

A walk for friends

'Sole mates' share in battle to overcome MS

By PAT MURPHY
STAFF WRITER

They're "sole mates" in many ways.

Obviously Stacy Gastwirth of West Bloomfield and Mary Jane Barry of the Union Lake area are sole mates by virtue of being paired up for the Walk for Multiple Sclerosis Sunday in Birmingham.

The MS society put them together so Gastwirth, a healthy sophomore at West Bloomfield High School, could walk the 12.5-mile course on behalf of Barry, a Waterford housewife who because of the disease has difficulty hobbling around the house.

But while the initial link-up came from the MS society, Gastwirth and Barry have much

more in common, such as:

■ Both have ties to West Bloomfield High School. Gastwirth expects to graduate in 1997, while Barry graduated from the same school in 1967.

■ Both know the ravages of MS. About a dozen years ago, MS began robbing Barry, first of the use of her hands and subsequently her ability to walk unassisted.

Gastwirth's grandmother, Janette Gastwirth, was stricken with MS more than 30 years ago, also partially crippling her. She died in December.

■ Both refuse to be intimidated by MS. "I'm lucky," said Barry. "MS makes it difficult to walk, but it hasn't affected my speech or my eyesight. It's not going to get me

■ 'They (my family) give me love and support. They're never ashamed to push me in a wheelchair or to help me with a cane.'

Mary Jane Barry
MS victim

down."

Barry was the active mother of three in 1982 when she began to feel a numbness in her hand. "Every day, another finger would be numb."

What followed was a series of trips to the doctor, with little results. "My doctor suggested my problems were all in my mind," she said.

When she was diagnosed with MS, Barry said she was relieved.

"I wasn't crazy," she said. "And my kids knew their mother wasn't crackers."

Barry was a typist at an insurance agency at the time, capable of typing 160 words per minute. She resigned as the disease robbed her of the use of her hands.

Among other things, MS has given Barry a deeper love and respect for her family. Husband Jack is a teacher at Walled Lake

Western High School; daughter Jeanne, 21, is a senior at Michigan State University; daughter Robin, 20, attends the University of Michigan; and son John is a Waterford Mott High student.

"They give me love and support," Barry said. "They're never ashamed to push me in a wheelchair or to help me with a cane." For Stacy Gastwirth, Sunday's MS Walk is a fun outing with a serious purpose. "There's about 20 of us paired up as sole mates," she said. "We walk together, and we have a lot of fun."

The 12.5-mile walk is a bit longer, Gastwirth said, because of the enthusiasm she and her friends put into it. "For one thing, we never shut up... we're talking all the way. And we're forever

meeting people we know along the route. The day after, we're sore."

"But my family understands," she said. "They saw how my grandmother suffered, and they support everything I do."

Indeed, the entire Gastwirth family — her father, Craig, is a physician; mother, Cheryl, a preschool teacher at Early Elementary; and her brother, Andrew, a student at Orchard Lake — will work at rest areas along the 12.5-mile course.

Stacy is a disc jockey on the school radio station, WBLD-89.3 FM, and hopes to go into broadcast journalism, possibly at MSU or U of M. She also works part-time at Amazing Savings, a discount chain store in West Bloomfield.

Multiple Sclerosis Walk rules: have fun, raise money

The rules for Sunday's Walk for Multiple Sclerosis can be boiled down to a simple axiom: Have fun, and raise some money.

The walk — cosponsored by The Eccentric Newspapers — begins (and ends) at Strohman High School at the corner of Lincoln and Evergreen (or Cranbrook). Registration begins at 8 a.m., and the walk commences at 9 a.m. This is the seventh year for the walk.

The route, 20 kilometers (or about 12.5 miles) passes through Beverly Hills, downtown Birmingham and Cranbrook Village with a lunch (provided by Subway) stop at Covington School. Rest stops will be stocked with fruit, snacks and water.

Medical assistance will also be available.

As of Friday, more than 1,000 walkers were registered for the Birmingham walk. Organizers

hope to register 1,800 walkers and raise about \$180,000.

Participants can walk as individuals or teams. They are responsible for raising and collecting pledges. The MS society hopes each walker can raise about \$160.

On a statewide basis, MS officials expect about 8,400 walkers to participate during the weekend along routes in nine other communities. Walks in Kalamazoo

and Grand Rapids will be on Saturday. Walks in Grosse Pointe, Ann Arbor, Dearborn, Saginaw, Monroe, Lansing and Flint will be Sunday. They are expected to raise as much as \$180,000.

More than 350,000 walkers are expected to participate in 400 communities nationwide.

Multiple Sclerosis is a chronic disease of the nervous system that affects the control a person has over body functions. While

the severity and progression of the disease varies from person to person, symptoms range from numbness to paralysis to blindness.

In some cases the disease is progressive, and in other instances the symptoms are stable, enabling the victim to function at near-normal levels. There is no known cure.

Most MS cases are diagnosed when the victims are between 20

and 40, but the physical and emotional impact often lasts forever. Volunteer walkers are still needed. Besides participating in the walk, their job is to raise for each kilometer completed. Money raised is used for research and to support services for the 15,000 MS victims in Michigan and their families, including educational programs, support groups, information and referrals.

Additional information is available at 1-800-247-7382.

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