50th Anniversary Celebration

August 20, 2026

50 YEARS
FOUNDED 1976

MYASTHENIA GRAVIS
mgmi
FOUNDATION OF MICHIGAN

Honoring Our Past = Inspiring Our Future

Wow, fifty years... that's hard to believe!

I recently spoke with Darlene Briest as we reminisced about our first meeting in April 1976 that was held in her home with 10 attendees affected by Myasthenia Gravis (MG). The journey from that humble beginning to the service and outreach MG-MI is honored to provide today is truly phenomenal! Working together, we have been faithful and diligent in delivering support and resources to hundreds of patients throughout Michigan. Reassuring them that they are not alone when living with MG—MG-MI is here for you!. It is truly our privilege and joy to encourage and support patients and their care teams as we walk the MG journey together.

I personally am honored and blessed to reflect on God's blessings over the past 50 years – what fond memories! Yet, it is with anticipation, and that ever-present hope that MG patients hold on to, that we embark on future opportunities and goals into our next bi-centennial era.

Esther M. Land
Co-Founder

50 YEARS | MYASTHENIA GRAVIS mgmi FOUNDATION OF MICHIGAN
FOUNDED 1976

MISSION

The Myasthenia Gravis Foundation of Michigan is committed to our MG Community by providing support, community connections, education, and advocacy.

VISION

Living your best life with Myasthenia Gravis.

50th Anniversary Celebration Gathering

Thursday, August 20, 2026
Grand Rapids Art Museum
5:00 – 8:00 p.m.
Program 6:00 – 7:00 p.m.

Special thanks to John Bosserman for tonight's slide show

Welcome

Keshia Dickason and Wardell Frazier
MG-MI Co-Directors

Shelley Irwin
WGVU Radio, Emcee

Inspirational Message & Invocation

Lisa Gigliotti
Board Member

Honoring Our Past

Esther Land
MG-MI Co-Founder

Highlights Remembered

Jack Passwaters
Past President, Board of Trustees

Rae Green
Former Executive Director

Amit Sachdev, M.D.
Board Member & Medical Advisor

Recognizing our Founding Members

Inspiring Our Future

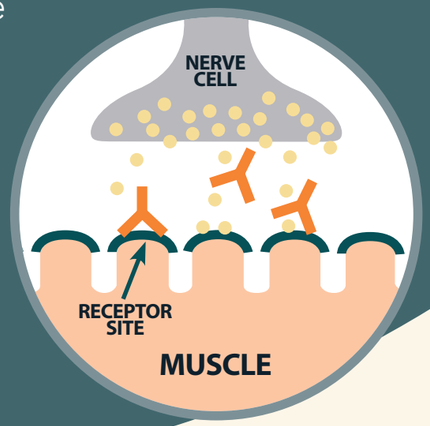
Susan Woolner
President, Board of Directors

Fueling the Care Silent Auction Announced

Enjoy
A time to eat, greet and reminisce

WHAT IS MYASTHENIA GRAVIS?

Myasthenia Gravis (MG) (Pronounced My-as-theen-ee-a Grav-us) is a serious autoimmune neuromuscular disease that manifests itself in varying degrees of weakness. For unknown reasons, in MG, the immune system produces antibodies that attack the nerve-muscle junction. The impulse from the healthy nerve is blocked or altered by the antibodies, so it cannot reach the healthy muscle. This defect, along with a reduction of receptor sites, causes fatigue and weakness of the victim's voluntary muscles.



As a result of this defect, victims may experience *one or a combination of the following symptoms:*

- Intermittent blurred or double vision
- Involuntary drooping eyelids
- Nasal voice, especially after prolonged talking
- Difficulty in chewing and swallowing, particularly near the end of a meal
- Loss of facial expression, including inability to smile
- Weakness of the arms and legs
- Difficult or shallow breathing

MG can appear in all races and in both sexes from infancy to senior citizen.

It is not a communicable disease or directly inherited. However, in recent years, familial autoimmune diseases are being noted. The prevalence of MG is estimated to be **70,000 to 100,000 people** in the United States.
The cause and cure are unknown.

Diagnostic testing includes an antibody titer blood test, electromyogram, review of symptoms, and a thorough neurologic exam. An ice test may be given for ocular symptoms.

There are several treatment modalities available, including anticholinesterase and immunosuppressive medications, plasma exchange and infusion therapies, and thymectomy (surgical removal of the thymus gland). In recent years, advancements in the understanding of the immune system in relation to the neuromuscular junction have accelerated the development of FDA-approved therapies. These newer optional treatments bring an exciting era for persons living with MG offering an improved quality of life. ***With proper treatment, many patients lead active and productive lives.***

> "I was a young attorney trying to manage a demanding career at the same time as unstable myasthenia gravis symptoms. I met Esther Land and observed how she and her organization's efforts brought people hope and a sense that they could live a life of meaning with MG. I found inspiration in MG Foundation-Michigan and I wanted to be part of Esther's efforts to provide to others MG information and an assurance that they were not alone on their health journey. I remain grateful decades later!
> ~ Lisa G.

MG is an illness with **HOPE!**

MG-MI MILESTONES

MEMORABLE INFORMATION

1976

$0 RESEARCH SUPPORT
$425 YEAR END FUND BALANCE
225 TOTAL ON DATABASE
18 PATIENTS
11 SUPPORT MEETINGS PER YEAR

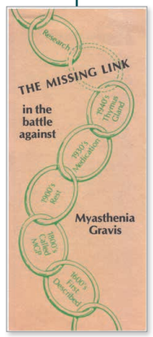
Tony Randall, actor & MG National Campaign Chairman

First Annual Meeting

- Became Great Lakes Chapter of MGFA
- Osserman Quarterly Newsletter
- Established Medical Advisory Board

1979

$2,600 RESEARCH SUPPORT
$4,489 YEAR END FUND BALANCE
265 TOTAL ON DATABASE
110 PATIENTS
31 SUPPORT MEETINGS PER YEAR

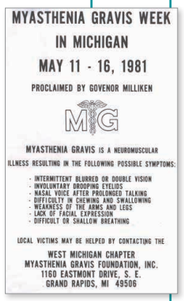


Printed our 1st brochure "Missing Link"

- Fashion Show Fundraiser
- Mall Bazaar Fundraisers
- Christmas cards sales
- MG & Rel Disease Annual to medical doctors
- Begin Support Meetings
- Gave Nursing Training
- Media Promotion

1980's

$3,100 RESEARCH SUPPORT
$12,900 YEAR END FUND BALANCE
363 TOTAL ON DATABASE
230 PATIENTS
38 SUPPORT MEETINGS PER YEAR



Governor Milliken proclaims MG Week

Eastbrook Mall Health Expo

- Celebrated 10th Anniversary
- Exhibited at Eastrook Mall Bazaar
- Hired PT office staff & PT Director
- "Trash for Cash" Fundraiser
- Las Vegas Nights Fundraiser
- Combined Federal Campaign Funding

1990's

$18,190 RESEARCH SUPPORT
$56,348 YEAR END FUND BALANCE
552 TOTAL ON DATABASE
432 PATIENTS
41 SUPPORT MEETINGS PER YEAR

Harley-Davidson Poker Runs

- MI Frat Order-Eagles $18,190
- Grant for MI research at Wayne State Univ
- Travel Grand Traverse Motorcycle FR
- MG Splash with Gd Valley Divers Club
- Hosted MGFA Annual Conf in 1994
- Produced PSA with ITA-Mid-MI
- First Walk-a-thon
- Hired PT Executive Director

2000's

$n/a RESEARCH SUPPORT
$52,521 YEAR END FUND BALANCE
681 TOTAL ON DATABASE
518 PATIENTS
79 SUPPORT MEETINGS PER YEAR

Annual Hoon Open Golf Outing

5K became Eenhoorn Run/Walk

- Celebrated 25th Anniversary
- Walk-a-Thon became 5K Run/Walk
- Several Restaurant Fundraisers
- Texas Hold'Em Fundraisers
- Spartan UPC Labels Fundraiser
- Bedroll & Barbecue Fundraiser
- Gov. Engler photo op - MG Awareness
- 30 min. awareness taping at GVSU TV

2010's

$17,000 RESEARCH SUPPORT
$79,094 YEAR END FUND BALANCE
965 TOTAL ON DATABASE
703 PATIENTS
177 SUPPORT MEETINGS PER YEAR

Printed brochure "Understanding MG"

2018 Annual Conference MSU

- Name change to M G of MI
- Obtained our own 501(c)(3) status
- Governance from Trustees to Directors
- Began sponsorships with Pharma cos
- Celebrated 35th & 40th Anniversaries
- WZZM TV appearances
- Printed "Understanding MG" brochure
- Began full-day annual conferencs

2020's Thru June 2026

$36,000 RESEARCH SUPPORT
$411,320 FUND BALANCE
1,497 TOTAL ON DATABASE
751 PATIENTS
151 SUPPORT MEETINGS

- Began Health Summit & Resource Fair
- Expanded pharmaceutical partnerships
- Research grants to Yale U & MGNet
- Virtual Conference & Support Mtgs
- Contract with Communications Mgr
- Hired PT Admin Assistant
- First Medical Student Resch Grant
- Awarded 8 Med Student Resch Grants
- Hired PT ED-Development
- Hired PT ED-Org Strat & Admin
- Rec. $55,500 from bequests

Awards

ESTHER M. LAND FOUNDER'S AWARD

Jack D. Passwaters

IN RECOGNITION OF 50 YEARS

Evelyn P. Navarro, MD
John R. Visser, MD
Elida Williams
Sue E. Higgs
Cathy Wassenar

2026 RESEARCH GRANTS

MGNet Scholar—$2,000

Fatemah Khani-Habibabadi, PhD—Yale School of Medicine Research project: *B-Cell Depletion and Refractory Response to Anti-CD19 Therapy in MG*

Kevin O'Connor, PhD—Yale School of Medicine, Research project—*Seronegative and MuSK MG*

Michigan State University Students—$2,500 grant each
2026 MG-MI Esther Land Finding Solutions in Myasthenia Gravis
Literature review research

Grant recipients and their topic:

Heidi Aguas—Achieving Minimal MG Manifestations (MMD)

Eaman Ahmad—MG & Muscle Pain

Shems Hamdan—gMG & Anti-Lipid Medications

Cynthia Hinderscheid—Pre-existing Infectious Illness (screening)

Annie Hoang-Pham—Inebilizumab Transition

Saneh Kaur—Muscle Relaxants (Safety)

Emily Myers—gMG and Employment

Justin Romero—The Underhoused & Underinsured Impact

Our Leadership

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Fueling the Care
for Myasthenia Gravis in Michigan

Myasthenia gravis can impose significant burdens on patients and families that extend beyond neuromuscular symptoms. The combination of disease-related physical, emotional, employment, health insurance, financial, and lifestyle changes can mount significant challenges. Professional healthcare navigation and social work interventions are proven to offer comprehensive solutions to these challenges. By integrating these clinical specialists into the MG care team, this pilot program will address the spectrum of patient needs.

MG-MI Fueling the Care for Myasthenia Gravis in Michigan represents an investment in patient-centered, comprehensive care for rare diseases. The social worker and patient navigator with MG expertise will be a supportive listener and provide individualized guidance and referrals to address patient care, clinical integration, access to treatment, and payer issues that deny or delay treatment for people with MG. We call upon donors to support this innovative pilot program. MG-MI is seeking initial funding of $90,000 for a 36-month pilot. By funding current foundation commitments, we have already received a $45,000 matching grant commitment. We are publicly launching the Fueling the Care initiative tonight and we are asking for community support to help us transform MG care in Michigan.

Expected Outcomes and Impact

For Patients

- Improved disease understanding to aid treatment adherence and decision-making
- Enhanced quality of life through psychosocial and resource support
- Reduced financial burden through referrals to assistance programs, disability benefits, and employment accommodations
- Maintained functional independence when possible

For Health Systems

- Increase neurologists' knowledge of symptoms and treatments for myasthenia gravis, and best practices of insurance approval and prescription processing
- Increase patient access to neurologist-prescribed treatment(s) including FDA-approved therapies for MG across the state
- Reduced emergency department visits through proactive disease management guidance

For Community Impact

- Increased awareness of myasthenia gravis in the Michigan healthcare community
- Development of Michigan-specific MG resources and support networks
- Regional access to clinical specialists through a "Care on Call" model
- Training opportunities for social work students in rare disease care

MYASTHENIA GRAVIS mgmi FOUNDATION OF MICHIGAN

HOPE! The bedrock of the MG-MI Foundation is HOPE! With profound gratitude, we honor Esther Land for her fortitude, tenacity, resilient dedication, generosity, drive, lively positivity, and for seeing the need and acting on it!

I was diagnosed with generalized MG 50 years ago! As a 17-year-old senior in high school, it was a daunting diagnosis! There was fear, apprehension, and unknown obstacles for my future. How would I live with MG?

With my family, I attended the first Christmas party for the newly organized MG-MI chapter. I saw HOPE! I was not alone. I saw and met other MG patients. I saw those with MG living a life of joy. Esther gave all of us an invaluable gift when she organized and created the MG-MI Foundation! What a gift to have a community of support! It is a place/space where we belong, accepted for who we are, an organization where we can ask questions, gather knowledge and understanding. Back in the day, before any internet or personal computers, I loved receiving the printed newsletter–it was a pipeline for a wealth of information and invaluable resource.

Thank you MG-MI Foundation and Esther Land for bringing HOPE to all of us! Congratulations on a job well done!!

~ Cathy Wassenar

Congratulations!

Thank You MG-MI for 50 years of service to Myasthenia Gravis patients throughout Michigan

Congratulations!

to the

Courageous *Coraggio!* Spirit Award Winners

for being part of

50 years of MG-MI inspiration

from *With Courage I Can, LLC.*

MYASTHENIA GRAVIS mgmi FOUNDATION OF MICHIGAN proudly presents the *Coraggio!* Spirit Award to Eva Schmucker

2025 Yolanda Arnold

Eva Schmucker 2024

2023 Aimee Jazdzyk Smithem

Ashley Boucher 2022

2021 Jack Sheehan

Mat & Vicki Mikolajski 2020

2019 Ashley Cotten

Brandie DeHaan 2018

2017 Marilyn Andersen

Arlene Van Til 2016

2015 Priscilla Walden

Susan Southerton 2014

2013 Esther Land

Dianne Bramer 2012

2011 Jennifer Walsh

1970's

The Myasthenia Gravis Foundation, Inc.
230 Park Avenue
New York, New York 10017

Charter

The Myasthenia Gravis Foundation, Inc. having determined that the requisite steps for organizing a chapter have been taken, hereby authorizes the formation of the

WEST MICHIGAN CHAPTER

On its part, the above chapter has agreed to carry out the objectives and the purposes for which this organization was founded in the territory assigned to it, and to foster its work in accord with, and subject to the By Laws, Rules, Regulations and Policies of the Myasthenia Gravis Foundation, Inc.

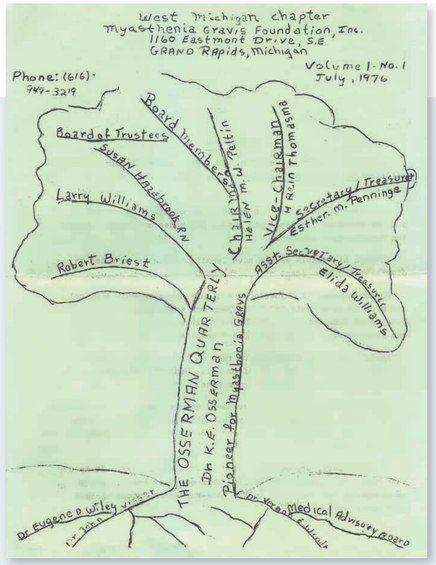
By Authority of the Board of Directors

Murray A. Blairas
President

Dated: April 24, 1976

Charter from MGFA
April 1976

MGA-Detroit Support
September 1976



West Michigan Chapter
Myasthenia Gravis Foundation, Inc.
1160 Eastmont Drive, S.E
GRAND Rapids, Michigan

Volume 1-No. 1
July, 1976

Phone: (616)-949-3219

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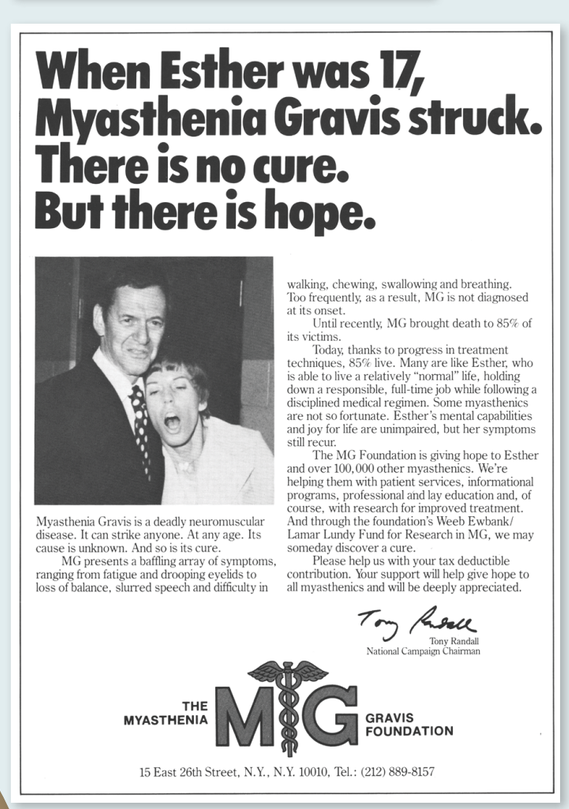


When Esther was 17, Myasthenia Gravis struck. There is no cure. But there is hope.

Myasthenia Gravis is a deadly neuromuscular disease. It can strike anyone. At any age. Its cause is unknown. And so is its cure.

MG presents a baffling array of symptoms, ranging from fatigue and drooping eyelids to loss of balance, slurred speech and difficulty in walking, chewing, swallowing and breathing. Too frequently, as a result, MG is not diagnosed at its onset.

Until recently, MG brought death to 85% of its victims.

Today, thanks to progress in treatment techniques, 85% live. Many are like Esther, who is able to live a relatively "normal" life, holding down a responsible, full-time job while following a disciplined medical regimen. Some myasthenics are not so fortunate. Esther's mental capabilities and joy for life are unimpaired, but her symptoms still recur.

The MG Foundation is giving hope to Esther and over 100,000 other myasthenics. We're helping them with patient services, informational programs, professional and lay education and, of course, with research for improved treatment. And through the foundation's Weeb Ewbank/Lamar Lundy Fund for Research in MG, we may someday discover a cure.

Please help us with your tax deductible contribution. Your support will help give hope to all myasthenics and will be deeply appreciated.

Tony Randall
Tony Randall
National Campaign Chairman

THE MYASTHENIA GRAVIS FOUNDATION

15 East 26th Street, N.Y., N.Y. 10010, Tel.: (212) 889-8157

National Magazine Ad
1970's - 1980's

Muscular Disease Victims Join Hands

By Sharon Hanks

For the last six years, Linda Hoffman, 33, searched in vain for someone like her—suffering from myasthenia gravis.

"I felt like I was the only one in the world that had it," she explains.

But now, for her sake and that of countless others in West Michigan, Ms. Hoffman, 3322 Ramswood Ct. NE, no longer must feel alone with the rare neuromuscular disease that causes muscle weakness.

Ms. Hoffman was overjoyed to learn that a West Michigan Chapter of the Myasthenia Gravis (MG) Foundation was established here in April.

"I went to the first meeting and it really meant a lot," she says. "I'm not alone anymore. It has taken away a lot of fears and anxieties."

Doctors say MG is a difficult condition to diagnose. Symptoms are double vision, drooping eyelids, loss of balance and difficulty in walking, swallowing and chewing. In early stages, the disease often is mistakenly diagnosed as an emotional disturbance, brain damage or malfunction of other organs because the patient's condition fluctuates from day to day.

Helen Peltin, 25, chapter chairman, says the group is trying to make the public and medical field more aware of the disease and to raise funds for research. The illness has no cure but symptoms can be eased through medication.

It is a "strange disease," Mrs. Peltin says. "I think the main thing is that people think you're nuts. One day I can be normal but the next day I can't get out of bed because I'm too weak."

So far, about 80 persons have traveled from Ionia, Kalamazoo and Grand Haven to attend monthly meetings. Of this number, 50 have MG.

"Right now, the novelty of finding others hasn't worn off yet," Mrs. Peltin says. But in the future, the chapter hopes to have area medical experts speak at meetings. A quarterly newsletter began in July and members also are collecting proof-of-purchase coupons found on food labels to raise money.

Four physicians have agreed to serve on an advisory board for the chapter: neurologists John R. Visser, M.D., Evelyn Navarro, M.D., and D. Eugene Wiley, M.D., and a specialist in internal medicine and cardiology, Vernon E. Wendt, M.D.

As an example of the traumatic emotional effects of MG, Mrs. Peltin says that when she was 21, she was so embarrassed about her condition that she quit school, stopped visiting friends and avoided all trips outside her home.

"For two years, I wouldn't leave the house because I was ashamed," she recalls. She could not smile, chew food or even clutch a glass because she was too weak. "My husband would grind up my food and feed me."

Now, through medication, Mrs. Peltin's condition has improved and no longer does she stay home. Because she has had numerous difficulties in breathing, emergency tubes thrust down her throat have partly paralyzed her vocal chords, causing her to speak in a raspy voice.

Esther Penninga, the chapter's secretary-treasurer, says another disheartening thing about the disease is that once a boy friend finds out about it, he drops you.

"People think you're drunk because you can hardly talk," says Miss Penninga, 34, of 1160 Eastmont Dr. SE. "Believe me, a curb is even hard to get up sometimes."

Martha McWilliams, 40, of 1840 Mason St. NE, calls the local chapter "a dream come true. There was a great need for a chapter in this area, but I didn't realize there were this many people in the area who had the disease."

Miss McWilliams, who has had the disease since 1962, said she once thought MG patients were unemployable.

"Through the group I found out there are a lot of businesses that will hire and I was glad to hear that. It gives you a better outlook towards the business people."

Because of group encouragement, she plans to write a book about the disease.

The nationwide MG foundation was founded in 1952 in New York City and now has 52 chapters. It has established 37 clinics and research centers throughout the United States.

Perhaps the most famous person afflicted with MG in recent times was Aristotle Onassis, 69, the late Greek shipping magnate.

The illness usually strikes women between 20 and 40, and men after 40. Foundation surveys estimate it strikes one in 10,000 to 40,000 persons.

Monthly meetings here are held at 7:30 p.m. the second Monday of each month at the Kentwood Public Library, 4700 Kalamazoo Ave. SE.

Grand Rapids Press Photograph by JIM STARKEY

WORKING on the organization's second quarterly newsletter are Helen Peltin, left, and Esther Penninga.

Grand Rapids Press Article
Sept. 1976

Congrats Esther

for 50 Courageous Years so no one with MG would feel alone.

Coraggio!

1980's

Christmas Party - 1986

"I can't believe the MG organization is celebrating 50 years in 2026. I remember when mom and dad were at a church meeting and suddenly dad could not swallow. Everyone wanted him to go to the ER but instead they came home and called you. You said just to sit and relax and his swallowing would come back - and it did!

~ Gladys Wierenga

"Thank you for the email with attached materials! I called your office yesterday late afternoon, after 5 PM, and expected to just get the voicemail to leave a message. However, your lady Esther Land answered the phone despite the time of day, and spent 20+ minutes on the phone with me, going through how MG-MI might help with my MG, etc.

Esther went out of her way, on her own time, to help. Please put in a good word for her. You will definitely see me soon, both online and in person, for your events!

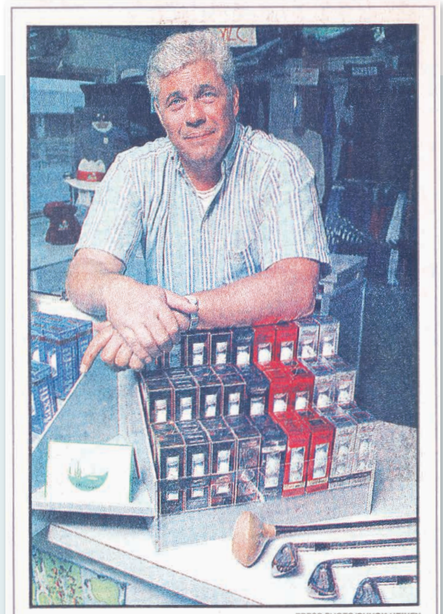
~ Jim D.

1990's

Motorcycle benefit tour to Interlochen

When motorcyclists head north Saturday, Sue Higgs, a myasthenia gravis patient, hopes she's one of them. Higgs, of Plainwell, wants to participate in the two-day Grand Traverse Motorcycle Tour, an excursion to the Traverse City area whose proceeds will support research into the cause and cure of MG as well as expand support services for area patients. All she needs is a driver who offers to take her along. The tour begins at 9 a.m. at Perry's Harley-Davidson, 579 Portage St. Participants must have at least $100 in pledges and pay a $25 registration fee that covers meals, games and awards. To register, call Perry's at 342-0400.

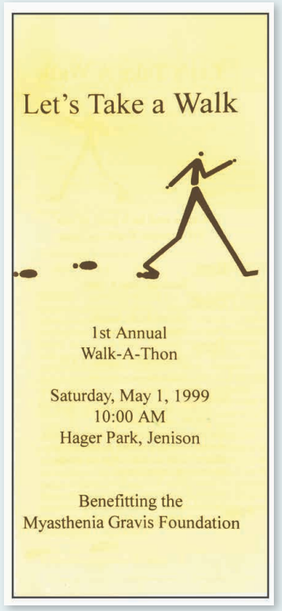
MGFA Annual Conference - April 1984



PRESS PHOTO/CHUCK HEINEY

Myasthenia Gravis Foundation *is sponsoring its third annual four-person golf outing Saturday at Fairway Golf Course, 6150 14th Ave., Jenison. Registration at 8:30 a.m. will be followed by shotgun start at 9 a.m. Looking forward to the event is Fred Hoonhorst, vice president of the foundation. Tee times are available by calling the Myasthenia Gravis (MG) office at 956-0622. Cost is $50 and includes 18 holes of golf, cart, door prizes and lunch. The first person to shoot a hole-in-one on the fourth hole will win the use of an Oldsmobile for one year. Proceeds from the event will benefit patients and their families. MG is a neuromuscular disease.*

Hoon Open Promotion - August 1993



2000's-10's

Govenor Engler - MG Awareness 2000

Eenhoorn MG 5K Run/Walk 2017

"Support for newly diagnosed patients is most important. MG is by no means the end of the road, but it makes the road pretty uncertain at times. New patients need to get drilled in knowing MG does come and go, and they need to learn to schedule their lives a little differently. I commend the efforts of the MG Foundation. I believe the organization can fulfill an important role informing patients and the public at large.
~ Rinck H.

Esther, you have been there for my weakest moments and strongest moments with MG,
Brandie D.

2020's

Team De Haan - 2022

Land Rovers - 2022

Health Summit & Resource Fair - 2025

Kristy's Team - 2023

Why does Paul Twydell, DO volunteer as a Medical Advisor?
Myasthenia Gravis is a complicated and still misunderstood autoimmune neurological disease. When I first arrived in Grand Rapids, it quickly became obvious the MG-MI (formerly MGFA Great Lakes chapter) was playing a vital role in supporting and communicating with those afflicted in the community. Educating patients and caregivers about the disease and its intricacies is vital. I wanted to join MG-MI to offer my expertise to those afflicted as well as lend my support to those who are contributing so much to the cause. We are very fortunate to have such an active and caring group in our community.

My father has been approved for infusions in the home, and the provider has approved his financial hardship application. He is covered 100% for one year and we feel very blessed! This never would have happened without MG-MI. My dad is so grateful! Thank you for leading us down a path that will help our dad. Our hearts are filled with joy and hope! Thank you again!
~ Karmen Kraft

a positive life

I started as an MG patient seeking support from MG-MI. Last year, my wife Ann and I were able to help educate others about how we live a positive life with MG from a patient and care giver perspective.
~ Erik Rayford

Thank You

for celebrating with us, believing in our mission,
and helping fuel the future of Myasthenia Gravis care.
Here's to the next 50 years of hope, progress,
and lives transformed.

In Loving Memory

of **Lori Sytsma,**
Esther's sister and MG-MI Volunteer.

50 YEARS | MYASTHENIA GRAVIS mgmi FOUNDATION OF MICHIGAN
FOUNDED 1976

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