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Kosair Charities to pay teen's hospital bill *HAROLD J. ADAMS*

Family calls help `amazing relief'

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The uninsured family of a 13-year-old Scottsburg girl who will lose parts of two fingers because of a snakebite has learned that the hospital bill of more than \$44,000 will be paid by Kosair Charities.

The organization is the charitable arm of Louisville's Kosair Shrine Temple.

Supporters of the organization who read about Ashley Vernon's snakebite in The Courier-Journal Monday asked Kosair Charities to help, said executive director Randy Coe.

``The family need have no worry about the fact they have no insurance to pay for her medical care. Her medical bills will be taken care of," Coe said.

Kosair Charities provides more than \$3 million each year to pay for the care of patients at Kosair Children's Hospital, where Ashley had been staying until she went home Monday.

In addition to paying the hospital bill, Coe said the temple ``certainly will be discussing the situation" with Ashley's physicians and other medical providers.

``That's an amazing relief," said Ashley's mother, Sandy Vernon. ``God always takes care of us somehow."

Ashley went home after six surgeries in 11 days.

The seventh-grader at William H. English Middle School was climbing a hill in the Clark State Forest on April 18 when she fell. As she tried to get up, ``I lifted up my hand to grab a tree and there was a snake hanging down from my hand," Ashley recalled last Friday.

The snake, a copperhead or a timber rattler, had sunk its fangs into her left palm at the base of her pinkie and ring fingers. The entire arm swelled to more than twice its normal size.

Dr. Mark Chariker made incisions on the front and back of the arm from the hand to above the elbow to release the pressure and restore blood flow. But Chariker said two-thirds of the ring finger and one-third of the pinkie are beyond saving.

Last weekend Chariker said that he would probably write off his fees for Ashley's surgeries, which are expected to top \$20,000. But the list of costs includes anesthesia and other associated fees, along with emergency room fees at Scott Memorial Hospital, where Ashley was stabilized before being transferred to Kosair Children's.

The Ashley Vernon fund has been set up at Bank of Louisville, which will accept donations at any branch. Sandy Vernon said yesterday that if donations exceed the amount of the remaining medical bills, the money would be donated to Kosair

Charities.

As for Ashley, she will need lots of painful physical therapy on her arm and hand to regain normal function, her mother said. The teen also wants to explore the possibility of replacing the fingers she will lose.

In the meantime, she's going to be careful in the woods. ``I'll probably (only) go in there if my dad's with me."

BY PAT McDONOGH, THE COURIER-JOURNAL

Ashley Vernon will lose parts of two fingers due to a snakebite.

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