

Walker won't let cancer set the pace

► **Cancer** continued from A1

"I don't sit down and think a lot about it. I know it's there. I've accepted the fact my life term is limited. I'm just getting on with things and doing what I want."

A longtime arts supporter, he helps his wife, Jill, promote the Cambridge Community Orchestra. In February, he entered a fundraising draw with a grand prize of a guest conductor spot in an upcoming show.

Feb. 23, four days after his name was drawn, he was diagnosed with advanced colon and liver cancer.

In his 30s, Summerhayes looked at his growing belly and decided to get fit. After a mediocre running career, he took up race walking at age 55. Medals started filling his house after he won international meets and set 26 Canadian records in masters rankings.

He said nothing with his health had been amiss until his race times started slipping last summer. Slim and wiry, he remembers his doctor's astonishment after blood tests discovered cancer after his annual physical exam.

"Nobody could figure out why it didn't show up before in blood tests, how it had spread so far, so fast," Summerhayes said.

By April, he was enduring brutal chemotherapy to blunt the spreading disease. After his second round of treatments — even at reduced dosage — Summerhayes said no more.

"I was still walking around like a zombie," he said.

"I decided to end it, that I would rather live a full life half as long, not half a life twice as long."

Summerhayes takes no medication now, but visits his doctor monthly for checkups. To help his body battle the cancer, he's now taking protein supplements daily — something he never did when training for races.

As strength returned after chemotherapy, he resumed work on the city's cultural advisory committee and started

preparing for his four minutes leading the orchestra.

Summerhayes doesn't read music, but he knows the music well. He's always been a fan of Mozart's *La ci darem la Mano*, from the opera *Don Giovanni*.

Several times daily, he plays a CD of the music in his living room, picks up his baton and practises until his shoulder aches.

"Some people say it's been like therapy for me," Summerhayes said.

With overwhelming support from friends and family over the last few months, he expects he'll step in front of a packed house in the 1,300-seat sanctuary in Forward Baptist Church. The more the better, he said, because that means more people to fill donation jars for the non-profit organization.

Jill Summerhayes remembers the news of cancer was devastating for her.

"I'm much more like Stuart now. We're getting sensible and practical about it," she said.

"I had someone say, 'You're so calm getting on with everything as you always did.'"

"My analogy is: you see a duck just floating along, but he's paddling along like hell underneath."

While Stuart Summerhayes is determined to control his life, the cancer did kill one important event for the couple. Before diagnosis, he booked a plane trip to his native England. After his cancer diagnosis he had to cancel because there was no way he could get travel medical insurance.

He hasn't been told how long he has to live. Not that he's worried about it.

"I hear about people who are told they have nine months to live and five years later they're still around because that's what they decided to do," Summerhayes said.

"I just keep on with life, as though nothing went wrong. I want to go on as long as I possibly can. I hope the end comes swiftly and that's it."

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Orchestra plans vocal splendour as finale

Record staff

CAMBRIDGE – Opera will fill Saturday's last show of the season for the Cambridge Community Orchestra.

The evening, entitled Vocal Splendour, is about celebrating beautiful music while instilling hope, said conductor Sabatino Vacca.

"We've always done a vocal program at the end of our season," he said.

"This is a showcase of young singers but this year we're trying something different: highlights from *The Barber of Seville*.

"It's almost a can't miss. It's happy, spirited, and it's funny."

Vacca said it is the first time the orchestra has attempted such a large chunk from an opera but he's noticed people in Waterloo Region seem to love the genre.

The three soloists in the concert are all young, up-and-coming

Vocal Splendour

Cambridge Community Orchestra Saturday, June 12, 8 p.m. Forward Baptist Church 455 Myers Rd., Cambridge Pay-what-you-can admission, donations gratefully accepted

singers in the competitive opera field.

Kitchener mezzo soprano Jennifer Fina will perform. Her husband, tenor Emilio Fina, founded Opera Kitchener.

Tenor Richard Iannello and baritone Andrew Tess have both worked with Vacca in the past.

The first half of the program will include composers Mozart, Verdi and Puccini.

"Things that people recognize," he said.

"It's a nice mix of favourites,

with a small chunk from *Carmen*."

Cambridge Community Orchestra was founded in 2004. It features a mixture of professional and amateur musicians.

No admission is charged to concerts. Instead, patrons are asked to pay what they can in donation jars.

Next season's five-concert series begins Nov. 13.

Vacca said it will be the orchestra's most ambitious project to date as it continues to grow and develop.

After the success of a Young People's Concert in 2009, Vacca plans another in 2010-11.

The season will start with Copland's *Fanfare for the Common Man* and conclude with Dvorak's symphonic masterpiece *From the New World*.

The final concert will feature singers in operatic and musical theatre repertoire, as well as highlights from Bizet's *Carmen*.

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