

Southern man forming foundation for cystic fibrosis patients

By Gene Coleman

For the past year, Ronald Werstler has been making extra stops along his sales route from Pensacola, Fla. to Hammond, La., gathering donations that could sustain the life of his 6-year-old son Brandon.

Werstler, a resident of Mobile, Ala., needs \$250,000 for a double lung transplant for Brandon, who has cystic fibrosis (CF), a terminal genetic disorder.

Brandon looks the same as any healthy kid, but he was extremely thin until the age of five when surgery allowed him to begin gaining weight. He now does exceptionally well in school and also plays baseball and acts out his dreams of becoming a policeman or fireman.

"Kids with cystic fibrosis have a gene, he has a gene that makes him naturally real smart," Werstler said. "He can do fourth-grade work. He plays baseball, shortstop, and the coach said he's the best player on the team. You'd knever know he had cystic fibrosis unless somebody told you. Right now he's as normal as can be."

Werstler said that while doctors do not expect Brandon to live beyond his mid-20s, he is optimistic that his son could live into his 40s with the transplant.

While researching his son's disorder, Werstler found that there are foundations searching for cures for CF, but none that assist with

the cost of treating the disorder. He is in the process of changing that by establishing the non-profit organization Caring Now for Kids with Cystic Fibrosis, Inc.

"I prayed for five years to have the boy, so I know he's special," Werstler said. "And now there's a foundation to help out with lung transplants and my question is why didn't anyone ever start one."

Werstler said that his first priority is to treat his son, but that a list would be established to provide financial support for others through the organization, probably on a basis of urgency.

He recently visited Chicago in hopes of booking an appearance on Oprah Winfrey's television show to discuss the foundation. Werstler, who practices karate, said that if invited to appear he would attempt to break 100 two-by-fours with his



Brandon Werstler

bare hands, if allowed, as a fundraiser for the foundation.

Until that time, Werstler will continue placing collection jugs and collecting donations for his son. Anyone wishing to donate to Brandon may do so through an account in Ronald Werstler's name at Merchants & Marine Bank.