Man behind meningitis movement “proud” to be Pride of Britain

THE man who launched the UK’s meningitis movement after losing his baby to the disease is “proud” to receive a Pride of Britain award for his lifetime’s crusade.

Meningitis Now founder Steve Dayman, 66, collected the Special Recognition during a glamorous, celeb-filled ceremony at Grosvenor House, London, last night (Monday, October 6).

The spectacle broadcasts on ITV tonight (Tuesday, October 7).

Steve, of Alveston, began his relentless, 32-year crusade after witnessing his 14-month-old son Spencer succumb to meningitis in 1982.

He has been called ‘the father of the meningitis movement’, raises millions of pounds towards preventative research, spreads awareness and travels the UK meeting and inspiring affected families.

Steve said: “It’s an absolute honour to be recognised on the national stage – I’m humbled, but the fight is bigger than one man.

“The honour is tribute to Spencer and the thousands of families touched by the trauma meningitis causes.

“Without my family and friends, it wouldn’t have been possible for me to make the contribution I have.

“I will not stop because I want the dreaded disease eradicated, so no one else feels the pain I and many others have felt.”

Steve, who received his statue from Labour Party leader Ed Miliband and his wife Justine, attended the evening with some family including wife Gloria.

Mr Miliband praised Steve’s “extraordinary courage and humility”.

He continued: “Steve is an incredible guy, there are so many people hearing his story and thinking how would I deal with that tragedy?

“No one could imagine doing what he has.

“As a dad, of course, I feel that.

“It’s the true definition of courage, he’s a true hero.

“What he did is unimaginable, his response has been extraordinary.”
Justine said: "I thank Steve from the bottom of my heart."

“He’s helped save so many children’s lives.”

He then met Ed’s rival, PM David Cameron at a ceremony this morning (Tuesday, October 7).

Steve, who received a University of Bristol honorary degree in July and MBE in 2010 for his work said: “It was an amazing evening – a surreal spectacle.

“There were so many inspirational award winners, and celebrities.

“The evening will stay with me forever – it was emotional to see my work rewarded.”

The award comes just after he helped press the Government to put the UK’s first Meningitis B, the form Spencer had, vaccine free on the NHS, subject to price negotiations with its manufacturer.

Steve also co-launched Stroud-based Meningitis Now, formerly Meningitis UK and Meningitis Trust, last year.

Meningitis Now chief executive Sue Davie said: “Steve thoroughly deserves his Pride of Britain award.

“His achievements over the years are vast and world-changing, and the amount of people he’s helped is innumerable.

“He’s unrelenting, inspirational and many advances in the field wouldn’t have happened without him.

“We’re honoured to work alongside him.”

Spencer’s case “baffled” doctors and he died within 24 hours of admission to Southmead Hospital, Bristol.

Steve said: “We were heartbroken and consumed by shock and emptiness – one minute he was here, the next – gone.

“I held Spencer – the devastation and void is something I’ll never forget.

“His death completely changed my life.”

Steve, then 34, remembers “tickling Spencer’s cheek to make him laugh – all the while unaware he was dying” – a thought that spurs him on.

He only dreamed of driving lorries when he left school at 14, and owned a family-run haulage business.

Spencer’s passing saw Steve, Gloria and a few friends start campaigning.

The dad remembers ‘experts’ of the time saying he would not see any meningitis vaccines in his lifetime.

But vaccines to combat Hib, Pneumococcal disease and Meningitis C are free on the NHS.

The vaccine for Meningitis B, the most common form of bacterial meningitis in the UK, was approved for the NHS, subject to price negotiations, in March.

Steve said: “Initially, I was astonished by how little people knew about the disease, including the medical profession.

“It was startling to discover no leaflets, no charities and no help available.”
“We felt alone – something had to be done because we wanted to protect others from the horrendous pain of losing a loved one.

“I wanted to do something Spencer would be proud of and never expected to make the strides we’ve made.”

Steve left the haulage business in Gloria’s hands, and launched Motorways Meningitis Appeal in a Portakabin on his lorry park off the A38 Alveston.

He started studying the disease and travelling across the country to conferences.

It was not until the ‘Stroud meningitis outbreak’ in the mid-1980s that Steve and Gloria met others touched by the disease.

Steve brought meningitis to a national audience by appearing on BBC Breakfast Time TV presented by Frank Bough in 1986.

This was the first time Steve’s phone rang constantly, hearing from people across the country.

He chose to prioritise visiting families touched by meningitis, something he still does today, and has always been available 24-7 by phone to anyone needing his help.

Steve said: “Over the years, I’ve met thousands of families who’ve experienced a similar tragedy.

“I encourage them to fundraise to help create a better knowledge of meningitis and its associated diseases.

“Most families who’ve suffered find it helpful, like me, to do something positive.

“If we unite and do all we can – we will make a difference.”

At a conference in London in 1991, Steve heard a Norwegian scientist describe the now famous tumbler test, which had never been mass promoted.

Impressed, Steve asked for the literature and had it translated into a leaflet in English.

The breakthrough test hit national headlines after Steve informed Esther Rantzen, so she could promote it on the BBC’s That’s Life! TV show.

He said: “I saw the tumbler test and was amazed at how a simple glass could be used to help diagnose septicaemia, the blood poisoning form of meningitis.

“I was proud to promote the idea over here and am overjoyed it has become a lifesaving tool.”

Being fit, Steve took on charity marathon walks, which often involved 40 days walking on end and routes such as John o’Groats to Land’s End.

An example of Steve’s spirit is seen when he visited the doctor with “tomato-sized blisters” after an early long-distance walk.

The doctor said the easiest way to get rid of them was to give up the walks, but Steve said ‘being told to stop made me more determined to carry on’.

The fundraiser has since raised more than £2 million from marathon walks alone, amassing over 12,000 miles.
It dawned on Steve that awareness would have had little effect in Spencer’s case, so in the late-1990s decided to dramatically change his crusade towards funding vaccine research.

He forged Bristol-based Spencer Dayman Meningitis UK in 1999, to primarily fund a £500,000 state-of-the-art research laboratory at the University of Bristol.

The Spencer Dayman Meningitis Laboratories officially opened in April 2002 and now house a £2.5 million research investment.

Meningitis UK united with Meningitis Trust, which Steve also helped launch, in April 2013.

To donate to Meningitis Now or for more information, visit www.MeningitisNow.org.

ENDS

Photo Caption(s):

Steve Awards a – PRIDE OF BRITAIN: Steve Dayman with his award, surrounded by family

Steve Grad a – “HONOURED” MAN: Steve with his honorary degree

Steve Grad b – THE DR: Steve with Professor Adam Finn, left, and Vice-Chancellor Professor Sir Eric Thomas

Steve Grad c – SUPPORTIVE WIFE: Steve with wife Gloria Dayman

Steve Grad d – PROUD FAMILY: Steve and wife Gloria Dayman with extended family

Steve Trailer a – TRAILBLAZER’S TRAILER: Steve Dayman and staff with Meningitis Now’s new awareness trailer

Spencer Dayman a – NEVER FORGOTTEN: Spencer Dayman

Spencer Dayman b – PROUD PARENT: Steve Dayman cuddles baby Spencer

Steve D a – STARTING OUT: Steve Dayman starting his crusade outside the family haulage business in the early 1980s

Steve D b – HUMBLE BEGINNINGS: The portable building that housed Steve Dayman’s early meningitis charity, circa 1983

Steve D c – CREDIT Coleraine Chronicle– YOUNG HELPER: Steve Dayman with Louise Greer (centre), of Coleraine, NI; who lost her legs and part of her arm to meningitis aged two. Photo circa 2002

Steve D d – REST STOP: Steve Dayman taking a well-earned rest during a Giant’s Causeway walk, Antrim, NI

Steve D e – GRAND OPENING: Steve and Gloria Dayman launch the Spencer Dayman Meningitis Laboratories at the University of Bristol in 2002, with their family
Steve D f - CREDIT Derbyshire Times – TEAM WORK: Steve Dayman and dedicated fundraisers, circa 2005

Steve D g – UNITED FRONT: Steve Dayman (right) with avid supporters, starting a Bath to Bristol walk

Steve D h - CREDIT Sunderland Echo – SPREADING AWARENESS: Steve Dayman and supporters help spread awareness

Steve D i – MENINGITIS EXPERT: Steve Dayman spreads awareness with info materials

Steve D j – STILL SUPPORTING: Steve Dayman and an older Louise Greer help spread awareness

Steve D k – ROYAL RECOGNITION: Steve Dayman received an MBE for his efforts in 2010, with wife Gloria

Steve D l – ON THE ROAD: Steve Dayman still on the road, dedicated to the meningitis fight

Steve D m – MENINGITIS MAN: Steve Dayman – Pride of Britain

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<tr>
<th>Meningitis and Septicaemia Facts</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Meningitis is usually caused by bacteria or viruses</td>
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<td>• Meningitis is inflammation of the membranes that surround and protect the brain and spinal cord</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Septicaemia is blood poisoning</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Some bacteria that cause meningitis also cause septicaemia</td>
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<td>• Meningitis and septicaemia often happen together – it is vital to know all the signs and symptoms</td>
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<td>• The early signs and symptoms of meningitis and septicaemia can be similar to ‘flu and include fever, headache, nausea, vomiting and muscle pain.</td>
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<td>• The more specific signs and symptoms include fever with cold hands and feet, drowsiness, confusion, pale blotchy skin, stiff neck, dislike of bright lights and a rash which doesn’t fade under pressure.</td>
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<td>• In babies, symptoms can also include being floppy and unresponsive, dislike of being handled, rapid breathing, an unusual, moaning cry and a bulging fontanelle (soft spot on the top of the head).</td>
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<td>• There are an estimated 3,200 cases of bacterial meningitis and septicaemia each</td>
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Following bacterial meningitis or septicaemia, one in ten people will die and at least a third of survivors will be left with lifelong after-effects such as hearing loss, epilepsy, limb loss or learning difficulties.

Meningitis and septicaemia can affect anyone, of any age, at any time. However, babies and young children are most at risk, and young people between 15 – 24 years are also a higher risk group.

In the past 20 years, effective vaccines have been developed to give protection against SOME types of meningitis. These are offered to all babies and young children as part of the UK childhood immunisation programme. BUT there are not vaccines to protect against ALL types.

In January 2013, a vaccine to protect against meningococcal group B (Men B) disease, the most common cause of bacterial meningitis and septicaemia, was licensed for use in Europe. In March 2014, this vaccine was recommended for routine use in the UK childhood immunisation programme, provided a cost-effective vaccine price can be agreed.

If you suspect someone may be ill with meningitis or septicaemia, trust your instincts and get immediate medical help.

For more information visit www.MeningitisNow.org or call 01453 768006. Freephone helpline 0808 80 10 388.

About Meningitis Now

Meningitis Now, the UK’s largest charity fighting the disease, formed after Meningitis UK and Meningitis Trust merged in April 2013.

The newly united charity, with around 30 years’ experience exists to save lives and rebuild futures – through research, awareness and support.

Meningitis Now fights the disease on all fronts by providing a powerful, united voice for people fighting meningitis.

- Saving lives by funding vaccine and preventative research.
- Reducing the disease’s impact through awareness.
- Rebuilding futures with dedicated support.
- Fundraising to deliver our plans.