

Teacher still recovering from stroke

By MIKE CONN

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When Ed Smith woke up last June 27, it felt like the beginning of a normal day. It was 70 and sunny, and Smith, 54, the band teacher at Landing Elementary School, was just starting summer break. He got out of bed, got himself ready and made his way to the Glen Cove YMCA to work out, as he had done on countless previous mornings.

But when he got home, something went wrong. At 9:27 a.m., Smith felt his body changing. He called his wife, Elizabeth, at work, telling her that his right side was starting to go numb. Then he began garbling his words. Elizabeth, a nurse at Northwell Health in Manhasset, asked if he could make it to the front door, because she immediately knew what was happening.

"You're having a stroke," she told her husband just before dialing 911.

Smith was rushed to Glen Cove Hospital, where he was diagnosed with right-sided hemiparesis, because he had lost much of the functioning on the right side of his body. He spent only a few hours there before being transferred to Northwell Health at Manhasset's neuro-ICU. Smith doesn't remember exactly what happened after his stroke, and said he only "started to wake up"

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 about two weeks later.

Elizabeth said that he had not shown

any signs of an impending stroke before that day. "Sometimes things just kind of hit you and your life changes on a dime," she said.

After spending three weeks at Northwell in Manhasset, Smith was transferred back to Glen Cove Hospital, where his intense rehabilitation consisted of speech, occupational and physical therapy. When he was deemed well enough to do so, he was transferred to the Northwell Health Stern Family Center for Rehabilitation in Manhasset for "subacute" rehabilitation. He was finally discharged on Oct. 31. He doesn't know when he will be able to return to work.

"I was delighted to come home to my wife," he said.

Ed and Elizabeth have two daughters — Samantha, a senior at Georgetown University, and Meghan, a freshman at Fordham University — both of whom are Glen Cove High School graduates and accomplished clarinetists, thanks to the influence of their father. "They only got there because of their dad," Elizabeth said.

Smith is not only adored by his family, but has also captured the hearts of countless people in the community. According to many of his colleagues in the Glen Cove City School District, he has always had a commanding presence at Landing Elementary, and his absence has sent ripples throughout the district.

Karen Serani, a health and phys. ed. teacher at Landing, has worked with Smith for nearly 25 years. She said that his passion for sharing his love of music with his students is unrivaled. "He is the basic foundation for the band program in the community," Serani said.

District Superintendent Dr. Maria Rianna said that she has always been astounded by Smith's devo-



tion to his students. “You can see his love of children and his dedication to what he does,” she said. “He is so committed to giving [students] the love of music.”

Rianna added that she believes Smith is the perfect example of how important teacher-student relationships can be. “The single most significant factor in student success is their connection to an adult,” she explained. “The impact he has had on his students cannot be measured because of all that he has done. I think the children have really connected to him in the way we would hope all our children would.”

One student who has a particularly close connection to Smith is David Maldonado, a 10-year-old Landing fifth-grader. David has visited the Smith family twice since Ed’s stroke, sharing snacks and chatting with his favorite teacher. He’s even shown off his proficiency at the trombone, which Smith has described as a gift.

According to David’s mother, Lerida, school hasn’t been the same for her son since Smith left. David and his fellow trombonists usually had group lessons with Smith twice a week after lunch, replacing recess in his schedule — which David didn’t mind because he loved band class so much. However, without Smith in the classroom, David doesn’t want to go to class, and sometimes skips his lessons with his new teacher to play during recess.

During his visits, though, Smith persuaded David to continue going to his lessons to hone his trombone skills. David said he was encouraged by Smith’s words, which helped him change his mind.

“He’s the best teacher in the world,” David said. “I miss him.”

Aside from his teaching, Smith is an accomplished musician. He is the principal clarinetist and concertmaster of the Northwinds Symphonic Band, which

rehearses at North Shore High School in Glen Head and performs across the North Shore. Conductor/director Helen Bauer described Smith as the ensemble’s “fearless leader.” He has been with the band since it formed 12 years ago, Bauer said, and has performed as a featured soloist more than any other member.

“He is one of the finest musicians I’ve ever encountered in my 50-year career,” said Bauer. “He’s a wonderful technician, and he also plays with incredible artistry and musicianship.”

Bauer also said that their band’s rehearsals and concerts haven’t been the same without Smith. “We think of him every week,” she said. “At the last two concerts — the two we’ve had without him — his chair [was] left empty on the stage. No one sits in his chair; it sits empty, waiting for him to return.”

“No one can really replace him,” she added.

Nine months after his stroke, Smith continues his rehabilitation. He has speech and occupational therapy twice a week, and physical therapy three times a week. He uses a wheelchair much of the time, but is making significant progress and working his way toward walking again. He also focuses a great deal of effort on speech therapy, as he has regained the ability to speak almost normally.

His family is taking his recovery one day at a time and, although the process has been difficult, they are looking forward to seeing what the future holds. “I wish for everybody in the supporting community to keep thinking ahead and thinking positively,” Smith said with a smile, “as we are.”

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ED SMITH HAS had a profound effect on 10-year-old Landing Elementary School fifth-grader David Maldonado, who has visited his favorite teacher a number of times since Smith's stroke.

Courtesy Elizabeth Smith