

Family, friends to join woman in benefit walk

By **Ann Piccininni** □ *Daily Herald Correspondent* □ Posted Wednesday, September 27, 2006

Carolyn Hamilton is grateful to the 40 or so people who will accompany her Sunday on the Life Without Lupus fundraising walk along the DuPage River in Naperville.

After all, a bout with the illness deferred her honeymoon six years ago.

She was 22, six months past college graduation and planning her wedding to her college sweetheart, Tony, when her health took a sudden turn for the worse.

“I was tired all the time, had fatigue, basically couldn’t wait to come home and sleep,” said Hamilton, an athlete who previously enjoyed a robust lifestyle.

Then she broke out in a rash and spiked a fever. A trip to a local emergency room led to a referral to a rheumatologist who diagnosed her with lupus and treated her symptoms.

“I was basically fine for a year. Then I had a lupus flare,” she said.

She gained 30 pounds within a month due to kidney problems. The Monday after her Saturday wedding, she was hospitalized, spending two weeks in intensive care and two more weeks as an inpatient. She also developed a blood disorder, an infection and cataracts.

“It was quite a year,” she said. “But I got healthy and fought through it.”

The condition, a chronic, autoimmune disease that can trigger life-threatening situations, affects about 2 million people nationwide, walk organizers said. And an estimated 65,000 Illinois residents have the disease.

While no cause has been identified and no cure has been found, most cases can be managed with early diagnosis and treatment, according to the Illinois chapter of the Lupus Foundation of America.

The fundraising goal for Sunday’s walk, in combination with a walk last Saturday in downtown Chicago, is \$250,000, said Terry Sanders, chapter president.

Funds will go toward efforts to spread awareness of the disease and provide patients with information on how to live with it, Sanders said. Money also is funneled into research aimed at finding a cure, she said.

The organization, which has had walks in Chicago for six years, is adding the Naperville

walk this year.

“It’s to raise more money and for those people who can’t make it into Chicago,” Sanders said. “We have a large population of volunteers in Naperville and in DuPage County. For several years, they’ve wanted to start a walk there.”

About 500 walkers and runners are expected at the Naperville event, which will give athletes a choice between 1- and 3-mile routes.

Hamilton, who works for the city of Naperville’s community relations department, said she will be joined on the walk by her sister-in-law, Dana Parkhill, who was diagnosed with lupus as a teen, along with almost 40 family members and friends.

She said she wants to do what she can to help the millions of other people coping with the disease.

“Lupus is one of those diseases where it tends to surface in the late teens to early 20s,” she said. “It affects everybody in a different way. It’s so hard to pinpoint. It affects so many people.”

Almost a year after her honeymoon was postponed, Hamilton said, she and her husband finally took that trip to Orlando, Fla.

“I still probably wasn’t 100 percent myself,” she said.

Then, two years ago, Hamilton gave birth to the couple’s first child, a daughter named Maggie Grace. She counts herself lucky to get through her high-risk pregnancy with little drama.

Nowadays, Hamilton, who lives in Romeoville, keeps the disease in check with blood pressure medication and a diuretic to prevent fluid retention.

“I’ve been really lucky and fortunate,” she said. “I just have to take it one day at a time. Take your meds, see your doctor and hopefully all will go well.”