be successful has failed for former Liberal and Emporia resident Lisa Spillman Mesa.

According to a report in the Emporia Gazette, Mesa died Saturday at her home in Broken Arrow, Okla., of complications from graft vs. host disease caused when her body reacted to the donated stem cells. The procedure was the only hope for the 32-year-old, who was diagnosed with acute myelogenous leukemia less than two months after giving birth to her second son, Logan, in August 2008.

Doctors performed the stem-cell transplant on Feb. 12 at Baylor University Hospital in Dallas, after a donor was found through an international bone-marrow donor registry.

The hunt for a compatible donor narrowed down possibilities to only four people on the international registry; only one of them was able to come to the United States to donate the needed cells.

Mesa's plight prompted her former employer, Greg Bachman of Emporia Physical Therapy and Emporia Fitness, to hold a campaign to register Emporia-area residents for the National Marrow Donor Program in March. The drive was not to find a donor for Lisa Mesa, but to encourage people to register as potential donors for others trapped in similar situations.

"We're not doing this for Lisa," Bachman said at the time. "We're doing it in honor of her."

Mesa worked for Bachman both in Emporia and at the company's location in Liberal.

Always athletic and fit, Mesa became Liberal's representative for three years in the annual Pancake Day Race, which pitted Liberal residents against Olney, England residents to see which city's representative was fastest in racing a defined distance and flipping a pancake two times during the race.

Mesa won the race three times and, until this year, held the record.

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