

Walk boosts epilepsy foundation

BY GREG MARANO • POUGHKEEPSIE JOURNAL • MAY 4, 2008

NEW PALTZ - The temperatures were low, the sky was gray and the air was damp. But residents said it was still a great day for a walk.

The third annual Sara's Walk for Epilepsy, organized by 13-year-old Sara-Elizabeth Clark of Gardiner, brought together walkers from around the region to raise more than \$15,000 for the Epilepsy Foundation of Northeastern New York.

"It went very well," Clark said after the 45-minute walk around the State University of New York at New Paltz. "I hope everyone enjoyed themselves."

Clark, a seventh-grader at New Paltz Middle School, was diagnosed with epilepsy at age 4 but has been seizure-free since age 5.

The Epilepsy Foundation of Northeastern New York's objective is to help people with epilepsy lead normal lives, educate the public about epilepsy, and aid in research to improve treatment.

Rusty Senecal, vice president of the board of the Epilepsy Foundation of Northeastern New York, said events like Saturday's walk are invaluable for raising not only funds, but also awareness of what he called a very misunderstood condition.

"The stigma goes back to biblical times," he said. People who had sudden seizures were often thought to be possessed by demons, and the United States had immigration restrictions on people with epilepsy until 1965.

The walk's two-mile course circled the college campus, bringing walkers back to the starting point near the Elting Gymnasium for free food, raffle prizes from 39 businesses, music and the chance to chat with others who are affected by epilepsy.

Erin Anderson of the City of Poughkeepsie brought her husband and three kids to the event. Her youngest son, Shawn, 5, has epilepsy.

"We wanted to be part of this event so we could meet other families who are dealing with epilepsy," Anderson said.

Karen Endres of Schenectady used to have regular epileptic seizures, until an operation 10 years ago removed the portion of her brain that

was causing them. Now seizure-free, she and her husband, Gary, and their two dogs made the trip from Schenectady Saturday to take part.

"I'm just giving back for people who are still afflicted by it," she said.

In remarks before the walk began, Jeannine Garab, executive director of the Epilepsy Foundation, praised Clark for devoting so much effort to raise money for epilepsy, even though she now lives without seizures or medication.

"She didn't walk away from epilepsy," Garab said. "She stayed around to help others."



Sara-Elizabeth Clark, 13, right, walks with her friend, Christina Tortorici, 12, at Sara's Walk for Epilepsy held at the State University of New York at New Paltz campus Saturday. (Kimberly Ruth/For the Poughkeepsie Journal)

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Correction Note from Sara-Elizabeth – My first seizure was actually at 16 months old, not four years old.