

# Woman 'Steps Up' to honor her hero

By Jeffrey Miesbauer  
News-Topic correspondent

Shirley Tucker's brother died three months ago, but she's not about to let his spirit and love of life be forgotten.

"My brother just had such a zest for life," said Tucker, a resident of Hudson who decided to carry on her brother's legacy by participating in "Step Up and Save Lives."

The fund-raising walk is sponsored by the National Kidney Foundation. Tucker will walk in the Hickory Kidney Walk March 15 to support the cause and raise awareness of kidney disease.

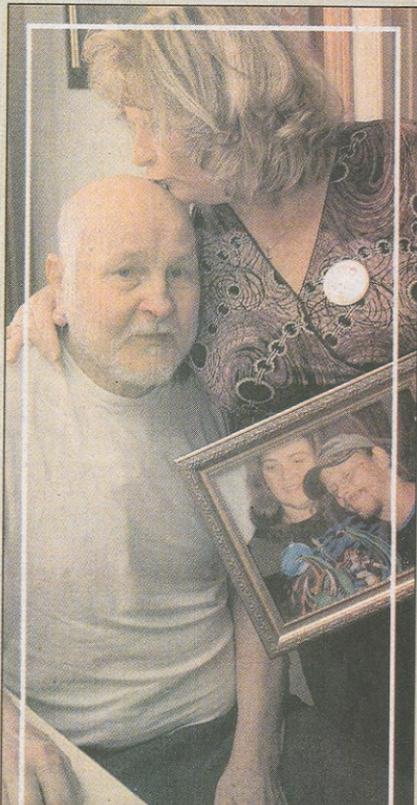
Her brother, Herbert Sutherland Jr., died Dec. 17, 2007, from prolonged kidney failure. He had been on kidney dialysis since 2003 and was to be married this month.

Tucker's uncle has been in dialysis treatment for 17 years, and her father has started treatment as well.

She takes care of her 74-year-old father, Herbert Sutherland Sr., taking him to the treatment center and keeping him company during his four-hour treatments at Fresenius Medical Care.

It was at the treatment center that Tucker learned about the "Step up and Save Lives" fund-raiser. It is sponsored by the National Kidney Foundation (NKF) and raises money and awareness for kidney research. For every dollar donated, 75 cents will go directly to kidney research. The rest will go toward a patient emergency fund at Fresenius Medical Care. This fund helps patients get transportation to dialysis treatments, as well as with their medication. It is very helpful since Medicaid does not begin to cover dialysis for a month or later.

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Shirley Tucker clutches a picture of her brother, Junior Sutherland as she kisses her father, Herbert Sutherland Sr. Herbert has a history of kidney complications, while Junior lost his battle with kidney disease in December.

Tucker, and others participating, received a Step Up Kit that included pledge cards, pledge envelopes and a pedometer to count their steps. The NKF asks that participants raise at least \$150, but Tucker has set a higher goal of \$1,000.

"He just inspired me," Tucker said of her brother. "I can do this for him, because if it was him sitting in my seat, he would have done it."

Tucker and her family will walk as "Team Sutherland" on March 15, and she has made shirts with her brother's nickname, "Junior," on the front and "Hero" on the back. She has even made an outfit for her 6-month-old great-nephew that reads, "I'm rolling for my Uncle Junior."

Her team will be walking not only for Junior, but for her father, uncle and all the patients who do not have family to walk for them. With 100 dialysis patients in Caldwell County, this is no small task.

The community also has stepped up to help Tucker. She has spoken at several churches, which have shown their support by collecting offerings. Local Checkers restaurants are hosting collection buckets for Tucker as well.

For Tucker's cause, even change means change.

She will collect donations until



COURTESY PHOTO

**Junior Sutherland, shown at left, died Dec. 17 from kidney complications. His sister Shirley is stepping up to help battle kidney disease.**

*'This is a problem, and in the future, it's going to skyrocket.'*

— Shirley Tucker

Friday, March 14, the day before the walk, which takes place the next day in Hickory at Market on Main. Registration for walkers begins at 8 a.m., and they hit the pavement at 9 a.m. Refreshments, speakers and music will be on hand for the walkers, who complete the 3.5-mile loop around downtown.

The main purpose of the walk is to raise awareness of kidney disease and the need for organ donors. According to the NKF

Web site, 16 people die every day awaiting organ transplants.

Kidney problems originate from common health issues such as obesity, high blood pressure and diabetes. All of those conditions are common in Caldwell County.

"This is a problem, and in the future, it's going to skyrocket," said Tucker, who has lupus, which most likely will lead to dialysis in her future.

Tucker's own health issue

empowers her to do what she can while she can to help such a widespread issue.

To "Step Up and Save Lives," contact Dana Watson of the NKF at 1-800-356-5362 or refer the organization's Web site at [www.kidney.org](http://www.kidney.org). To contribute to the NKF, make checks payable to the National Kidney Foundation and mail to: Fresenius Medical Care, 322 Mulberry Street SW Lenoir, NC 28645.