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Healthy cohort helps build momentum to combat MS

By Hilari Graff

One Rivertowns woman has motivated several local businesses to unite in an inaugural event next weekend that will raise money to combat multiple sclerosis (MS).

“Let’s Move to Fight MS,” spearheaded by Julie Fischer of Dobbs Ferry, brings together Spincredible in Ardsley, Dobbs Ferry Karate, Hastings Yoga, and Mix on Main in Dobbs Ferry for an afternoon of activity next Sunday, Feb. 8.

With an admission ticket (\$80), participants will have access to three fitness offerings, starting with indoor cycling at Spincredible (led by instructor Steve Schindler) and self-defense with Shihan Chris Tortu at Dobbs Ferry Karate. Ticket holders select a 1 or 2:30 p.m. time slot at each location so they can enjoy both activities.

Then, Mary-Ann Mastreani, owner of Hastings Yoga, will conduct a class at 3:45 p.m. at Dobbs Ferry Karate.

Free juice shots from Mix on Main will be served at both venues. The fundraiser closes with food, refreshments and a raffle at the karate studio at 5 p.m.

Fischer, 42, was diagnosed with MS in December 2011. All money raised will benefit the National Multiple Sclerosis Society through Fischer’s local team, Follow Your DreaMS, in the Society’s Climb to the Top NYC event on March 1 (climbing 66 flights of stairs to the Top of the Rock Observation Deck at Rockefeller Center).

The team’s overall goal for



Julie Fischer

JOHN MEORE/RIVERTOWNS ENTERPRISE

2015 is \$10,000; Fischer hopes that “Let’s Move to Fight MS” will attract 50 participants and bring in about \$4,000. To achieve her financial objective, she knew she had to go beyond e-mailing for donation requests, so a community event seemed ideal.

“I started brainstorming about an event last summer at the same time I was becoming more public about my disease,” explained Fischer, who has lived in the village since 2002 with her husband, David, and children Sara, 11, and Owen,

9. “I wanted to create an event based on movement because MS impacts the body’s ability to move, and movement on any level is so important.”

Fischer first contacted Patricia Straub, owner of Spincredible and a fellow Dobbs Ferry resident, about participating; Straub signed on immediately.

“One of the greatest parts of being a small, local business owner is that we have the opportunity to give back to the people in our community,” said Straub, who opened Spincredible in September 2012. “I have known Julie and her family through the dojo [Dobbs Ferry Karate] and the schools in Dobbs Ferry, so when she approached me about the fundraiser, I knew right away it was something we wanted to be a part of.”

“As a fitness facility, it just fit perfectly,” she continued. “As soon as we put the fliers out, many of our clients said they have a family member, best friend, aunt or uncle, parent, etc., who has been affected by MS. And that’s where the awareness happens — people talking about their experiences.”

Community connections fueled the event’s evolution. Straub told Fischer that Tortu had recently approached her about organizing something together. Fischer knew Tortu because her son has been going to Dobbs Ferry Karate since he was 5.

“I try to teach my students that part of being a karate stu-

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MS fundraiser

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dent is giving back and doing good for others,” Tortu said. “Everyone associates karate with the physical aspect, yet there is so much more that creates a good karate student, and participating in an event like this is just one example.”

Tortu’s father, José Guzman, opened Ryu Renshi-Dan in Dobbs Ferry in 1977; Tortu took over the school as the owner and chief instructor in 2009. According to Tortu, the school goes by both names.

“I had really wanted to do a fundraiser of some sort for years now,” he continued. “I have taught both Patti’s and Julie’s kids for over four years. They are both great professional people, so when they brought this idea to me I was all over it, plus it is closer to home for us, being that it is impacting one of our own families.”

Fischer, Straub and Tortu met in early December to determine specifics of the fundraiser. “I had self-defense and cycling elements, and wanted to include a yoga portion to allow for people of all levels, including those with MS, to participate,” Fischer noted. “Yoga is highly recommended for people with MS as a way to improve balance and

flexibility and reduce stress.”

Fischer went to Mastreani, who has owned Hastings Yoga since last January, to gauge her interest. The two women have been friends for nearly a decade.

“I decided to participate in ‘Let’s Move to Fight MS’ because I believe in Julie and in her holistic approach to managing the symptoms of her MS. I also know that yoga is a system and tool that anyone can use to stay healthy and in balance in the face of any adversities or disease or pain,” Mastreani said.

With these three partners in place, Fischer then approached Vance Campbell of Mix on Main to add a healthy-eating element, and spin instructor Schindler, whose class she takes at New York Sports Club.

Food at the reception will come from Dickey’s BBQ in Yonkers, whose owner, Yves Le Breton, lives in Dobbs Ferry. Raffle prizes include a photo session from Mary Jane Photography; five-ride certificate from Spincredible; 10-pack of yoga sessions from Hastings Yoga; grease/oil/filter change from Straub Auto in Hastings; and a gel seat cover from Endless Trail Bikeworx.

Fischer began experiencing symptoms in 2005. She lost strength in her hand and had weakness in her arm but the doctor suggested it related to her carrying around her infant

son. Three years later, while training for the Avon 39-mile walk, she had numbness in her legs and arms. Tests revealed two lesions on her brain, but doctors didn’t think there was cause for alarm.

“In 2011, my symptoms re-emerged, but worse. I felt numbness and tingling along my right side in my foot, hand, and face and experienced extreme fatigue,” Fischer recalled. “Tests showed two more lesions. I had lots of tests the rest of that year, and in December I was officially diagnosed with MS.”

After a year on medication (throughout 2012) and still suffering from fatigue and migraines, Fischer decided to take control of her health. For three years prior to her diagnosis, Fischer had been focused on getting healthier, with increased exercise and experimenting with different diets. In the process, she realized that certain foods made her feel worse or better.

She read the book “Managing Multiple Sclerosis Naturally” by Judy Graham, which talked about the “best-bet diet” for MS: no gluten, dairy, legumes or refined sugar, high in lean proteins, fruits, vegetables, and vitamins/minerals. Fischer first eliminated gluten and felt better, and that led to her getting off dairy, eating more vegetables, doing the 21-Day Sugar Detox, and adopting a full paleo

diet (which also excludes legumes and all grains).

“The brain fog that is often associated with MS had lifted, and I realized more what I was meant to be doing. In a way, this took me out of hiding and I was able to really let people support me,” Fischer said. “This pointed me in the direction of nutrition. The body wants to heal itself, and if you provide it with the right foods, nutrients and proper care, then it can do it.”

Fischer will graduate in September from the online Institute for Integrative Nutrition. She is studying nutrition and health to become a certified holistic health coach with her own private coaching practice, Healthy On Hudson.

The fundraising event is her primary focus at the moment. “It has been so rewarding to see these businesses come together. I am really grateful to be within this community and see people show so much support,” she said.

“Let’s Move to Fight MS” next Sunday, Feb. 8, 1-6 p.m., is for ages 14 and up. The \$80 ticket includes access to all three classes that day, plus one raffle ticket and refreshments. Purchase tickets at www.letsmovefightms.myevent.com/?1420477851. For more information, contact Julie Fischer at healthyonhudson@gmail.com.