

A Thousand Cranes for Employee Battling Cancer

A Silicon Valley engineer gets an emotional lift as co-workers' hopes for a miracle take flight in an origami project and a trip to Missouri. "We wanted Scott to know and feel how much we care about him, love him, and miss him."

By Aaron Halabe

When a group of Silicon Valley employees learned that terminal colon and intestinal cancer was taking a debilitating toll on their colleague, Scott Laws, they did something few Microsoft teams would. They folded.

Inspired by a Japanese fable, some 100 employees from Hotmail and MSN operations teams met every day for nearly a month to fold 1,074 paper cranes as a message of hope and encouragement. Recently, seven staffers delivered them to Harrisburg, Missouri, where Laws, 30, is resting at his parents' home.

"I always have hope that a miracle will happen and that Scott will find a way to beat this cancer, but the prognosis is grave," said Charmaine Lingerfelt, who organized co-workers' efforts and made the company-funded trip to Missouri.

Lingerfelt proposed the project after reading about [Sadako Sasaki](#), a two-year-old girl who survived the Hiroshima bombing in 1945. At age 11, she was diagnosed with leukemia. Sasaki learned of a Japanese story of a wish being granted to anyone who folds a thousand paper cranes. She achieved that goal and wished for good health, but died a year later.

The cranes have become a symbol of peace and hope worldwide.



Origami contributors included, from left, Bob Aquino, Rajesh Balwani, Rajeev Nischal (holding lei of cranes), and Turner Morgan Smelker.

Laws' parents set up a backyard surprise party for Scott on a warm July afternoon. A group of family and friends helped adorn lawn chairs with the rainbow-colored cranes. Others, strung together, were woven through trees and fluttered gently, dappled in sun and shade. A friend covered Laws' eyes and led him past a cake decorated with the message, "A Thousand Cranes for Scott."

His reaction: "I had to do a double-take, like 'Am I seeing what I'm seeing?'" said Laws, in a [story](#) published July 17 in the "Missourian" newspaper. "I'm actually surprised that they were able to surprise me. It took two months to plan, and I didn't have the slightest clue," he said. Laws was too ill to be interviewed for this article.

"Scott looked very thin and sick, but when he saw all of us, his face lit up, and it made a huge impression," said his manager, David Schiffrin. "It gave him a good feeling for a little while, and Scott needs all those he can get."

"This seemed like the perfect project, because everyone had the opportunity to participate," Lingerfelt said. "People don't always know what to do or say for someone in this situation. This provided them with the



Adorned with paper cranes, Scott Laws opens a gift at a party in July.

outreach to display friendship, compassion, and love. It also gave the team the opportunity to bond and talk with each other about how they were feeling. I think it helped everyone.”

Employees met in a conference room for nearly a month for two-hour folding sessions. Many staffers – some of whom barely knew Laws – took paper and instructions home to fold with their families. One program manager asked every visitor to his office to fold at least one crane before leaving.

The informal gatherings gave people the chance to laugh and reminisce, Schiffrin said. “Sometimes it was happy reminiscing about Scott and sometimes we had much darker conversations about his condition.”

“A generic get-well wish wasn’t enough,” Lingerfelt noted. “We wanted Scott to know and feel how much we care about him, love him, and miss him.” She was proud of the collective effort, thankful that director Glenn Beeswanger approved funding for the trip, and heartened that the project is helping Laws and his family through an agonizing time.



In Missouri, Scott Laws (green T-shirt) is flanked by colleagues, from left, Dave Schiffrin, Charmaine Lingerfelt, John Walpole, Andrew Gibbons, Tony Stilling, and Julie Krebs.

“I sit here and weep as I think of all the happenings of the last few days,” wrote Laws’ mother, Sherryl, in a thank-you note to Microsoft. “Tears of joy and tears of sadness. How can I thank you for all you did for my son and for our whole family. ... I know these last few days have been some of the happiest of Scott’s life.”