

Band Together community darling maintains positive outlook

ALS patient Lisa Nichols wishes everyone had a 'Band Together'

BY NICHOLE TARON

Lisa Nichols is still smiling. Sure, she has some days that are better than others.

"[My emotions] are up and down, but basically good," she said. "You forget until you start walking."

Nichols, 45 years old at the time, was diagnosed in January 2004 with ALS, also known as Lou Gehrig's disease.

Nichols maintains a positive outlook. She greets you with a hug and kind eyes. She offers coffee, the perpetual caretaker.

The disease, which is fatal, is estimated to cost approximately \$200,000 a year to treat. At the

time she was diagnosed, her husband Dave had been laid off his job as a computer programmer. With seven children who would eventually lose their mother, it was bleak to say the least.

Enter the best friends anyone could hope for. The Nichols' neighbors began to rally around the family.

In a grassroots effort that would make any nonprofit organization take note, the group started a fundraising campaign that culminated in an Aug. 29 festival in Village Greens Park, in Greenwood Village.

More than \$120,000 was raised. After the deduction of a mere \$3,282 for expenses, and 10 percent for charity, the remaining funds are in the process of being set in a trust for the family's children.

"It's tough," said Susie Roy, a friend of the family. "She isn't going to get any better."

ALS attacks nerve cells leading to the brain and spinal cord. It creates muscle weakness, starting in the arms and legs and eventually affects speech, swallowing and breathing.

Lisa now has difficulty walking. "I can walk, but not for very long," she said.

Thanks in part to the Muscular Dystrophy Association, she now has a brand new, fully motorized wheelchair to make things easier. The chair has a tilt capability, which is helpful because it mean Lisa can sleep in it. She sometimes has trouble getting up to go to bed.

On March 4, T.D. Schenck, of United Seating and Mobility, delivered the chair to the Nichols' home.

Hesitant at first of the five different speed settings, Lisa loves her new chair. Schenck gave her



Lisa Nichols gets used to her new wheelchair. Nichols, center, with T.D. Schenck of United Seating and Mobility, left, and Linda Johnson, Healthcare Coordinator with the Muscular Dystrophy Association.



Lisa Nichols experiments with the speed settings on her new wheelchair.

Photos by Matthew Rice.

a full tutorial, and made adjustments to ensure her comfort.

"This is why I love what I do," Schenck said. "We've just given her the mobility to be independent."

Looking back on last summer's Band Together event, Lisa said she feels blessed.

"It blew my mind," she said. "The whole community is the most wonderful place to be. I'm lucky to live [here]."

"It actually worked," said Susie. "I don't think anyone

knows what the formula was, but somehow, somehow it worked. It was a 'we' thing."

Susie and Lisa attend monthly support meetings, "when [Lisa] is up to it."

"You want to go because somebody [at the meeting] might need your help," Lisa said. "The hardest part is you feel like your helpless. But if you can help newly diagnosed

[patients], you can give them your advice."

A week after the Band Together event, Lisa, Susie and another friend volunteered for the MDA telethon, working the phones. She is now in the process of working with the MDA to raise awareness of ALS.

"It's hard to do it on your own," she said, "and people forget unless you see it everyday."

As for the future, Lisa, her husband Dave, and their family are trying to cope as best they can.

"Last year, I was distracted [with Band Together], so that was good," she said. "I'm just so grateful. I wish everyone had a Band Together."

To make a donation to Band Together, send checks payable to Band Together to 9000 E. Tufts, Greenwood Village, CO 80111.



Band Together

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