

Homer Glen resident becomes ambassador for lupus walk

Local teen with lupus looks to raise awareness, funds with May 21 event

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Ambassador is probably the most appropriate position that Homer Glen resident Meaghan Fox could hold, and that's exactly what she has become for this year's Lupus Society of Illinois Southern Suburbs Illinois Lupus Walk.

Fox, who was diagnosed with lupus at age 9, got involved with the Lupus Society of Illinois almost immediately following her diagnosis and has made it a point to be as involved as possible in the organization.

"I'm one of those people that believes — it might sound a little corny — but if you have something to give, you should give it," Fox said.

The walk is Saturday, May 21, and Fox has her own team called The Fighting Fox's. She has been raising money since the beginning of March and has already far surpassed her original team fundraising goal of \$2,500, raising over \$4,000. But even though her team goal has already been met, Fox wants to do all she can to help the society.

"Lupus Society [of Illinois] gives a lot back when lupus takes a lot away," she said.

Fox suffers from Systemic Lupus Erythematosus and is part of the minority of lupus patients who were born with the disease.

"Being systemic, it hits every organ system of the body," Fox said. "There's not an organ or part in me that hasn't been affected."

The effect that lupus has

had on Fox's body is almost incomprehensible, as she now has 29 other medical diagnoses due to the damage lupus has done to her body. She has broken more than 30 bones because of the steroids she's been taking since age 5 have made her bones brittle. But Fox doesn't want pity; rather, she wants to see a more widespread understanding of lupus.

"I'm not someone that likes pity, but I also want people to know enough about lupus because there's not enough noise being made," Fox said. "That's one of my main goals — for people to just be more aware of it."

Being ambassador has given Fox more opportunities to speak up about lupus and help raise awareness. That's why she accepted the position immediately when it was offered to her.

"[Lupus] takes a lot away, but that's part of the reason I want to be ambassador — because when I found the Lupus Society, it felt like I got something back," Fox said.

Fox was chosen as ambassador by the Lupus Society of Illinois, because at 18 years old, she'll be able to accurately portray the society's message while attracting younger people with lupus to get involved, Fox said.

The Lupus Society of Illinois does its best to help out with medical costs, but between daily doctor visits, x-rays, chemotherapy and medical equipment, costs can pile up quickly for those affected by lupus. Fox recalls a time when she was younger when she apologized to her parents for costing them thousands of extra dollars.

Now knowing that one of her medications costs upwards of \$30,000 per month,

Fox can't help but laugh when she thinks back to that heartfelt apology. But she hopes that with more support, the Lupus Society of Illinois will be able to further its research of treatments and a possible cure, starting with the walk on Saturday, May 21.

"There's only been one drug ever made for lupus," Fox said. "I have a best friend who has lupus, but she can't take the medication because she's allergic to it."

Since lupus doesn't have any overly distinct symptoms, it is hard to diagnose and even tougher for people to recognize. Fox has heard plenty of insensitive remarks from people who aren't aware of her disease. As ambassador, Fox hopes to increase everyone's awareness of the disease to hopefully prevent others from enduring those same types of ignorant comments.

"I want lupus to one day be at the point where one day someone might say, 'yeah, she has a handicapped sticker, yeah it looks like she is walking fine,' but what they don't know is that I'm not supposed to be walking at all or that every step is excruciating," Fox said.

Fox's mother, Barbara, and brother, Nick, as well as other members of her family have dedicated large portions of their time to taking care of her, and that's not something she takes for granted.

"I've always been happy to give back, because I've received a lot of support from my family and friends," Fox said.

Being ambassador for the Lupus Society of Illinois Southern Suburbs Illinois Lupus Walk gives Fox a chance to give a louder voice to herself and many of her friends who she has met in hospitals and doctors' of-

fices, and doing that is just part of who she is.

"I've always based my life on believing in doing the right thing, no matter how it affects you or not," Fox said.

To donate to Fox's team, visit www.lupusil.org, click on the May 21, 2016 - Southern Suburbs Illinois Lupus Walk event and click on The Fighting Fox's under the top teams on the right hand side of the page.



Meaghan Fox (left) and her mother, Barbara, have been involved with the Lupus Society of Illinois for nearly a decade. PHOTO SUBMITTED