

King woman leads by example

By Mark Pavilons

A King Township woman epitomizes the sentiment about walking the walk.

And that's literally what Whitney Goulstone will be doing this weekend.

Goulstone launched Whitney's Wish, the only patient-led initiative to promote research into epilepsy. And she will be joining many others for the first-ever Purple Walk for Epilepsy, this Sunday, Aug. 30. The walk begins at 10 a.m. in the parking lot of Epilepsy Toronto, 468 Queen Street East.

The inaugural walk is taking place during Scotiabank's BuskerFest supporting Epilepsy Toronto.

Participants will meet as a group, to enjoy a pancake breakfast, refreshments, purple face painting, balloon twisting (from the balloon artists, the Twisted Ones) and a fun celebration before they embark on the first ever epilepsy walk, ending at Dundas Square (Yonge and Dundas).

For more, visit <http://www.epilepsytoronto.org>.

Since Goulstone launched Whitney's Wish, they have had great success and have helped (with the support of the UHN's Toronto General and Western Foundation team) to double the size of the Epilepsy Monitoring Unit at Toronto Western Hospital from 5 beds to 10. This, she said, entailed a complete renovation of the unit, with many upgrades. The wait times for the EMU have dropped from 18 months to one with the increased capacity.

This past June, they announced a new fellowship, the Donald Hill Epilepsy Surgical Fellowship, named in memory of Whitney's stepfather, who passed last February.

"He was a champion for my care, and fought hard for my medical needs to be met. There are currently a lack of trained epilepsy surgeons in Canada, this fellowship will change that," she said.

Whitney's Wish continues to support research in epilepsy programs at the UHN and is the only patient led initiative.

From the age of 13, Whitney Goulstone had experienced vision disturbances and other symptoms, but it wasn't until University that she was diagnosed with epilepsy. Despite medication, Whitney began to experience seizures which got progressively worse over time. Unfortunately, many people with epilepsy will suffer from severely as Whitney did. People also access a specific life insurance when suffering from epilepsy; you can find more at Special Risk Managers.

"They graduated to where I could not speak during them," she explained. "I would lose my balance and started to suffer injuries."

Between 2007 and 2010, Whitney's health steadily declined over the course of two pregnancies. The new mother of two was barely able to hold her own children. A trip to the emergency room one evening in 2009 revealed toxicity in her liver, likely brought on by an allergic reaction to her seizure medication.

"At this point I was in a wheelchair. I couldn't even bathe or dress myself."

At possibly the lowest point in her life, she turned to the Epilepsy Monitoring Unit (EMU) at Toronto Western Hospital's Krembil Neuroscience Centre.

Today, Whitney is seizure free, thanks to the incredible team that cared for her at Toronto Western Hospital.

"Epilepsy-wise I'm doing great!," she said, noting that this coming Nov. 25, it will be five years seizure-free.

Whitney's ordeal has not only changed her physically, but also in the way she looks at life. Something as simple as spending family time with her children fills her with joy. For her, seizing the day is not just a catch phrase, it's the real deal.

An eight-minute video that chronicles Whitney's journey is posted on YouTube ? YouTube Video:

[YouTube.com/watch?v=W6HYScEJVI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W6HYScEJVI)

Goulstone said there have been a lot of advancements in the field of epilepsy. A few major ones are in genetics ? breaking down and looking at the individual genes behind seizure disorders. There is always research with new medications happening; and on the surgical front there is the neurostimulator transplant, which is similar to a pacemaker in the brain.

"There's so much more, and it's so exciting!" she remarked.

Those supporting this weekend's walk will directly support Epilepsy Toronto's critical programs and services that help those impacted by epilepsy to live well.

It's estimated epilepsy affects one in 100 people and is one of the most prevalent neurological disorders. Some 300,000 Canadians suffer from the disorder.