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## Cancer survivor toasts benefactors

### Charitable chocolate milk: Cream O'Weber workers shipped the drink he craved to Virginia as he underwent chemotherapy

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Strangers met earlier this week - a man who craved chocolate milk during chemotherapy and the Cream O'Weber employees who shipped cases of it to his Virginia home for free.

John Rust dropped by Cream O'Weber's Salt Lake City office Thursday to thank his benefactors and see their faces for the first time.

"When I came to Utah, I didn't know anyone," said Rust, 21. "What they did for me was unbelievable."

Last December, Rust was recuperating from surgery to remove a cancerous tumor when he remembered how much he loved the milk he drank while living in Utah the year before.

Not just any milk, he told an aunt visiting him at a hospital in Fairfax, Va. He craved whole chocolate milk, and it had to be from Cream O'Weber.

"I was losing a lot of weight and couldn't keep anything down," said Rust, whose 5-foot-10 frame shrunk from 170 pounds to 130.

His aunt, Linda Bryce, telephoned Cream O'Weber's office in Salt Lake City, asking if her nephew's favorite milk could be shipped back East.

"When I told them our story, they wouldn't take a credit card or a check," Bryce said. "I was so shocked. John was going to the University of Utah, but he wasn't even a Utah boy. It was just something they wanted to do."

Patti Butterfield was at the office that day. Cream O'Weber, a part of Dallas-based National Dairy Holdings, had just laid off 50 people in Utah. Butterfield, who had been an administrative sales assistant, was working the switchboard and took the call.

"I guess I kind of took it on my own to ask [quality control manager] Pete Cresci if we could send the milk for free, and he worked at keeping costs down when we shipped it. We didn't think it would be a long-term thing."

But the shipments kept coming as Butterfield checked on Rust's progress through frequent calls and e-mails.

"It was brutal," said Rust's aunt. "He couldn't stand or talk and he couldn't open his eyes. We weren't sure he would recover." During the next six months of chemotherapy, the company sent two cases of refrigerated milk to Virginia - and never sent a bill.

That prolonged kindness helped Rust overcome his startlingly rapid descent into poor health.

Added his aunt: "That first shipment was the turning point in his recovery."

Rust had been an avid skier, drawn to the Beehive State to train for competitive races. But after injuring his ankle, he learned from a doctor that he had more to worry about - tumors were growing on his shoulder and femur bones. In the span of three days in December, he attended his grandfather's memorial, learned of the tumors, underwent surgery and began chemotherapy treatments.

"It seemed overwhelming when I was first diagnosed, but I struggled through it," said Rust. "Ski racing is a dangerous sport - it demands so much that you learn to give all you have."

His last treatment ended in June, when physicians announced he was cancer free. Rust plans to live, work and resume skiing in Utah, and who knows, he added, perhaps he can race competitively again.

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