

SAN JOSE - Spring is here and with the onset of beautiful weather comes an explosion of cyclists, runners and walkers onto our trails. Almaden Valley is a fantastic location for getting outdoors and the Northern California chapter of the Scleroderma Foundation is pleased to announce the second annual “Stepping Out to Cure Scleroderma” two mile walk or 10K competitive run to be held Sunday, May 15 at Almaden Lake Park. Registration will begin at 8:00 am and the walk/run will start at 9:00 am. There is a discounted registration fee if you register before April 27 at www.firstgiving.com/scl-northernca.

For families who enjoy getting outside, the two mile flat distance is perfect for a morning walk, strollers and wheelchairs are welcome. For individuals who are training for late Spring and Summer events, the 10K distance is an excellent way to kick start the racing season. New for 2011, the course is professionally managed so the distances will be accurately measured, well marked, and timed. Also for this year the course boasts a new starting point that sets the walk and run courses off in opposing directions so runners can focus on being competitive and families won't have to dodge runners. Lastly don't forget your wallet because once the finish line is crossed there will be raffle and silent auction items to browse, the proceeds of which will go towards supporting the Scleroderma Foundation, the leading non-profit supporter of scleroderma research and patient support in the United States. Last year 600 people came out for the inaugural Stepping Out Walk/Run, and the Northern California chapter hopes to double that number this year.

If you haven't heard of Scleroderma yet, you're not alone. It is a little known but devastating autoimmune disease in which the body's immune system attacks it's own tissues. The disease, which literally means “hard skin”, can cause a thickening and tightening of the skin as well as serious damage to internal organs including the lungs, heart, kidneys, esophagus and gastrointestinal tract, up to and including organ failure and death. It occurs 3 to 4 times more often in women than men, and affects children. There is no cure for scleroderma yet. Because awareness of the disease is limited, it can be difficult for patients to receive an accurate diagnosis, and early diagnosis is critical. With increased funding The Scleroderma Foundation can increase awareness about this disease, achieve a better understanding of who is susceptible and why, and most importantly work towards finding a cure.

This cure is what Jane Johnson of Almaden Valley is desperately hoping for. She is

not only one of the known 300,000 cases in the United States, but she also falls into the 15% of all patients who suffer from the most severe and aggressive form of the disease, diffuse systemic sclerosis. Fortunately for her, she was connected with an amazing team of doctors and health professionals and has been receiving cutting edge treatments that have slowed the progression of the disease. But daily life is still incredibly challenging due to a disease that involves the skin, the body's largest organ. "Imagine trying to sit down when your body doesn't bend, or losing the ability to braid your daughter's hair or tie your son's shoes. This disease is so cruel because it steals so much and takes it all at once. You look perfectly fine from the outside, but on the inside everything is falling apart," she wrote on her personal website and blog, Healing Jane. Even on her most difficult days she is thankful for both the medical advances that keep extending the precious time she has with her young family, and for the emotional support of her family and community. Her message is, "People can make a difference! When people come out to the walk/run they are saying to countless families in the community, 'We are there with you!' Every dollar makes a difference. I am so much better this year than last when doctors feared for my life. And it's all because people cared and came out to the walk/run and did something with their families that they would do anyway. Others have lost or are losing the battle. Let's stop that! Please help us find a cure!"

For more information or to register, please visit www.firstgiving.com/scl-northernca. If you would like to become a member of Jane's team, please visit www.firstgiving.com/fundraiser/jane-johnson-1/healingjane2ndsanjose. And if you can't come to the event, you can still donate or purchase raffle tickets for some fabulous prizes, including a San Jose Sharks experience and tickets to a San Francisco Giants game. For more information about scleroderma and the Scleroderma Foundation please visit www.scleroderma.org or call 1-800-722-HOPE.

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