

COMBINES FOR CURES™

SAVING LIVES IN RURAL COMMUNITIES. ONE MAN AT A TIME.

John Lee

John Lee has a simple message to men in rural Alberta: getting a simple baseline blood test may save your life.

The blood test that Lee is referring to is the Prostate Specific Antigen (PSA) test; PSA is a substance produced by the prostate and is released in small amounts to the blood stream. Prostate cancer is one of the most successfully treated types of cancer – if caught early.

Thankfully Lee's cancer story ends well: he's here to talk about it. Lee routinely had yearly physicals with his family doctor in order to maintain his pilot's and class one license. But it was Lee's doctor that suggested that Lee get a PSA blood test with every physical in order to establish a baseline measurement when it came to keeping his prostate health in check.

In September 2009, Lee had more than five years worth of baseline blood tests that proved critical in his cancer diagnosis. While the test showed only a slightly elevated level, his doctor recommended that Lee go to the Prostate Cancer Center in Calgary.

"I went through the first procedure there and from that examination they said we still don't know if you do or don't (have prostate cancer), but indications are that we suggest

you get an ultrasound and a biopsy. Out of 10 biopsies they had only one that was suspect. I went through all the testing and I was diagnosed with prostate cancer."

That's why Lee is excited to spread the word about the Prostate Cancer Centre's (PCC) new pilot project in Alberta called Combines for Cures™. The initiative that launched in March, 2012, encourages central Alberta farmers and ranchers to get the PSA blood test to help in the early detection of prostate cancer.

Lee fits that demographic as he runs a purebred cow/calf operation near Airdrie, Alberta and is now retired from his long-time employment as a manager with UFA. And he's emphatic about encouraging his rural colleagues to get that PSA blood test when the PCC brings its mobile clinic to central Alberta.

"We believe universal access in remote areas to prostate cancer awareness and PSA testing is clearly important," says Pam Heard, executive director of the PCC. "We know that by establishing a baseline PSA level at age 40, by providing early detection of prostate cancer and rapid access to treatment we will ultimately save lives."

While Lee was only 58 at the time of his cancer diagnosis, it was the family history of cancer that got him to choose a radical prostatectomy. And he's thankful his doctor suggested those baseline blood tests for so many years.

Without knowing that baseline blood test, Lee had no other symptoms of prostate cancer. "By the time symptoms occur – difficulty passing urine (these symptoms are most common with BENIGN enlargement of the prostate, and

are uncommon with cancer), or pain in bones of lower back, hips, or upper thighs (these symptoms are due to advanced disease) the disease may have spread beyond the prostate, and may be incurable," says Heard.

"Early diagnosis is important because it gives you so many options. With today's medical technology it gives you such a huge opportunity for a complete cure," says Lee.

The Combines for Cures™ program will also be fundraising to help purchase a MAN VAN™ that will be used only in rural communities. Farmers and ranchers can make a cash donation or a pledge of grain to an Agrium CPS Retail Outlet. Richardson Pioneer and/or Western Feedlots Inc., (feed grains) will take the grain, and then convert it to a cash donation for the PCC, based on the commodity pricing on the day the grain is received. The PCC will issue tax receipts for all donations.

"When we involve communities in an important health initiative we stimulate change for a healthier future," says Heard. "It's a call to action for men to take charge of their health."

"It's so simple and so easy. There's no pain, no embarrassment, no nothing. It's just a simple draw of blood and you're done," says Lee.

"It doesn't cost you anything but a little bit of time."

To help the Combines for Cures™, watch for MAN VAN™ events taking place in central Alberta.

