

Cooperative inspiration

Members inspire each other to inspire others.

Acts of kindness are often inspired by someone we know or something we witness by a complete stranger. When Tom Trabue was diagnosed with Hodgkin's Lymphoma last spring, little did he know that we would soon become an inspiration to so many.

A civil engineer, Tom serves as a partner with Trabue, Hansen & Hinshaw Inc. and KimberMedia. The word *integrity* is frequently used when referring to Tom. People also describe him as a problem solver and a mentor, always taking time to listen to the thoughts of others.

Tom responded to the news of the diagnosis by reaching out to his support system of family, friends, church, colleagues and social media network.

"I knew that attitude would be everything," says Tom. "And all of our supporters were on board and echoed that. It's kind of hard to fight that positive momentum, even when you have a bad day or two."

One of those supporters in Tom's life is Michele Spry. As president of Midway Electric Inc., Michele is highly active in her community and with the Columbia Chamber of Commerce. She and Tom have served together as classmates in Leadership Columbia and as Chamber Ambassadors for the past three years and have become great friends.

Michele is best described as a storyteller. This is evident through her contributions to Midway Heights Elementary, where she helped start a read-a-thon program with a fellow Partner in Education member. Each spring, approximately 70 local celebrities, business people and others are recruited to visit the kindergarten through 5th-grade students at the school and read a story, discuss the importance of reading and how it relates to their respective jobs. Michele is also a dedicated blogger, discussing her daily encounters and anything that happens to be on her mind.

The news of Tom's misfortune and how gracefully he was dealing with it inspired her to tell a story. However, this would be different than anything she had written prior. Michele decided to write her first book — a chapter book for children with a life lesson.

Tom T's Hat Rack

Author Michele Spry's first book, "Tom T's Hatrack," is written for children between the ages of 8 and 12 years, but parents are encouraged to read it as well.

The story follows the journey of a 10-year-old girl during summer break. Her perspective is changed for the better when a retired neighbor, who has been battling cancer, recruits her to help him with a special project. Suddenly, the uneventful and ordinary summer she had expected

becomes one she will never forget. This bright young lady is sure to inspire other children with her selfless actions and maturity.

Both Tom and Michele are Boone Electric members. Area artist Peggy Guest, a member of neighboring Howard Electric Cooperative, was chosen as the book's illustrator. Peggy is well-known for her murals throughout central Missouri and the gnome sculpture she and her husband, Joe, created for the small community park in Rocheport.

Be someone's inspiration

"I am incredibly humbled to be included in Michele's book project," says Tom. "To be the inspiration for her book is a legacy moment for me."

Michele hopes to inspire young readers with her book. "I want them to think about people they know that really make a difference in the lives of others and how they could do something to benefit others," she explains.

The character of Mr. T. is strongly based on the actions and personality of Tom Trabue, following his cancer diagnosis. Michele describes Trabue as someone who has gone through a transformation from focusing only on his work to being 100-percent involved in his community. "His journey with cancer has really changed him for the better," she says.

Connect With
Tom Trabue,
Michele Spry &
Peggy Guest



Although the treatment of Tom's illness is uncomfortable and leaves him feeling not so well, he is grateful for the quality time he and his wife, Kim, have been able to share. His career allows for a great deal of flexibility, for which he is appreciative. This is not the case for everyone in his situation.

"I have a heightened awareness of the difficulties that people face with jobs that are not as accommodating as mine, says Tom. "This is a real problem – wish I had a good answer for it."

Look for "Tom T's Hat Rack" online and in bookstores by the first of the year. A portion of

the proceeds from book sales will be donated to the American Cancer Society. The 80-page book is perfect for its intended youth audience. Short chapters and several illustrations make for an easy read.

Build a hat rack

A unique feature of this book is a set of blueprints encouraging readers to build their own hat rack to donate to a local cancer hospital or other beneficiary. This offers a great opportunity for parents to spend quality time with their children, while helping others.



- Tom's Four Tips for Cancer Patients**
1. **Stay Active (as much as you can)** - Getting back to work (even part-time), going to lunch with friends and being out in the community kept me around my awesome support network. This was invaluable in keeping my attitude positive.
 2. **Be Curious** - Ask lots of questions about your diagnosis and your treatment.
 3. **Have a Personal Advocate** - My wife heard things from the doctor that I completely missed - "chemo-brain moments," I suppose.
 4. **Tell Your Story** - I found that most people are really curious and really care.

Tom's Tip for Non-Cancer Patients
Be Someone's Support Network - Let them know that you are supporting them in whatever they need.