WISCONSIN PARKINSON ASSOCIATION MAGAZINE

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In this Issue

Increasing Access

"There have been moments at WPA programs and partnerships that have made me quite emotional. Seeing people participate and experience things that they otherwise would avoid due to having Parkinson's is so rewarding and inspiring. Being a part of increasing access to those programs that improve quality of life and changing lives means more than I can put into words. I have been deeply moved by the dedication of the committees, sponsors, businesses, and communities that make these events possible. When people come together with passion, purpose, and heart, something powerful happens. It is an honor to support WPA programs and events that continue to grow, touch lives, and create meaningful experiences for individuals, families, and entire communities."

— Raven Hamilton, WPA Operations Manager

Across Wisconsin. Community Strong.

Every day across Wisconsin, something remarkable is happening

A newly diagnosed person walks into a support group for the very first time and discovers they're not alone. A care partner finds encouragement from someone who truly understands. An exercise class helps improve strength and confidence. A conference brings together experts, volunteers, and families who leave feeling more hopeful than when they arrived.

From Ashland to Janesville. From Eau Claire to Milwaukee. Across cities, small towns, and everywhere in between, people are finding hope because of a community that refuses to let Parkinson's be faced alone.

That community exists because of you.

Your generosity helps Wisconsin Parkinson Association bring programs, education, support groups, movement classes, conferences, and resources directly into communities across our state. Every dollar you give stays in Wisconsin, helping your neighbors, your friends, and your families.

Parkinson's doesn't stop at county lines, and neither do we. Together, we're building a statewide network of hope that reaches people wherever they are on their journey. Whether someone lives in a rural community with limited access to care or in the heart of a larger city, your support helps ensure they're connected to the resources they need.

Community is built one conversation, one class, one volunteer, one donor, and one act of generosity at a time.

Please consider making a gift today. Together, we can continue strengthening communities across Wisconsin and ensure that no one has to navigate Parkinson's disease alone.

Please consider making a gift today! Simply scan the QR code to make a donation!

OR if you prefer, you can mail your donation in the attached envelope.

Letter from the President & CEO

Dear Friends,

One of the greatest privileges of serving WPA is hearing your stories. Whether you are living with Parkinson's or supporting a loved one, your experiences help shape our work and remind us of what matters most: access to education, wellness programs, and meaningful connections that empower people to live well.

Dacy Reimer, WPA President and CEO, introduces panelists at the WPA Spring Symposium.

We regularly hear from individuals and families seeking opportunities to stay active, informed, and engaged in their health. We understand that access to these resources can look very different depending on where you live. That is why expanding our reach across Wisconsin remains a priority.

This commitment recently took us 350 miles north to Ashland, Wisconsin, where WPA hosted an Urban Poling workshop in June. The enthusiastic response reinforced the importance of bringing evidence-based wellness programs directly into communities that may have limited access to Parkinson's-specific services. We look forward to returning to Ashland on September 24 for a Parkinson's conference that will provide education, resources, and support for individuals and families throughout northern Wisconsin.

The work happening in Ashland reflects a belief that guides everything we do: every community matters.

Whether a community is large or small, urban or rural, the people living with Parkinson's there deserve access to the resources and support that can help them thrive.

As part of that commitment, WPA is also moving forward with a five-year strategic expansion plan focused on strengthening our impact and increasing access to programs and services throughout the state. While the work ahead is ambitious, it is rooted in a simple goal: ensuring that more individuals and families have access to the education, wellness, and support they need to live well with Parkinson's.

As we look ahead, our commitment remains clear. We will continue listening to your stories, learning from your experiences, and working to increase the reach of programs that help people proactively manage their health and live their best lives with Parkinson's. We know there is more work to do, and we are dedicated to meeting that challenge with purpose and determination.

Thank you for placing your trust in WPA. Your voices guide our mission, and your resilience inspires our work every day. Together, we are building a stronger, more connected Parkinson's community—one where every person matters, every story matters, and every community matters.

With gratitude,

Dacy

Dacy Reimer, President & CEO
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Finding Joy Doesn't Mean Ignoring the Hard Days

"People with Parkinson's don't just need information. They need opportunities to laugh together, create something together, and discover abilities they may not realize they still have.

That philosophy is reflected in the conference's name."

Can you find joy while living with Parkinson's disease?

For many people, the question almost feels unfair. Parkinson's changes the way you move, speak, sleep, and sometimes even the way you see yourself. It asks people to adapt to challenges they never imagined, often one small adjustment at a time.

Yet joy isn't the absence of those challenges. Sometimes it's found in spite of them.

That's the idea behind Finding Joy with Parkinson's, a new regional conference coming to Janesville on September 30th. Organized with support from the Wisconsin Parkinson Association and local Parkinson's advocates, the event is designed to remind people that living well with Parkinson's involves more than doctor's appointments and medications. It's also about creativity, movement, laughter, friendship, and discovering new ways to keep living fully.

For organizer Connie Udell, the conference grew from both personal experience and a desire to bring more opportunities closer to home. Her mother lived with Parkinson's, and Connie has spent years working alongside the Parkinson's community through fitness programs, Rock Steady Boxing, and wellness initiatives. When another regional conference was canceled, she and fellow coach Doug Anderson decided not to let the opportunity disappear.

"We said, let's just hold our own conference," Connie recalls.

The result is a day that feels intentionally different.

The morning will begin with keynote speaker Bill Bucklew, an endurance athlete living with Parkinson's who is perhaps best known for walking across the United States in just 67 days after his diagnosis. More recently, he completed an extraordinary ride from Chicago to Phoenix on a recumbent tricycle to attend the World Parkinson Congress, proving once again that Parkinson's does not have the final word on what's possible.

From there, attendees will have the opportunity to shape their own experience. Traditional educational sessions on caregiving and deep brain stimulation will be offered alongside interactive activities designed to nourish both body and spirit. Local artists will lead collaborative art projects. Visitors can learn to journal, learn about Memory Cafés and Parkinson's resources through the public library, explore Rock Steady Boxing, practice safer falls on specialized equipment, take a chair yoga class, or even have trained specialists evaluate the fit of their vehicle to improve driving comfort and safety. High school and physical therapy students will join the event, creating opportunities for intergenerational learning and connection.

The conference reflects something Connie has witnessed over the years. People with Parkinson's don't just need information. They need opportunities to laugh together, create something together, and discover abilities they may not realize they still have.

That philosophy is reflected in the conference's name.

Finding joy doesn't mean pretending Parkinson's is easy. It means recognizing that purpose, creativity, friendship, and hope still belong in the story.

For people throughout southern Wisconsin and northern Illinois, the conference also offers something practical. Instead of traveling several hours to attend larger statewide events, attendees can access expert speakers, local resources, and community connections much closer to home.

Registration opens in early September. To learn more about Finding Joy with Parkinson's or to register, visit wiparkinson.org/events.

Singing Anyway:

A Choir, a Coincidence, and a Community Rebuilt

Living with Parkinson's in northern Wisconsin presents challenges that many people elsewhere don't have to consider...Access to specialists, support programs, and educational opportunities can be limited, making local connections all the more valuable.

One winter evening, at a concert in Ashland, Wisconsin, Reggie Holmes turned to the man sitting next to her and warned him she was about to ruin the music. Parkinson's disease had taken her singing voice, and she missed it badly.

"It's going to sound awful, and I'm sorry," she told him. "But I'm going to sing because I want to."

Instead of criticism, she received an unexpected question.

"Have you heard about the Parkinson Choir?" the man asked.

For Reggie, that simple conversation changed everything. It helped reconnect her with music, introduced her to a community of people who understood Parkinson's disease, and eventually inspired her to help rebuild something that had quietly disappeared in northern Wisconsin: a place where people living with Parkinson's could find one another.

This September, that vision takes another important step forward as the Bay Area Parkinson's Support Group, supported by the Wisconsin Parkinson Association (WPA) hosts the "Navigating Parkinson's Disease in Northern Wisconsin: Compensate. Adapt. Participate." conference to Ashland. The event will offer education, encouragement, and connection for people living with Parkinson's, care partners, and healthcare professionals across a region where specialized resources are often separated by hours of highway rather than a short drive across town.

Living with Parkinson's in northern Wisconsin presents challenges that many people elsewhere don't have to consider. Reggie travels nearly an hour and a half to Duluth to see her neurologist because there isn't one closer to home. Access to specialists, support programs, and educational opportunities can be limited, making local connections all the more valuable.

Those realities became even more apparent after the pandemic. A Parkinson's support group that had once served the Ashland area dissolved after longtime leaders moved away or passed on. When Reggie returned to Wisconsin after teaching overseas, she discovered the community she had hoped to join no longer existed. Rather than accept that loss, she agreed to help start again. Although she had never led a support group before, she knew firsthand how much people needed a place to share experiences, ask questions, and simply be understood. Today, the group regularly welcomes 12 to 20 participants, an encouraging number for a rural community.

That same spirit is driving September's conference, "Navigating Parkinson's Disease in Northern Wisconsin: Compensate. Adapt. Participate.," which will be held at the Northern Great Lakes Visitor Center in Ashland. Sponsored by the Bay Area Parkinson's Support Group with support from the Wisconsin Parkinson Association, the event will feature a keynote presentation by neurologist Dr. Ashley Acheson, along with a medical panel that includes movement disorder specialist Lauren Thielen, rehabilitation physician Dr. Kate Museus, and other regional experts. Dacy Reimer, President and CEO of WPA, will also be a presenter adding WPA's statewide perspective to the conversation. Additional sessions will explore movement and exercise, memory care, and the lived experience of Parkinson's, giving attendees practical tools they can take home while also creating opportunities to connect with others who understand the journey.

Reggie hopes the conference does more than provide information for a single day. She hopes it strengthens a network that continues to grow throughout northern Wisconsin, encouraging people to become involved, support one another, and help ensure that no one has to navigate Parkinson's disease alone. As she puts it, the goal is to "spread our wings throughout this whole area."

Looking back, it's remarkable to think that the journey began with one conversation at a concert. Reggie thought she was about to apologize for how Parkinson's had changed her voice. Instead, she found a community that reminded her she still had something important to say. This September, that same community will welcome others to Ashland for a day of learning, support, and shared understanding.

To learn more or register for "Navigating Parkinson's Disease in Northern Wisconsin: Compensate. Adapt. Participate.", visit wiparkinson.org/events.

Spotlight:

Listening to Your Body:

Learning to Interpret Parkinson's Signals

By: Brian Nagle, MD, MPH, UW Health, Madison,
and WPA Medical Advisory Committee Member

"On" and "off" are two words that take on a whole new meaning when you have Parkinson's disease. When your medication is working well, you feel "on." When it starts to wear off, you feel "off." These ups and downs are called fluctuations, and they are very common. Most people with Parkinson's disease will have some degree of fluctuations over time. They can show up within a few years of starting treatment, and they tend to get worse as the disease progresses.

Why Does This Happen?

The main medication used to treat Parkinson's disease is levodopa. When you take it, your brain turns it into dopamine — the chemical your brain needs to control movement. In the early stages, your brain can store extra dopamine and use it as a backup supply between doses. But as the disease progresses, the brain loses more of the cells that store dopamine. Without that backup, symptoms can return before your next dose is due. This is called "wearing off." Research has shown that the timing of when you start levodopa (earlier versus later) does not cause fluctuations — they are tied to how the disease itself progresses.

It's Not Just About Movement

Fluctuations are often called "motor fluctuations," but wearing off can affect much more than movement. Motor symptoms like tremor, stiffness, slowness, cramping, or trouble with speech and swallowing may return. But non-motor symptoms can also come and go with your medication. These may include:

- **Mood changes**: anxiety, depression, panic attacks, restlessness, or trouble sleeping
- **Thinking changes**: fatigue, brain fog, or slowed thinking
- **Body changes**: sweating, feeling too hot or cold, or bladder urgency or frequency
- **Sensory changes**: pain, aching, discomfort, or numbness

Many people do not mention these symptoms to their doctor because they do not seem related to Parkinson's disease. But non-motor symptoms can sometimes be more bothersome than motor ones — and they are still worth bringing up.

What Can You Do?

If a symptom shows up before your next dose and gets better after you take it, it may be a sign of wearing off. When this happens regularly, your doctor may recommend adjusting your treatment. Options include taking doses closer together, switching to a longer-lasting form of levodopa, or adding another medication.

Listen to your body. If you notice symptoms that come and go throughout the day, keep a journal. Write down when they start, when they improve, and when you take your medication. Share this with your neurologist — even if you are not sure the symptoms are related to Parkinson's disease. It may be something they have seen before and can help with.

Living in the Moment:

Jessica and Randy's Parkinson's Journey

When Jessica first noticed a small tremor in her left hand in 2019, Parkinson's disease crossed her mind, but she was only 48, and she didn't seem a likely candidate for the disease. For several years her symptoms were easy to dismiss with other explanations, but they persisted and even grew worse moving up her arm and into her leg. Medication for essential tremor did not help, and after repeated visits and growing concern, Jessica was finally referred to a neurologist. Blood tests and an MRI came back normal, but a DAT scan in April 2023 confirmed what she and her husband, Randy, had feared: Jessica had Parkinson's disease.

The diagnosis brought both answers and heartbreak. Jessica was shocked. She and Randy had just become empty nesters and had been looking forward to the next chapter filled with plans and new adventures. Instead, they found themselves learning about medications, side effects, attending appointments and experiencing the emotional weight of a progressive disease. For a long time, Jessica kept the diagnosis quiet. She did not want people to stare, worry, or treat her differently. Even telling their children felt difficult; she did not want to burden them.

Through the Wisconsin Parkinson Association, Jessica found education, encouragement and connection.

Eventually, silence became its own burden. As fatigue changed their social life and friends wondered why she skipped a glass of wine and they frequently left events early or didn't attend them at all, Jessica and Randy realized that sharing the truth could bring understanding instead of pity. "Being strong is helpful, but being strong and silent," Randy reflected, "sometimes works against you." Today, they speak more openly about Parkinson's, while still reminding others that Jessica is capable and wants to be treated as herself.

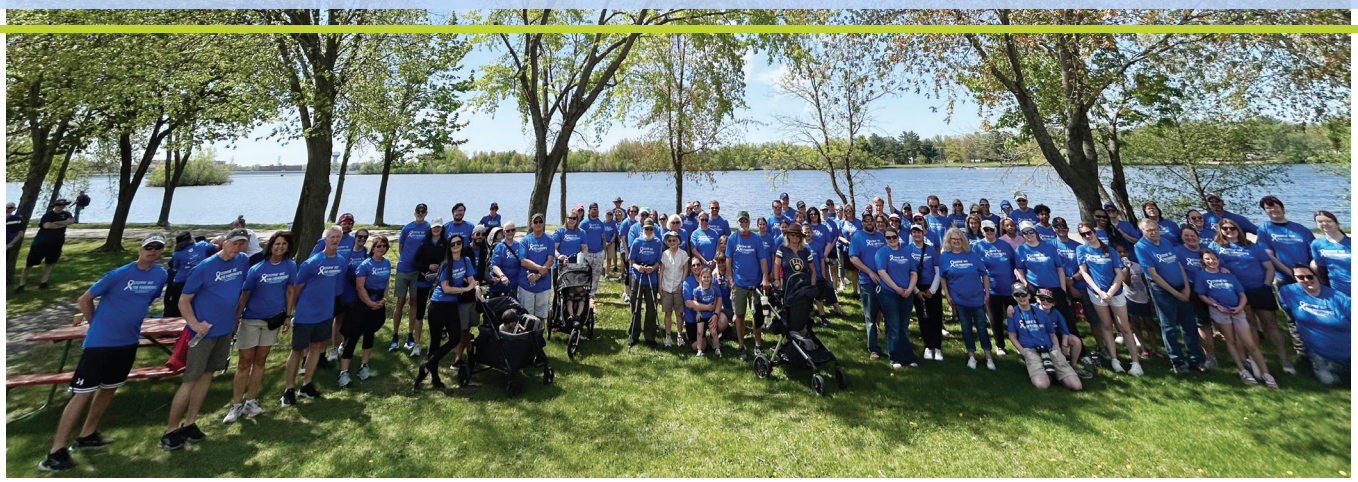
Support has become essential. Through the Wisconsin Parkinson Association, Jessica found education, encouragement and connection. She helped start a young onset support group in Madison after meeting another young woman who has Parkinson's and understood what it meant to be "different but the same." What began with two people has grown into a group of nine. Randy, too, found strength in a caregiver support group, where he can share honestly with others walking a similar road.

Randy's care is steady, loving and intuitive. Jessica says he knows when to push her to stay active and when to back off. He sees her as a fighter, someone who not only manages her own health but also encourages others. Jessica volunteers weekly with a Rock Steady Boxing class at Attic Angel Senior Community in Madison, where she bonds with others living with Parkinson's. She leaves those sessions energized, knowing that helping others helps her, too.

After 30 years of marriage, Jessica and Randy are now learning how to move through a different life together. Parkinson's has taken away some of what they imagined, but it has sharpened their gratitude for what remains: a dinner date, a walk around the neighborhood, live music earlier in the evening, moments of laughter, and days when joy breaks through. Their advice is simple: live in the moment. It's advice they would give to anyone, not just those living with Parkinson's disease. They ask themselves, "What do we need to do today?" Some days that means resting and crying together. Other days it means going out and soaking in the good. Parkinson's may have changed their plans, but it has not changed their love of life and each other.

“Steppin’ Out” Together in Stevens Point

STEPPIN' OUT FOR PARKINSON'S
CENTRAL WISCONSIN WALK FOR PARKINSON'S



When Dan Firkus was diagnosed with Parkinson’s disease in the fall of 2024, he met the news with practical courage. After years of living with an essential tremor in his right hand, he and his family began noticing changes that were harder to explain: the tremor worsened and moved to his left hand, and his feet sometimes seemed to freeze or get stuck. A neurologist, testing and a DAT scan eventually gave the family a name for what was happening- Parkinson’s disease. “I would just call it a reality,” Dan said. Life is different now, but it is still life—and for Dan, the best advice for others newly diagnosed is simple: “Keep moving.”

Those two words became the heartbeat of a new community event in Stevens Point: Steppin’ Out for Parkinson’s. Dan’s daughter, Sarah Solinsky, saw both her father’s journey and an opportunity to build local awareness and support. After attending a newly diagnosed seminar led by Dacy Reimer, WPA’s President and CEO, at Marshfield Clinic in spring of 2025, she realized that many Parkinson’s resources and events were centered in the Fox Valley or southern Wisconsin. Central Wisconsin needed something of its own, something accessible, encouraging and rooted in movement.

“I had this vision, and it came to life,” Sarah said. At first, the idea was modest: a small fundraising walk, maybe 50 people, and something her dad would enjoy. But with support from Wisconsin Parkinson Association staff and a growing circle of family, friends, sponsors and community members, it quickly became more than a walk. Sarah visited local businesses for sponsorships and basket raffle donations, worked with the city to secure a park location with a paved walkway and brick building, and mapped out the route with help from her daughter. Her sister, Kessa, became what Sarah called her “right-hand” helper, spending hours on calls and working on T-shirts, signs and details to make sure the event happened for Dad.

The first Steppin’ Out for Parkinson’s was held in May 2026 in Stevens Point on what Sarah described as a beautiful day. More than 100 participants came together, raising nearly $4,000 and proving that a simple idea, carried out with determination and love, could become something powerful. For Dan, the day carried a touch of

"I would just call it a reality,' Dan said. Life is different now, but it is still life—and for Dan, the best advice for others newly diagnosed is simple: 'Keep moving.'"

celebrity. People gathered not only because of him, but also because of what his story represented: the need for awareness, connection and support close to home.

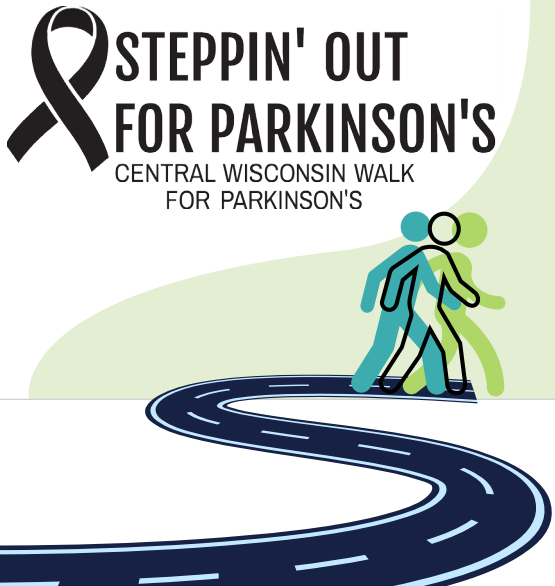
The event also helped introduce people affected by Parkinson's to one another. While Sarah kept the day moving, Dan and his wife, Cathy were able to meet others living with Parkinson's. Although they already use many of WPA's virtual resources, including Pearls for Parkinson's, the newsletter and the magazine, they know local connection matters. That sense of community is exactly what Dan hopes to see grow. "The more support groups we can get, the better," he said, because people can "work for each other."

Sarah is already thinking about what comes next. She hopes Steppin' Out for Parkinson's can expand beyond Stevens Point, with other communities participating virtually, forming teams, seeking local sponsors or creating smaller gatherings that fit their needs. The connections and positive outreach from the first event were so powerful that she believes people with Parkinson's across Wisconsin would benefit from similar opportunities close to home. As she considers next steps for Stevens Point, including the possibility of lengthening the route to a 5K-style walk, her larger hope is that other communities will be inspired to host their own local Steppin' Out for Parkinson's events.

Even the name carries Dan's touch. When Sarah told her dad she wanted to organize a walk, he came up with Steppin' Out for Parkinson's. The phrase is memorable, but it also captures his message: keep stepping out, keep moving and keep reaching toward one another.

For Sarah, the success of the first year is something to celebrate and build on. "I had this vision, and it came to life, but I didn't do it alone," she said. After the newly diagnosed seminar, she realized there was nothing quite like it in her area, so she reached out to WPA to see if they would partner with her and help make a walk possible. "That support made a big difference," she said. Jen helped create flyers and materials, Kelly encouraged her to think beyond a simple walk, Raven assisted with registration, and WPA gave her people to brainstorm with, ask questions of and plan alongside. Sarah's advice to anyone with an idea for an event is to start small with something doable, like a walk in a local park, but not to feel as though they have to figure everything out alone. With WPA's guidance and the support of local businesses and families, she said, inspired individuals can create something that brings people together, raises awareness, keeps people moving and grows from there.

"Steppin' Out for Parkinson's" is Going Statewide in Fall of 2027



Steppin' Out for Parkinson's is growing! After an inspiring first year in Stevens Point, WPA is exploring new ways to bring the energy, connection and purpose of this event to communities across Wisconsin. Soon, WPA will share resources to help local groups, families and friends host their own Steppin' Out experience—whether in person, virtually or through peer-to-peer fundraising.

Stay tuned for ways to get involved and help us keep stepping toward a future where no one faces Parkinson's alone.

Where Music Met a Mission

A Community in Perfect Harmony

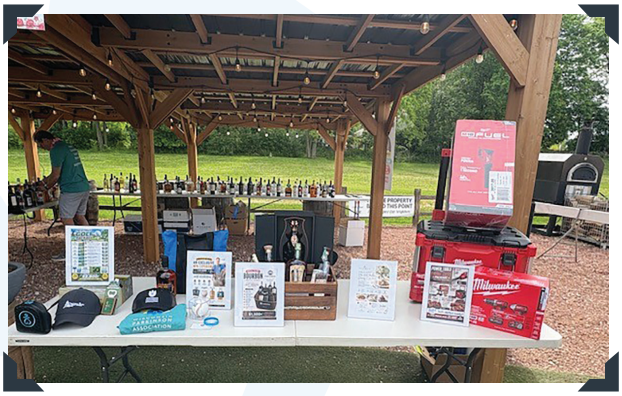
By the time the first notes of yacht rock drifted across Matty's The Big Backyard, something special was lready happening.

Friends who hadn't seen each other in months embraced. Care partners swapped stories over lunch. Volunteers hurried from table to table putting the finishing touches on raffle baskets while musicians tuned their instruments backstage. Everywhere you looked, conversations were unfolding between people who understood something about Parkinson's disease, whether they were living with it themselves, caring for someone they loved, or simply showing up because they believed no one should face it alone.

By the end of the afternoon, those conversations had helped raise more than $78,000 for the Wisconsin Parkinson Association.

But anyone who attended Concert for a Cause would probably tell you the dollars, impressive as they were, weren't the most memorable part of the day.

The annual fundraiser brought hundreds of people together on May 31 for an afternoon that blended live music, laughter, storytelling, and generosity into something that felt less like a fundraiser and more like a reunion. Guests enjoyed performances by The Abby Moeller Band and After Hours Band, browsed raffle tables, tested their luck with a liquor pull and 50/50 raffle, and spent the day reconnecting with friends old and new.



At the heart of the event, however, were the voices of people living with Parkinson's disease.

Throughout the afternoon, WPA Ambassadors stepped forward to share their personal journeys, speaking honestly about the challenges that come with a Parkinson's diagnosis while also describing the hope they've found through community, movement programs, support groups, and the relationships they've built along the way. Their stories served as a reminder that while Parkinson's affects every person differently, no one should have to navigate it in isolation.

That message echoed throughout the day.

TMJ4's The Morning Blend host Molly Fay guided the afternoon as emcee, celebrating the community's generosity and encouraging support for WPA's mission. The day also held personal meaning for Molly, who shared her mother's journey with Parkinson's.

Behind the scenes, months of planning made the event possible. A dedicated volunteer committee led by Angela Pecoraro, Kristi Guthrie, Maureen Soltwedel, Katy Malo, Lisa Kovalcik, and Craig Barbian transformed an idea into one of WPA's most successful Concert for a Cause events to date. Sponsors, donors, volunteers, musicians, and countless community members all played a role in creating a day that reflected the very best of Wisconsin's Parkinson's community.

Every raffle ticket purchased, every sponsorship secured, every donation made, and every volunteer hour contributed shared the same purpose: ensuring that people living with Parkinson's across Wisconsin have access to education, exercise programs, support groups, and resources that help them continue living full and meaningful lives.

In many ways, Concert for a Cause reflected the Wisconsin Parkinson Association itself.

It wasn't simply about raising money. It was about bringing people together. It was about celebrating resilience, honoring the courage of those living with Parkinson's, and reminding every person in attendance that they are part of a community ready to stand beside them.

The music eventually faded. The raffle tables emptied. Volunteers packed away signs and decorations.

The impact of the day, however, will continue long after the last song ended.

Mark your calendars!

Concert for a Cause returns on Sunday, May 23, 2027.

We hope you'll join us for another unforgettable afternoon of music, community, and hope.

Connecting Future Physicians to the Parkinson's Community

At the Medical College of Wisconsin-Green Bay, Dr. David Ferguson is helping future physicians see medicine through a wider lens, one that extends beyond exams, clinics and classrooms into the neighborhoods and organizations where people live, move and receive support. Through the Physician in the Community program, medical students partner with local health care systems, nonprofits and community organizations across northeast Wisconsin to explore real-world health challenges through research and quality improvement projects.

Now in its 10th year, the program gives students an early, practical introduction to ethical human subjects research, and the work of building a project from the ground up. Each student identifies a topic, finds a community partner, develops a project, works through the institutional review board process, prepares an abstract and poster, and presents the results at a year-end showcase. Along the way, the experience becomes a bridge between medical training and community service, offering students skills they will carry into residency and practice.

Medical students Madeline Morrissey and Rory Campbell are working with WPA and will be developing a project and conducting research related to Parkinson's disease.

The program's strength lies in the ownership students have from the start. Instead of stepping into a large research project in a limited role, they begin with a community need, connect with an organization or health care partner, and shape a project around a question that matters. The work is academic, but it is also deeply practical: a hands-on lesson in collaboration, project management, problem solving and listening to the community.

For Dr. Ferguson, one especially meaningful area of focus has been Parkinson's disease. A certified trainer with a personal interest in exercise as medicine, he has volunteered with Parkinson's exercise programs at the YMCA and has seen firsthand the impact of movement, consistency and encouragement. That perspective has helped inspire student projects related to boxing, fine motor skills and, most recently, Empowered by Movement, an organization founded by Lisa Pritzl. Guided by Dacy Reimer, WPA's President and CEO, this collaboration will help evaluate and strengthen programming for people living with Parkinson's. More information about Empowered by Movement and its belief that "every move matters" can be found at Lisa's website: empoweredbymovement.org.

For community partners, these projects can offer more than an extra set of hands. They can provide evidence to refine programs, support grant applications and better understand whether services are reaching the people they are designed to serve. In return, students gain experience applying research skills in settings where the results have the potential to inform real programs and real lives.

Looking ahead, Dr. Ferguson is particularly interested in questions of motivation and behavior change. For people with Parkinson's, dopamine loss can affect motivation, making exercise and other healthy routines harder to sustain. Recognizing that challenge not as laziness, but as part of the disease itself, may help shape more compassionate and effective strategies for support.

As WPA continues to champion exercise, education and connection across Wisconsin, the Physician in the Community program offers a promising path for partnership. Together, students, physicians, care partners and people with Parkinson's can ask better questions, identify barriers and turn community challenges into meaningful solutions—one project, one partnership and one person at a time.

Poling and Pitching for Parkinson's:

Building Community in Wisconsin

When Poling for Parkinson's launched this year at the Kroc Center in Green Bay, the goal was simple and powerful: place practical tools in the hands of people living with Parkinson's and help them use those tools safely, confidently and meaningfully. The first-year event welcomed about 150 attendees and quickly filled the space, showing just how much interest exists in movement-based support throughout the Parkinson's community.

Organized as a "sister event" to Pitching for Parkinson's, Poling for Parkinson's focused on interaction, education and movement. Participants rotated through workshops that demonstrated how walking poles can be used while seated, while standing and while walking on a track. Sessions covered safe techniques, proper pole height, adapting to different terrains and ways poles can support balance, movement and independence. Dr. Joy Cochran also helped guide attendees on the track, offering visual and instructional support.

The connection between Poling and Pitching for Parkinson's is intentional. Funds from Pitching for Parkinson's help provide poles at no cost to individuals with Parkinson's. Poling for Parkinson's takes the next step by supporting trainer education, helping community professionals, therapists, coaches and others become certified to teach urban poling classes. Already, more than 10 individuals have received training through the first certification session, expanding the network of knowledgeable instructors available to support people with Parkinson's.

That momentum continues Thursday, September 24, with the fourth annual Pitching for Parkinson's at Timber Rattlers Stadium in the Fox Club Room. The event, which has sold out each year, typically brings together about 250 guests for a sit-down lunch overlooking the field. While more formal than Poling for Parkinson's, the day still includes movement exercises between speakers, education about urban walking poles and their benefits, and an atmosphere centered on support, awareness and connection.

This year's keynote speaker will be Dr. David Ferguson, who will bring an inspirational message to attendees. Event organizer Kim Patterson says Pitching for Parkinson's is not simply a fundraiser. Its purpose is to give back to people living with Parkinson's by providing tools, education and encouragement. When additional funds are available, they are reinvested in local Parkinson's programming, including exercise and movement opportunities throughout the community.

The Wisconsin Parkinson Association has been an important partner in helping turn these ideas into reality. From registration support to statewide promotion, WPA helps connect people, resources and opportunities so individuals and families know they are not alone. Patterson credits WPA with helping make the vision possible, saying the organization's support has helped bring an idea to life.

For those who attended Poling for Parkinson's, and for those looking ahead to Pitching for Parkinson's, the message is the same: movement matters, community matters and support is close at hand. With WPA's partnership and the dedication of local organizers, these events continue to build awareness, offer hope and provide practical tools that help people with Parkinson's live more fully.

To register for Pitching for Parkinson's, scan the QR code, or call: 920-327-3161.

Stronger Together

A New Model for Parkinson's Care in the Chippewa Valley

Not long ago, people living with Parkinson's disease in the Chippewa Valley often found support one program at a time. A yoga class, support group, table tennis program, or speech class might help, but many people never realized how many opportunities existed just beyond the one they already knew.

"We had all these great opportunities," says Ellen Dovre, a certified yoga instructor and physical therapist with advanced certifications in Parkinson's disease. Ellen is a movement instructor with Wisconsin Parkinson Association. "We really wanted to bring everyone together in one place."

This September, Wisconsin's Parkinson's community will gather for *United for Parkinson's*, a first-of-its-kind conference connecting people living with Parkinson's, care partners, medical professionals, program leaders, and community organizations. The event will highlight movement programs, voice therapy, support groups, and wellness services while promoting collaboration between organizations that previously operated in separate "silos." Featured speakers include Bradley McDaniels of Virginia Commonwealth University on non-motor symptoms, Nick Beltz of the University of Wisconsin–Eau Claire on the Parkinson's glove project, and an individual sharing a personal deep brain stimulation journey. With live and recorded sessions, the conference represents a significant milestone in bringing together local Parkinson's services and creating a sustainable model for future collaboration.

For Andrew Pougher, Vice President of the Parkinson's Wellness Initiative 501(c)(3) and founder of Healthy Eau Claire, which operates the Parkinson's Table Tennis program and Gentlemen's support group, collaboration has always been the guiding principle and vision—one now manifesting in this first-time, landmark event uniting Parkinson's communities in the Chippewa Valley.

After moving to Wisconsin from England, and inspired by his family's experience with Parkinson's disease, Andrew saw strong programs doing meaningful work but often operating separately. The conference connects those efforts around one shared goal: helping people with Parkinson's live well. "If we can put all that to one side and focus on the people we're trying to serve," Andrew says, "then we can become really effective."

Other key collaborators in the conference and local Parkinson's work are Suzie Slota, Manager of Strategic Partnerships, who helped champion Pedaling for Parkinson's at the YMCA of the Chippewa Valley, and Laura Prince, Clinical Assistant Professor in the Department of Speech, Language, and Hearing Sciences at the University of Wisconsin–Eau Claire, who leads the Speak Out voice program for PD.

For Ellen, the most valuable part of the day may be the conversations. Receiving a Parkinson's diagnosis can feel overwhelming, and many people hesitate to try something new because they do not know anyone. Meeting someone already involved in a class, support group, or exercise program can make the first step easier.

"Life doesn't end after your diagnosis," Ellen says. "We just want to make everything available and make it easier for people to enjoy life."

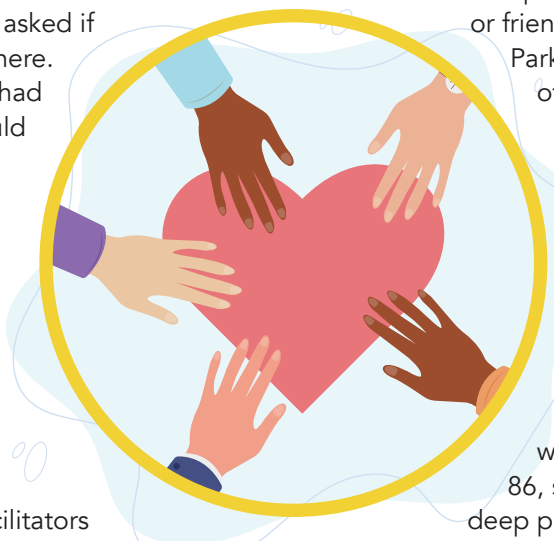
That is ultimately what *United for Parkinson's* hopes to accomplish: bringing separate strengths together so people and families affected by Parkinson's can find support, connection, and confidence close to home.

Watch the WPA website for more details on registering for the United for Parkinson's conference.

A Place for Support and Belonging

"The people are just so loving and so kind," Gail says. "Being a facilitator is a marvelous thing to add to your life."

When Gail Johnson moved into Newcastle Place, she never expected that a casual dinner conversation would become one of the most meaningful chapters of her life. After mentioning that she had facilitated Parkinson's support groups in the 1980s as a psychotherapist, a fellow resident asked if she would consider starting one there. Gail paused, but only briefly. She had recently promised herself she would find a way to honor dear friends whose family had been touched by Parkinson's. This, she realized, might be that way.



The Support Group held its first meeting in December 2019, and from the beginning Gail approached it as both a place of information and a place of belonging. With support from Newcastle Place, WPA, and co-facilitators including Sharon Kalos and Bonnie Barr, the group grew beyond its original home. Today, people come from communities across the area, often 25 to 30 at a time, sometimes more.

Gail's meetings are carefully shaped around what people need most. Each gathering begins with 10 to 15 minutes of movement, a reminder that caring for the body matters. Then come speakers, videos, or discussions on topics such as cognition, assistive devices, music, dance, the arts, mental health, and planning for future care. Gail is especially mindful of those newly diagnosed, many of whom arrive unsure where to turn. "We are constantly trying to be sure we have good education as well as support," she says.

Just as important is the way Gail helps people feel safe enough to connect. When the group separates, Bonnie and Sharon stay with those living with Parkinson's while Gail meets with care partners. She has watched people open up, encourage one another, and find strength in shared experience. Sometimes a neighbor or friend encourages the person with Parkinson's to attend Gail's group offering "pre-support," and then even attends with them for several meetings. Before long, that person feels comfortable and now they attend on their own.

For Gail, facilitation is not about having every answer. It is about listening, researching, inviting resources in, working with co-facilitators, and creating a room where people feel less alone. At nearly 86, she says the group has given her deep purpose. More than anything, she wants others to know that support groups are needed, possible, and profoundly rewarding. "The people are just so loving and so kind," Gail says. "Being a facilitator is a marvelous thing to add to your life."

Interested in joining a Support Group? Scan the QR code to find a WPA Support Group in your area.

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Wisconsin Parkinson Association provides hope, community, support, and resources for people with Parkinson's and their loved ones.