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Local resident helps to organize area's first liver walk

By Kathi Gunio

Perinton resident Sue Amrine has been a registered nurse for 34 years. She has learned a lot during that time, but now, Amrine says, it is her time to do the educating. Amrine has recently become the Community Events Assistant for the Western New York Chapter of the American Liver Foundation, and has taken on the cause to "educate the community about liver disease." Using her medical knowledge, she hopes to generate what she knows well.

Currently, one in every ten of Americans are or have been afflicted with liver, bile duct or gallbladder diseases, according to statistics from the American Liver Foundation. But although there are over 100 different diseases that can affect the liver, Amrine is concerned with making the community aware of one in particular – Hepatitis C.

Hepatitis C is steadily becoming an emerging health epidemic. Hepatitis C, spread through blood to blood contact, is the number one reason for liver transplants. The disease itself causes inflammation, and ultimately scarring of the liver. Unlike Hepatitis B, which can also lead to more serious liver disease, there is no known cure. For those infected with Hepatitis C, the current regimen is injections of Interferon, a protein produced by the body that interferes with the viral growth, combined with Ribvirin, a broadspectrum antiviral agent.

"Everybody probably knows of one person who has had gallbladder disease or cancer of the liver or even Hepatitis B" suggests Amrine, "but we need to demystify the stigma that liver disease only affects alcoholics or doesn't happen to us."

In fact, it is easier to be infected with Hepatitis C (and Hepatitis B) than AIDS. Blood transfusions prior to 1972, body piercing, tattooing, past drug abuse and being stuck with a sharp object or needle with infected blood is some of the causes and risk factors of Hepatitis C. But, many people don't know that.

"Our foundation's mission," says Amrine, "is to make the community aware of these facts through research and education."

So to bring awareness to this disease, the Liver Foundation is organizing two major events to be held in our area in June. One of the events is the "LIVER WALK;" the first of its kind. The 5K walk will be held Saturday, June 17th, at Highland Park, beginning at the Vietnam Veteran's Memorial. Viet Nam veterans are among the fastest growing population of liver disease, specifically Hepatitis C.

Walkers (individuals or teams) are asked to obtain sponsors for the walk. "This is something that everyone can participate in," says Amrine. A lot of time organizations hold expensive dinners or tournaments – we want everyone to be able to take part in this. If people can't walk, they can sponsor

or solicit donations. All monies received will support research, education and public awareness of liver diseases and organ donation.

“We hope to see a goal of \$100 per walker,” said Nancy Koris, Executive Director for the Western New York Chapter who lives in Brighton. “We really want to formulate educational programs within the community and businesses to inform people of this fast-growing disease,” Koris says. Hopefully the Liver Walk will accomplish this.

Koris says they’ve had great response from area businesses, such as Taylor Rental and Papa John’s Pizzarias who have donated various items for the walk. Also on the foundations community events agenda, is a “Kids N’ Trucks” day. It will be held at Frontier Field on June 8th and 9th. Over 50 trucks will be there for young children to climb on and explore.

“The correlation with event and liver disease is that trucks have large engines that need to be maintained,” says Koris. “The same is true for our body. Our liver is part of our body’s ‘engine,’ and it needs to be maintained and taken care of also.”

Wendy’s is the main sponsor of this event. Each child who attends will receive a coloring book and a coupon for a free Frosty.

Amrine, who states this is her “first indoctrination to fund-raising,” hopes that one of the things she raises is public awareness to liver diseases. “Then, and only then, will we be able to combat this chronic and deadly disease.” (

WHERE AND WHEN TO GO: American Liver Foundation’s LIVER WALK Saturday, June 17, 2000 8 AM, check in time, 9 AM walk begins Viet Nam Veteran’s Memorial in Highland Park Kids N’ Trucks July 8th and 9th Frontier Field Call the American Liver Foundation at 271-2859 for further information