A Doctor Walks For MS

Alan D. Legatt is no athlete. And he doesn't get hot flashes, either.

But this weekend, his running and walking team, the Hot Flashes, will be participating in several fundraisers for the National Multiple Sclerosis Society. Dr. Legatt has been walking to support the organization for the past 12 years. In that time, he has raised just over $350,000 for the group, bringing in an average of $30,000 a year through solicitations to colleagues and friends.

Dr. Legatt, 63 years old, is an attending in the Department of Neurology at Montefiore Medical Center in the Bronx and a professor of clinical neurology at Albert Einstein College of Medicine.

His team's name came from a group effort in 1996 to walk the New York City Marathon. (A colleague came up with the name and Dr. Legatt says he was the token male on that first team.) That marathon led to invitations to participate in other races and walks around the city.

Dr. Legatt had never walked for charity or asked friends for donations when he started out, but because he had watched several beloved men with multiple sclerosis progress to being wheelchair-bound, he wanted to see what he could do to raise money. He figured it was a good strategy to pick a cause and ask people to give yearly. He asked others to join him and he kept the Hot Flashes name because it's funny and invites conversation when people wear the team T-shirt. He's gotten a few walkers and donations through those chance conversations.

The races took on an added urgency for Dr. Legatt in 2000 when another relative was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. "That turned me into a fanatic," he says, "but I'm a nice fanatic."

Dr. Legatt and his wife, Elise, will walk on Saturday in the Rockland County race and on Sunday in the Westchester County race. He anticipates some 130 Hot Flashes team members to participate in walks in those two counties and a race in New York City.

Unlike many people who walk for charity, Dr. Legatt can trace the event of his fundraising when he goes to medical conferences. Often, he will extend a talk on multiple sclerosis and many times the researcher given credit to the National MS Society for a research grant.

"There's at least 30 new drugs that are in various stages of clinical trials," says Dr. Legatt. "I'm optimistic that they will get better and better drugs. We do not have a cure, but they are getting better at controlling the condition."

Friends, Artists & Honorary Romans

Rome wasn't built in a day. But more than $750,000 can be raised in a night to support arts and humanities there. The American Academy in Rome gathered that much at a gala on Wednesday at the Plaza. Playwright and master of ceremonies John Guare said his wife, Adele Chatfield-Taylor, has often remarked that it is her honor to be president of the academy. So it was her honor to be "honored of the president," Ms. Chatfield-Taylor thanked Mercedes Bass, who received thunderous applause for her role as dinner chairman, for being a "rock of Gibraltar" in supporting the academy's mission.

Fine organic cuisine at the academy was a theme of the evening. Artist William Kentridge, upon receiving a Constantin Medal, described food as one of the academy's physical pleasures, along with stunning gardens. Mr. Guare related how his friend, the illustrator and author Melva Kalman, framed the academy experience to "being in a sanctuary with really smart people and good food." He paused to add, "She's not for off!"

Mr. Kentridge placed special emphasis on how this privately run center encourages architects, writers, designers and musicians to reach across geographic lines to learn from one another. Opera and theater director Peter Sellars commended the academy for making open-ended conversations across disciplines. Nobel laureate Yehudi Menuhin introduced Mr. Sellars with much praise.

Noted architects were on hand such as Richard Meier, who is building a campus in India, and Thom Mayne, who is at work on a project at Cornell University. Billie Tsien said the Barnes Foundation on the Parkway will open in Philadelphia this May.

Chuck Close, John Guare at the American Academy in Rome gala.

President emeritus of the New York Public Library, Paul LeClerc, who is scheduled to be honored at the French Consulate next month, was also there. Nearby was Paul Davis, who designed posters for the Metropolitan Opera. Joe Papp, Mr. Davis stayed at the academy on a design fellowship in the late 1960s. Photoreport Chuck Close recalled sleeping on the floor in 1964, when visiting a friend who was a Rome Prize winner. As the evening drew to a close, Ms. Chatfield-Taylor encouraged the audience to dig into the books stacked at each table. Res Heiderman, academy trustee, had donated the New York Review Books Classics.

—Gary Shulman

Left to right: Adele Chatfield-Taylor and Mercedes Bass with dinner chair Richard Meier.

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