Barry Lucas



Barry Lukas with wife Jeanne
Diagnosis: Stage 4 Lung Cancer

Shining Hope

Barry Lucas' cancer journey began on December 6, 2023, after he suffered a heart attack.

During treatment in the Boone County Hospital Emergency Room, an X-ray revealed a mass surrounded by fluid in his upper right lung. At first, doctors believed it was likely pneumonia, and Barry was sent home with strong antibiotics. But over the following weeks, his condition worsened. He struggled to breathe, remained seriously ill through the holidays, and was eventually hospitalized again after fluid buildup in his lungs prevented a scheduled PET scan from being completed.

Further testing later confirmed the devastating diagnosis: stage 4 lung cancer with fluid effusion and metastatic cancer on his fourth rib. Following a 12-day hospitalization, Barry was discharged home, though his medical journey was only beginning. He required a PleurX catheter to continually drain fluid from his lungs and began an aggressive treatment plan involving chemotherapy, immunotherapy, and monoclonal antibody treatments.

As Barry and his wife, Jeanne, navigated this overwhelming diagnosis, they were also facing mounting financial strain. Because Barry's heart attack occurred just after the Medicare enrollment deadline, they were unable to secure additional coverage before treatment began. They were responsible for nearly $4,000 in copays for Barry's first chemotherapy treatments before his Medicare Advantage Plan became active in March 2024. In addition to treatment costs, they faced extensive hospital bills, scans, procedures, and ongoing travel to cancer specialists in Des Moines and Clive.

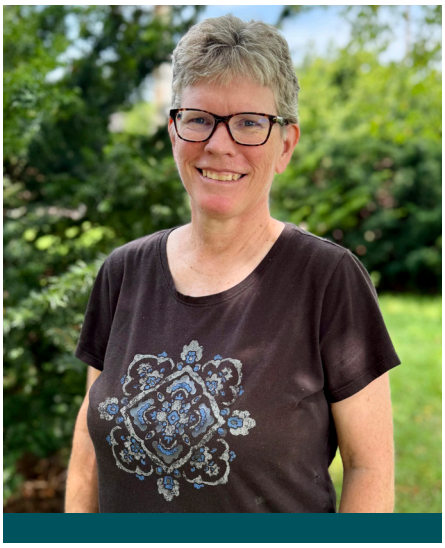
Amid the uncertainty and stress, Boone County Hospital Foundation's Project Be the Light (PBTL) stepped in to help ease the burden. The support Barry and Jeanne received provided relief during a season filled with medical appointments, financial worries, and difficult unknowns. More than financial assistance, it served as a reminder that they were not facing the journey alone.

"Receiving assistance from PBTL helped alleviate some of our financial concerns while we navigated this new reality," Jeanne shared in their application. "It gave us a cushion for the ongoing appointments and treatments that would continue into the future."

Barry was awarded a Project Be the Light grant in 2024. Though he later passed away that same year, his story remains a powerful reminder of why programs like PBTL exist—to provide hope, compassion, and support for families facing life-changing medical challenges.

The Boone County Hospital Foundation is grateful to the donors and supporters who make Project Be the Light possible. Through their generosity, families facing medical hardship are reminded they are not alone. To learn more, apply for assistance, or make a donation, visit bit.ly/BCHF-PBTL.

Julie Wilber



Julie Wilber
Diagnosis: Triple-negative breast cancer

When Community Becomes Care

For Julie Wilber, life has always been about family, community, and hard work.

She and her husband, Scott, both Boone natives, married young, raised their children, Drew and Jade, and built a life on an acreage just outside of town. In 1995, they took over a local produce farming operation—eventually launching Wilber Produce, a familiar sight near Boone Hardware and at the farmers market.

Julie balanced life on the farm with seasonal work as a certified IRS agent, working tax season indoors and growing season in the fields. But in 2024, Julie received a diagnosis that would shake their world: triple-negative breast cancer (TNBC). Unlike other forms of breast cancer, TNBC is more aggressive, fast-growing, and often resistant to standard treatments. It lacks the three common receptors—estrogen, progesterone, and HER2—making it more difficult to treat with targeted therapies. For patients like Julie, treatment involves a rigorous combination of chemotherapy, surgery, radiation, and immunotherapy.

"It's been a journey, to say the least," Julie says with quiet resilience. The physical toll was only one part of the battle. As a self-employed family, there was no safety net—no paid time off, no employer-covered insurance. If Scott missed a day in the field, there was no income. Their produce stand remained open while friends and family stepped up to drive Julie to weekly chemotherapy sessions and help lighten the daily load. Local organizations stepped in, including the Pink Tractor Foundation and, most recently, Project Be the Light (PBTL).

"I was grateful for the ease of the application process," Julie shared. "There was no red tape, no judgment. Just people who wanted to help." PBTL was created for exactly that purpose: to provide swift, compassionate financial relief for families facing serious illness or medical hardship. "Families like Julie's are the reason we do what we do," says Sara Klute Behn, Director of the Boone County Hospital Foundation. "In the midst of the unknown—treatments, bills, emotional exhaustion—we want them to feel supported and seen."

Julie recently completed her year-long immunotherapy and was beginning to imagine life after cancer when another wave of heartbreak hit—her father was diagnosed with Myelodysplastic Syndrome (MDS), a rare blood cancer. At 83, his treatment options are limited, focused primarily on preserving quality of life. Julie's mother, Char Wilkening, was a well-known Wound Clinic nurse at Boone County Hospital before passing away from pancreatic cancer. "Sometimes it feels like cancer is everywhere," Julie says. "You start to wonder how much our environment plays a role."

Despite the fatigue, grief, and lingering side effects, Julie holds tightly to gratitude—especially for her family, friends, and the Boone community. She treasures time with her children and embraces moments with her one-year-old granddaughter. For Julie, the future isn't just about survival—it's about connection, simplicity, and savoring what matters most.

The Boone County Hospital Foundation is grateful to the donors and supporters who make Project Be the Light possible. Through their generosity, families facing medical hardship are reminded they are not alone. To learn more, apply for assistance, or make a donation, visit bit.ly/BCHF-PBTL.

Jackson Bullock



Jackson Bullock, age 6
Diagnosis: Ewing Sarcoma



The Bullock Family
Kim, Jon, Jackson, Bristol, & Henry

Holding a Family Through the Storm

We met Kim and her three young children at a local coffee shop; the space was filled with laughter, hugs, and a high-energy game of "I Spy." Jackson (6), Henry (5), and Bristol (3) sip milk while the adults chat over coffee. It's a joyful, chaotic moment—one that feels almost surreal given what this family has been through.

In 2024, Kim and her husband, Jon, noticed Jackson was experiencing persistent side pain. Then, he started complaining of sharp side pain near his ribs. "By some miracle, both Jon and I were available to go to the doctor that day," Kim recalls.

That Friday, they were given life-altering news: Jackson had Ewing Sarcoma, a rare and aggressive cancer that primarily affects bones or soft tissues, often in children and teens. Within days, they were sent to the University of Iowa Hospital, where Jackson underwent surgery to place a port and perform a biopsy. His treatment plan was immediate and intense: 14 rounds of chemotherapy and concurrent six weeks of radiation, a tumor removal surgery that included part of two ribs.

Kim, who previously ran an at-home daycare, had to put her work—and income—on hold to care for Jackson full-time. They relocated temporarily to the Ronald McDonald House, 2.5 hours from home, where each day brought new questions and concerns. "You're just in survival mode," Kim said. "There's no space to breathe, let alone fill out paperwork or seek help." That's when Project Be the Light (PBTL) stepped in.

"The PBTL funds came with no hoops, no complications—just real support, exactly when we needed it," Kim shared. Even more powerful than the financial help was the reminder that they weren't alone. A community fundraiser not only lifted the financial weight but also broke through the isolation brought on by COVID and cancer. "Seeing people face-to-face again brought me to tears," Kim said. "It reminded me of how supported we are."

Now, Jackson is in remission and gearing up for first grade. His eyes light up when he talks about school, math problems (which he solves for fun!), and making new friends. While his partial rib removal will always affect his breathing, nothing seems to dull his spirit or curiosity. When asked what she most wants others to know from this experience, Kim doesn't hesitate: "Embrace your community, and your community will embrace you."

The Boone County Hospital Foundation is grateful to the donors and supporters who make Project Be the Light possible. Through their generosity, families facing medical hardship are reminded they are not alone. To learn more, apply for assistance, or make a donation, visit bit.ly/BCHF-PBTL.

Julie Kennedy



Julie Kennedy with husband Jim, daughter Lauren, and son-in-law Mason.
Diagnosis: Stage 3 Pancreatic Cancer

A Light Through the Journey

Julie Kennedy's story is one of faith, perseverance, and the strength of family.

For Julie Kennedy and her family, life changed quickly in October 2025 when she was diagnosed with Stage 3 pancreatic cancer. The tumor was located near a major blood vessel, making surgery impossible at the time, and complications from the tumor affected her liver before treatment could even begin.

The early weeks were filled with procedures, hospital stays, and difficult decisions. Julie needed stents placed to relieve blockages and manage her pain before chemotherapy could begin. Treatment moved quickly. She started chemotherapy in November and adjusted to a new routine of appointments, medications, scans, and recovery days.

The months that followed brought both encouraging news and difficult setbacks. Chemotherapy took a significant toll, causing fatigue, nausea, weight loss, and times when treatment had to be delayed because her body needed a break. In January, Julie and her family traveled to Mayo Clinic in Rochester for additional testing and consultation. Although surgery still was not an option, she continued treatment and eventually completed 12 rounds of chemotherapy.

By late spring, follow-up scans showed that treatment was helping keep the tumor in check. It was welcome news, even though the road ahead remained uncertain. Julie later underwent gallbladder surgery and began a five-week course of radiation while continuing chemotherapy in pill form. In August, another setback led to hospitalization when an infection and possible bile duct blockage caused additional complications.

Through each phase of treatment, Julie's family has remained closely by her side. Her husband, children, and extended family have helped with appointments, medications, hospital stays, meals, and the everyday responsibilities that become more difficult when so much of life revolves around cancer care.

As the medical journey continued, so did the financial and everyday pressures that often come with a serious diagnosis. Travel for appointments, treatment-related expenses, time away from normal routines, and the many unexpected costs of cancer can quickly add another layer of stress.

That is where Project Be the Light stepped in. The support helped ease some of that burden during a season already filled with treatment, recovery, and uncertainty. More than anything, it served as another reminder that the Kennedy family did not have to carry every part of this journey alone.

Julie's treatment continues, and so does the support surrounding her. Her family remains grateful for every prayer, card, meal, visit, and act of kindness they have received along the way.

The Boone County Hospital Foundation is grateful to the donors and supporters who make Project Be the Light possible. Through their generosity, families facing medical hardship are reminded they are not alone. To learn more, apply for assistance, nominate a family, or make a donation, visit bit.ly/BCHF-PBTL.

Kevin Calmer



Kevin Calmer
Diagnosis: Cholangiocarcinoma

Surrounded By Care

For Kevin Calmer and those closest to him, everything changed quickly in June 2026.

On June 19, Kevin was taken by ambulance to Boone County Hospital with what initially seemed like a possible heart attack. Instead, doctors discovered a blocked bile duct, first believed to be caused by a gallstone.

What followed was a fast-moving and devastating diagnosis. Kevin was found to have aggressive bile duct cancer that had already spread to several areas of his body, including his liver, small intestine, lymph nodes, bones, spine, chest wall, and skull.

In the weeks that followed, Kevin underwent multiple procedures and hospital stays. He received bile duct stents, treatment for pancreatitis, stents in both leg arteries, and surgery to place a metal rod in his right femur after cancer weakened the bone.

Kevin had been working at Woodward Resource Center, but his illness quickly made it impossible for him to continue working. By the time of his diagnosis, he had already exhausted his available sick leave and paid time off due to other health issues. With no short-term disability and no paycheck coming in, the financial strain began to grow alongside the medical challenges.

Kevin's former wife, Jayne, who remained very close to him after their divorce, moved him into her home after his diagnosis and became his primary caregiver. She helped manage his care physically, emotionally, and financially while also facing a significant decrease in her own income.

On August 8, Kevin applied for Project Be the Light and was approved for assistance. Just over a week later, on August 18, Kevin passed away. Project Be the Light became one more source of support for those closest to Kevin, helping ease some of the financial burden that came with his care and final weeks.

Through all of the uncertainty, one thing stood out to Kevin and his family: the care they received at Boone County Hospital. From physicians and nurses to cafeteria staff, housekeepers, and office staff, they shared how deeply supported and cared for they felt throughout an incredibly difficult time.

Kevin's story is a reminder of how quickly life can change, and how meaningful compassionate care and community support can be when a family is facing the unthinkable.

The Boone County Hospital Foundation is grateful to the donors and supporters who make Project Be the Light possible. Through their generosity, families facing medical hardship are reminded they are not alone. To learn more, apply for assistance, nominate a family, or make a donation, visit bit.ly/BCHF-PBTL.