

Mom with ALS inspires community to help out

By Jennifer Miller, Rocky Mountain News
August 30, 2004

GREENWOOD VILLAGE - More than the sun filled Village Greens Park with light on Sunday. The mood was bright as hundreds gathered in support of those with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, also known as Lou Gehrig's disease.

And the face of Lisa Nichols, who has the disease, further brightened the song-filled field.



Lisa Nichols was diagnosed with ALS in 2003.

The 45-year-old mother of seven beamed her smile to children, parents and friends at a fund-raiser for her and others with ALS that raised \$86,000, event organizers say.

Nichols has inspired her community since being diagnosed in March 2003. She is honest with her children, of whom the youngest is 4. She keeps a strong faith in God and speaks out about the disease.

"It's very scary and nerve-racking," said Nichols, who sits in a wheelchair and also walks with a cane, her husband's firm grip clutching her other hand.

"But all the love and nurturing is beautiful. God's behind this. Everything's going to be fine."

Her positive outlook inspired neighbors to form a group called Band Together that went from a local gathering to producers of a major fund-raiser in three months.

"It's the least I could do," said event chairwoman Katie Kleeman, whose son plays baseball with Nichols' son.

Kleeman said she and 72 committee members worked long hours for the event, which included a water balloon toss, ALS information and a silent auction.

As young and old joined in support of the cause, Greenwood Village Mayor Nancy Sharpe said the event was "perfect."

"This is exactly what Greenwood Village is all about," she said, "a group of people supporting each other."

ALS, which affects about 30,000 people in the United States, kills nerve cells that send messages from the brain to the muscles, said Leslie McKelvey, patient services director for the Rocky Mountain Chapter of the ALS Association.

"It's hard to diagnose," she said. "It usually starts with weakness or clumsiness in the hands or feet, and leads to complete paralysis."

Once diagnosed, a person usually has between two and five years to live, McKelvey said. Her organization works to support and comfort those with ALS, such as by offering counseling services and respite care.

Information

- For more information about ALS, call 303-772-1211 or visit www.alsaco.org.