



Community View

Chronic illnesses won't keep Yourman down

Thirteen-year-old has earned a nomination for a national hero award

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FAIR LAWN — Cystic Fibrosis (CF) and diabetes cannot keep 13-year-old Fair Lawn native, Sarah Yourman, from being the only thing she wants to be — a normal kid.

It is her battle to be "normal" in the midst of fighting two life-threatening diseases that has earned her a nomination for a national hero awards program, the Volvo for Life Awards.

The award recognizes people who have made outstanding contributions in the areas of safety, quality of life or environment. Using herself as an example for other people with CF and diabetes, Yourman has done just that.

She wakes up at 5 a.m. every morning for chest physical therapy before school. This requires forceful pounding on the chest to dislodge mucus in the lungs. She then takes 60 pills a day when she is well, and is continuously attached to a pump that regulates the insulin flow to her body.

None of this stops her from going to Hunter Mountain in New York every Friday to practice for ski competitions.

"My Dad taught me how to ski when I was 2," said Yourman. "I think I learned how to ski before I could walk."

All the practice has paid off. Yourman placed first in her age group in the state at

the NASTAR national ski championships earlier this year.

Skiing and exercise are a few of the driving forces in Yourman's life. She also enjoys biking and running to keep in shape. She even plans on making running a more important part of her life when she attends Fair Lawn High School next year.

"I don't think high school will be more difficult," Yourman said. "In fact, my eighth-grade teacher is coaching cross country next year so I'm going to join that too."

Yourman's active lifestyle, despite her illnesses, is what moved her mother, Lisa Yourman, to nominate her for the award.

"I see Sarah as a hero to me because here she is dealing with two life-threatening illnesses and she just keeps moving along like a normal kid," she said. "She's like the wind beneath my wings."

Sarah Yourman's influence extends beyond the family. With her mother, she created and regularly maintains a Web site to encourage people afflicted with disease to become more active and involved with life. The Web site, www.sarahyourman.com, contains Sarah Yourman's personal accomplishments in athletics and research on the latest medications and treatments for CF and diabetes.

"She's not only a hero to



Cystic Fibrosis and diabetes does not stop Sarah Yourman, 13, from racing downhill on skis. She recently won first place in the NASTAR national ski championships. The 13-year-old has been nominated for a Volvo for Life Award, which recognizes people who make contributions regarding safety, quality of life or environment. She has done that by using herself as an example.



PHOTO COURTESY OF LISA YOURMAN.

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me," said Lisa Yourman. "We get e-mails all the time on her guestbook about how people are so inspired by her."

Sarah Yourman recently took her influence to the political level, as well. She attended a press conference with Gov. James E. McGreevey in which instituting a preferred drug list in the Medicaid guidelines was addressed.

With this list, many CF patients would not have access to the same drugs Sarah Yourman uses regularly, so she approached the governor and asked him to reconsider.

"Now there is no preferred drug list," said Lisa Yourman. "The next thing we're working on is a disease management program that encourages CF patients to take health care into their own hands."

Sarah Yourman may be a hero herself, but she's not without her own heroes. Her grandmother, who survived ovarian cancer for 20 years, inspires her. Sarah Yourman was not old enough to remember her grandmother, but home videos and stories

told by her parents keep the memory instilled in her mind.

Despite her hectic schedule, Sarah Yourman makes sure she has lunch with her four best friends everyday and takes regular trips to the mall. Just like any other adolescent, she also finds time to fight with her younger brother.

"We beat each other up a lot," she said.

But that doesn't mean that Jeffrey Yourman, who also has CF, isn't inspired by his sister.

"He never says these things, but I know he must look up to me somewhere in his heart," said Sarah Yourman.

In March, she will find out if she is one of the nominees to be included in the 100 semi-finalists chosen by Volvo.

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