

NATIONAL MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS SOCIETY

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FEATURE STORY

THE MANY FACES OF WALK MS

THE 2015 CHAMPIONS TELL THEIR STORIES

BY TAREK WILEY

There is a shared feeling among all participants at Walk MS. Some call it strength. Some call it hope. But whatever you call it, there is no denying that it's there, like an invisible energy driving a sea of orange shirts along each route and across the finish line.

That feeling is what brings people back year after year. It's what ties each person together, creating a single community of dedicated walkers stepping ever closer to a common goal. Each person has his or her own story to tell, but at Walk MS the theme is the same: You are not in this alone.

ANGELA LOFTUS

Angela was diagnosed with MS in January of 2004, and at the time she didn't know much about the disease. "I didn't necessarily want to," she said.

For a short time following her diagnosis, Angela went into a period of depression and denial, but it didn't last long. Her family wouldn't let it.

"I laugh that my family is a little pushy, but I'm very blessed to have that in my life," said Angela. "They were not going to allow me to sit back and do nothing. I had to do something."

Her family quickly mobilized around her and formed a team, the MSketeers, and in May of 2004, they participated in their first Walk MS together.



“Honestly, I was nervous to go, but I got there and that really changed everything for me.”

She knew then that Walk MS would always be a part of her life.

“It was completely overwhelming to see the number of people there and the strength that everyone had. I knew there was no going back. I was going to do everything I could to make a difference and to take charge of this for me.”

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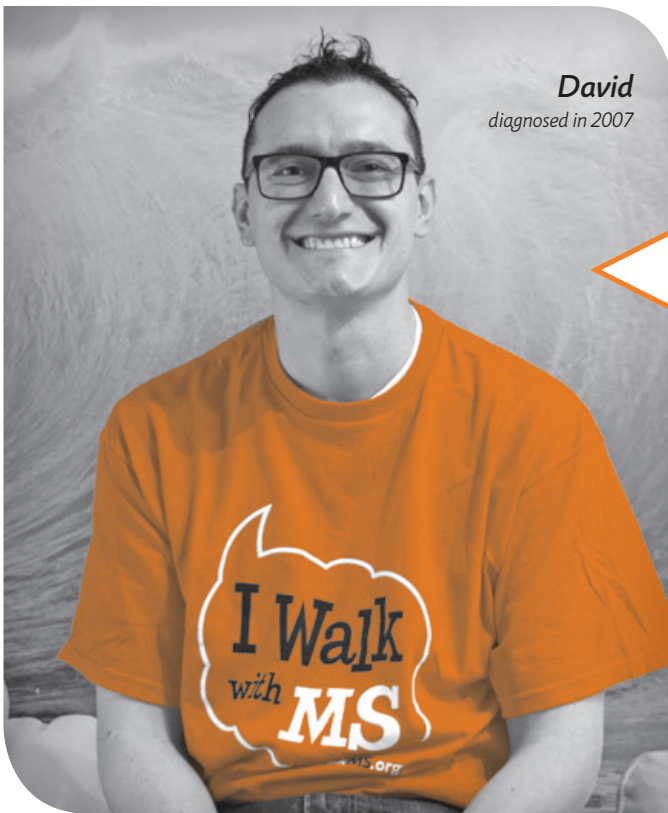
THE NATIONAL MS SOCIETY, GREATER ILLINOIS CHAPTER IS PROUD TO ANNOUNCE THE PRESENTING SPONSOR FOR WALK MS 2015: GENZYME, A SANOFI COMPANY



Genzyme has been a major sponsor of the MS Society for many years on both the local and national levels. In 2013 and 2014, it was the presenting sponsor of the annual Fannie and Charles Penikoff Research Symposium, Annual Meeting and Volunteer Recognition Ceremony as well as the national sponsor of the “I Ride with MS” program for Bike MS (and an annual local sponsor of the Tour de Farms ride). The company was also a major sponsor of Walk MS prior to becoming this year’s presenting sponsor.

Genzyme has been inducted into the MS Society’s Circle of Distinction, an honor given to organizations that demonstrate a commitment to the National MS Society’s mission through their extraordinary financial leadership and generosity.

Thank you, Genzyme, for your continued support in helping bring us closer to a world free of MS.



David
diagnosed in 2007

“Walk MS is where it all started for me. It’s the reason that I’m at such a good place today.”

DAVID ALCOZER

When David Alcozer was diagnosed with MS in 2007, he had a hard time accepting it, and he worried about how his life would be different.

When he first signed up for Walk MS, he felt uncomfortable having a team named after him, not knowing what people would think or expect of him. Instead, he named the team after his cat, Gizmo, feeling that those who knew him well would understand the connection.

“Things continue to evolve so that people can see that it’s me who has MS,” said David. “Now that I’ve accepted it and feel so strongly about helping people and supporting others, I’m not ashamed.”

He says Walk MS is to thank for that.

David now walks for other people living with MS who can’t walk for themselves.

“MS is a disease that is very different for everyone, and we have to support each other. I have so much positive support in my life, and it makes things easier to know that there are people who want to help me and are willing to walk in my honor. To see the looks on their faces when they cross the finish line with me is incredible, and I want to support others living with MS in the same way.”

JANEL BANKS

When Janel Banks first started participating in Walk MS, she had an issue with her team’s shirts. She didn’t like the messaging on them.

“They read, ‘I’m walking for Janel,’ and I wasn’t comfortable with that. I told them they were walking with me, not for me, because I can walk, and I also know how it feels to not be able to. I walk for those people who can’t.”

Janel also participates for the camaraderie and to connect with everyone at the walk.

“To see other people out there who are also living with MS gives you a sense of family, knowing that we’re going to support each other through this.”

Janel was diagnosed with MS in 2005, and it was in the hospital shortly after her diagnosis that her Walk MS team, the JWalkers, was formed.

“A couple of my friends came to see me, and they said we should do Walk MS. I have a large family and a great group of friends, and to see them out there wearing our team shirts, even in those years where I couldn’t walk, gives me a sense of warmth and hope that there will be a cure for this disease one day. We are walking toward that goal and actually raising money for that goal.”

Janel says that the fundraising is the most important thing about Walk MS.

“I realize it costs money to develop new research and medications for this disease, and I don’t want anyone to deal with what I’m dealing with. The proceeds from Walk MS go toward funding research for medications for people who have MS and to finding a cure. I know that’s being worked on every day.”



MARY BOUSTANY

For Mary Boustany, who was diagnosed with MS in 1992, Walk MS is a way for her family and friends to show their support.

“I think they see it as a way they can do something for me,” said Mary. “This is such a personal fight and journey, and this is a way for them all to get involved and show their support when they can’t in other ways.”

In the beginning, it was hard for Mary to be the person her family and friends were walking for, but being a part of a team helped her ease into the experience and provided her with an invaluable support system.

“The team has evolved from just me, my husband and our kids into this circle of friends and family



“The unity of the program and the whole day is the most exciting thing. When I walk beneath the balloons at the start of the walk, it brings a tear to my eye — just the whole show of support and love of everyone there.”

who join us at the walk every year and want to be involved in the fundraising. There has just been an overwhelming response from people who want to help and become a part of it.”

The generosity of everyone involved constantly amazes her, and having them come together at the walk makes the event even more emotional.

Like everyone involved in Walk MS, Mary hopes that her efforts will one day help create a world free of MS for all who live with the disease.

“So much is out of my hands, but participating in Walk MS gives me a feeling that I’m contributing to a cure someday, because ending MS is my cause and my future.”

Join Angela, David, Janel, Mary and thousands of other participants as they walk on May 3 at 11 locations throughout Illinois and on Sept. 13 in Peoria and Urbana to support everyone who is affected by MS. ■

REGISTER TODAY AT: walkMS.org | 1.855.372.1331

MAY 3, 2015

BLOOMINGTON

CHICAGO LAKEFRONT

MCHENRY COUNTY -
LAKE IN THE HILLS

NORTH SHORE -
GLENVIEW

NORTHWEST
SUBURBS -
HOFFMAN ESTATES

ROCKFORD

ST. CHARLES

SOUTH SUBURBS -
ORLAND PARK

SOUTHWEST
SUBURBS - LOCKPORT

SPRINGFIELD

WEST SUBURBS -
NAPERVILLE

SEPT. 13, 2015

PEORIA

URBANA