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MEDIA CONTACT: Leslie Kinnee

989-831-3669, kinnee@mmdhd.org

Mid-Michigan District Health Department

615 N. State St., Stanton, MI 48888-9702, www.mmdhd.org

H1N1 through the eyes of a grieving friend

St. Johns~ When Paula Hicks and her daughter attended Mid-Michigan District Health Department's (MMDHD) February H1N1 vaccination clinic at the United Church of Ovid, someone was weighing very heavily on her mind; Philip, their close family friend.

Paula and her husband Steve knew Philip for almost 30 years. "He always had a smile on his face, always had a joke to tell and was just a really great guy," said Paula. "He had a lot of friends and if you were fortunate enough to know him, he took care of you."

Sadly, the man who spent so much of his time taking care of others couldn't save himself from the virus that was about to invade his body.

Phillip became sick with cold and flu-type symptoms in late October but didn't think anything of it; hoping he could get better on his own without seeking medical attention. He finally went to a doctor a few weeks later and received an antibiotic, which seemed to make a big difference. However, just a week later he took a turn for the worse and was transported to Sparrow Hospital where he was admitted with pneumonia. That was on a Monday. On Wednesday the doctor diagnosed him with H1N1 Influenza, induced a coma and put him on a ventilator. During this time he continued to fight the H1N1 virus, but was found to also have Influenza A and Influenza B.

Just before Christmas he was weaned off the paralytic drug that kept him in his coma. The New Year brought good news- Philip was coming out of his coma! He could squeeze the hands of those at his bedside, blink his eyes and could understand what was being said to him.

"For awhile it looked like he was going to recover, but then he got a fungal infection in his lungs, which would have required a transplant and he was just too weak to have survived such an operation", Paula continued. That is when it became clear to family and friends that he was not going to make it.

Philip passed away on January 14th with his family at his side. He leaves behind three children, ages 24, 17 and 14. He was just forty-six years old.

Paula, her husband Steve and their children, Jacob and Melanie miss Philip terribly, but feel incredibly blessed to have known him. "He was a great guy who made a big impact on a lot of people."

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2~ H1N1 through the eyes of a grieving friend

Paula says she was aware that the flu could turn deadly, but admits she was surprised it would strike someone so young and that he would get so sick so quickly.

As for Paula, she is now a firm believer in influenza vaccinations. “This was my first time getting a flu shot and I did it for two reasons. The first reason is because a friend of mine is a nurse and she said I should. The second reason is because of Philip. His death really made me think twice. If anything good can come from his death, it’s to promote the influenza vaccine. Forty-six is way too young to die from something like the flu.”

Mid-Michigan District Health Department is collaborating with community partners to promote the H1N1 vaccine and offer clinics targeting businesses, schools, senior centers, faith-based organizations, etc. If entities are interested in scheduling a H1N1 clinic at their site, please call 989-831-3609.

Residents may also call the health department directly to make an appointment to receive the H1N1 vaccination at 989-224-2195.

Mid-Michigan District Health Department serves the residents of Clinton, Gratiot and Montcalm Counties.

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