

'I'm not letting this beat me down' Galesburg women copes with M.S.

By James R. Johnson

Two years ago, the Tribune spoke with Sheri Paulson of Galesburg, N.D., as she was adjusting to lifestyle challenges from living with multiple sclerosis.

She was experiencing facial pain, having trouble with digestion and keeping any food down. She'd lost 15 pounds and a lot of muscle tone in six months.

Two years later, she's still having some digestive issues, but has made progress with diet and exercise.

"I've just tried to work out other ways to be healthy and adapt to this pain," she recently told the Tribune. "I refuse to let it keep me on the sideline."

When she was first diagnosed with M.S. in April 2001, Paulson began running full marathons. The disease eventually prevented prolonged runs, but she was able to cover six miles Oct. 21 as a member of the inaugural Run A Myelin My Shoes relay team in the Detroit Free Press Marathon, which ran from Windsor, Ontario to Detroit. More than 90 people participated on the team, either physically or virtually, to raise awareness and donations for M.S. treatment.

"More than half of our team was comprised of M.S. patients," Paulson said. "We were represented by individuals throughout the U.S. as well as seven continents."

Virtual teammates, who would swim 10 kilometers the day of the Detroit marathon, represented 16 countries: Antarctica, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, India, Singapore, Bahrain, South Africa, Belgium, Italy, Netherlands, Argentina, England, Canada, Mexico and the United States, 25 of them, including North Dakota.

Paulson said she was proud to "represent my state and the M.S. community. Having lived with M.S. for over 17 years, this was such a highlight for me."

She says the key is finding the right balance of diet and exercise.

"I have worked with my team of doctors on this. We have found the Mediterranean diet has worked best for me. It avoids processed sugars and encourages eating lots of fruits and vegetables plus protein from chicken and fish. This has been helpful in managing my M.S. symptoms of pain, fatigue, insomnia, digestive and cognitive issues."

She shares that dietary news and gives motivational speeches "to people who are worse off than I was, but are

overcoming what they are challenged with. What can you do to live better with M.S. every single day? It's like going to a support group for me, in a sense."

Medical marijuana begins

Through her physicians plus the use of dietary supplements and medications, Paulson has been able to put some weight back on since 2016.

At that time, North Dakota voters passed a measure for the state to establish medical marijuana, something Paulson wants to use the oils from to administer to her daily pain.

In April 2017, two-thirds of both the North Dakota Senate and House amended the voter-approved North Dakota Compassionate Care Act to allow the use of marijuana as medicine for people who suffer from debilitating illnesses. Only in the past couple of weeks has the program started.

"It's sad to me that we're two years after the vote and other states who passed medical marijuana at the time we did have their programs up and running," Paulson said. "It's just very disappointing."

She kept a close watch on the recent midterm election, which included a statutory measure to legalize recreational marijuana. It failed by a 3-2 margin.

Paulson noted, "A lot of North Dakotans aren't ready for rec (recreational use). What I find frustrating and insulting is that lawmakers were using the same scare tactics as they were for the medical marijuana measure. Their argument was, 'People are going to abuse this to get high.' It's both sides of the aisle that I'm hearing that from."

Paulson said it's risky to buy marijuana on the street "because we don't know what's in it."

October 29 was the first day to apply for a medical marijuana card in North Dakota. The Department of Health plans to begin issuing registry cards in December. According to an Associated Press report, the DOH estimates as many as 4,000 North Dakotans will be legally using marijuana during the next three years for 17 approved medical conditions along with terminal illnesses.

Patients and designated caregivers (parent, friend) will pay a \$50 annual fee for a card and they must satisfy certain requirements, such as patient certification by a doctor or registered nurse, plus criminal background checks for caregivers.

Earlier this year, the DOH selected companies to implement a monitoring system and perform laboratory tests. Companies were recently named to open dispensaries in Fargo and Bismarck. Grand Forks and Williston are next before the end of the month.

Applications will be taken in January for dispensaries in Devils Lake, Dickinson, Jamestown and Minot. The DOH expects all eight dispensaries to be operating by July 2019. The cost will be dic-



Courtesy photos

Sheri Paulson, of Galesburg, N.D., lives with multiple sclerosis, yet recently ran six miles as a member of a relay team in the Run A Myelin My Shoes marathon from Windsor, Ontario to Detroit.

tated by the market, not the state. Patients are not allowed to grow their own.

When the Tribune spoke with Paulson about applications starting, she replied, "That's progress. Progress is good."

She plans to apply for a card. She says she'll be patient in her M.S. treatment and stay proactive in other areas while she waits.

"I'm not letting this beat me down. I refuse to," Paulson said. "I keep moving, I keep going and I put a smile on my face."

NDFB elects leaders Kaldor re-elected to represent Dist. 2

Two individuals were elected and three others were re-elected to positions on the NDFB Board of Directors during the 76th NDFB Annual Meeting, held Nov. 9-10 at the Ramkota in Bismarck. The NDFB Board is



Run A Myelin My Shoes is planning a second fundraising marathon for M.S. for November 2019 in Richmond, Va.