CF research opens doors

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For the first time since cystic fibrosis was identified 30 years ago, medical researchers have made major inroads toward a cure and improved treatments of the genetic disease.

Cystic Fibrosis Foundation-funded research succeeded in September in isolating the gene which causes cystic fibrosis. Subsequent research identified the defective protein produced by the gene.

For people with CF it means hope. Former LSU and professional quarterback Bert Jones knows firsthand what the disease means. Jones' youngest brother has two children with CF, and Jones said he also is a carrier of the CF gene. Jones has four children, none of whom have CF.

The advances in research should open doors to new and improved treatments for those with CF, as well as better identification tests for CF carriers, Jones said.

The former quarterback, who now lives in Ruston, is honorary chairman of the "Good Neighbor" Golf Tournament for Cystic Fibrosis.

Jones said he was approached by Jim Crane about becoming a spokesman for the foundation. Crane is the father of a child with CF and secretary of the state chapter of the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation.

"We do need a lot of research and development in the field for curing CF," Jones said. "We've made inroads, but a lot more needs to be done and I hope this tournament helps the cause."

Crane, who lost a daughter with CF 12 years ago and whose youngest son, Jamie, has CF, said last month's breakthrough should especially offer hope for better treatment and a possible cure to young adults with CF.

"I think the first things that will change because of the research are treatments, and maybe researchers will develop a cure for life for people with CF," Crane said.

"Such major breakthroughs in research are really rare, but they show that the money people give to research does pay off in the longrun."

In addition to improved treatments, Crane said research is improving methods to identify CF carriers more quickly.

Cystic fibrosis is an inherited disease which causes the body to produce abnormal amounts of thick, sticky mucus, Crane said. The mucus then clogs the lungs and pancreas, interfering with normal breathing and digestion.

Tournament benefits CF

The second annual Bert Jones "Good Neighbor" Golf Tournament for Cystic Fibrosis will be Oct. 9 at Santa Maria Golf Club.

Benefits will go to the Baton Rouge chapter of the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation to be used for research and treatment of the disease.

Event chairman Jim Crane said 200 golfers are needed for the benefit, which will feature a morning and afternoon round of competition.

The individual players fee is $100. The entry fee includes the green fee, carts, awards, refreshments, meals, and an evening awards party.

Other sponsorship categories include: super sponsor, $1,000, with recognition at each hole sponsored and on a super board; and a $500 sponsorship, with recognition at one hole and in the program. On-course recognition is available for $100.

Donations are tax deductible. Further information on the tournament can be obtained from the Baton Rouge CF chapter by calling 389-9993.

Both parents must carry the gene for CF to pass it on to a child. Genetic testing is available to determine if a person is a carrier, Crane said.

At one time, the life expectancy of a child with CF was to the mid-teens, but improved diagnosis and treatments have prolonged that to the mid-20s, Crane said.

"That's why this recent research is so significant because a cure could be even closer, or at least improved treatments," Crane said. "It's especially important for those CF people already in their 20s."

Locally, there are 30 to 40 children and young adults with cystic fibrosis, he said. Nationally, there are an estimated 30,000 CF patients, accounting for one case in every 2,000 births.

The Cystic Fibrosis Foundation funds research and treatment programs for CF patients. In addition, the foundation funds 120 care centers across the nation providing medical and support care for CF patients and their families, Crane said.

There are CF care centers at the Tulane University School of Medicine in New Orleans and the LSU School of Medicine in Shreveport.