Stefani Bush
Hope springs eternal for health and community advocate

By Marie Donovan
Sun Correspondent

CHELMSFORD — Since her graduation from high school, Stefani Bush has always worked in the service industry, holding such jobs as a certified nursing assistant and guardianian advocate at Tewksbury Hospital, a youth counselor working with troubled teens, a rape-crisis counselor, a Lowell auxiliary police officer, a 911 dispatcher and an EMT.

Her career in service took another turn shortly after she and her husband, Ralph, had two children, Will and Sasha. By 2008, both of the couple’s children were diagnosed with Primary Immunodeficiency Disease and were placed on weekly infusions of gammaglobulin. At that point Bush, now 34, began to volunteer with the Immune Deficiency Foundation. She and another volunteer, Billerica’s Michelle Fox, started the annual “Promise of Hope” wine tasting and this September, they’ll host a first annual “Promise of Hope” wine tasting.

Despite her ongoing health issues, Bush felt compelled to act when a recall election against members of the Board of Selectmen was launched this past year. She ended up co-chairing a successful anti-recall effort with Angie Taranto in 2011 and has since been elected as a Town Meeting representative.

Through it all, Bush stuck with the music that she has performed since a young age as a source of strength. In 2008, she released her first album, “Hope Rising, The Journey,” with proceeds divided between the IDF and the UMDF.

Eventually, Chelmsford's Unitarian Universalist Church donated space and the Table of Plenty was born. Ever since May 2010, any and all have been welcome there for a free weekly nutritious dinner.

“Now, we are serving an average of 65 or more per night,” McKeown said. “We’re trying to reach out. We’ve started bringing meals to My Father’s House in Chelmsford. Occasionally, we’ll deliver meals for house-bound veterans,” McKeown said.

Some young homeless mothers who are staying at a nearby hotel are among the regular visitors to The Table of Plenty.

“Their’s a lot to do during the week, but sometimes I actually serve meals, too,” she said. Over time, the Table of Plenty has expanded its mission to serve an even more diverse population.

“Chelmsford is a very close-knit community. We are quite small, so we get to know everyone. We get to know the people that we are serving,” McKeown said.

Charles J. Dougherty
Sun Correspondent

Plenty dinner, seven people showed up. “Now, we are serving an average of 65 or more per night,” McKeown said. A former youth minister at both St. Mary's and Sacred Heart Parish in Lexington, she is still a lector and Eucharistic Minister and also helps out with the St. Vincent de Paul Society.

McKeown mostly leaves the actual cooking at the Table of Plenty to a few “wonderful” volunteer professional chefs, but she does more than just run the organization and solicit donations from community sponsors. “There’s a lot to do during the week, but sometimes I actually serve meals, too,” she said. Over time, the Table of Plenty has expanded its mission to serve an even more diverse population.

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“They can walk over on the bike path,” McKeown said.

Other regulars include a group of friends from the Chelmsford Senior Center.

“One of Maureen’s gifts is, she has this intuitive sense for bringing people that would work well together. Everybody has a different strength,” said McKeown.

“Even something as small as one meal a week does make a big difference in their budget,” McKeown said.

But saving money isn’t the only draw for people on a budget.

“It’s nice to have the friendship and the social part, too,” McKeown said.