

Adult Honoree

Tonya Hill

Relapsing Polychondritis

For Tonya Hill of Lathrup Village, pain was something she endured most of her adult life. Periodically, she would experience extreme pain in her ear, throat, arms, back and legs. Tonya was routinely taking anti-inflammatory drugs and pain relievers. However, during the summer of 2010, the pain became so severe she had to visit the emergency room. The joints throughout her whole body became red and swollen making it nearly impossible to walk. The emergency room doctor referred Tonya to a rheumatologist. Upon further examinations, multiple tests and a biopsy, Tonya was diagnosed with a rare form of arthritis - relapsing polychondritis. She was 45 years old.

Relapsing polychondritis is an autoimmune disease characterized by reoccurring episodes of cartilage inflammation. The cause is unknown and there is no cure. When she initially received the diagnosis, Tonya was excited to finally have an answer. Within a month of the diagnosis, the excitement changed to uncertainty when she realized that dealing with the extreme pain became a daily struggle.

She decided to take control of her health by becoming educated on medication options, keeping a journal of on-going flares and turned to the Arthritis Foundation to better understand her condition. Like many arthritis patients, Tonya has spent much time searching for the best treatment. Some medications had harsh side effects, including nausea, vomiting, headaches and ongoing infections. Some were ineffective in combatting her arthritis. Two years ago, Tonya started a new regimen of a biologic drug administered through IV infusions every six weeks. This has improved her quality of life, but there are still days when the simple task of turning a door knob or standing in line at the grocery store can be a challenge. There are times when she has missed family gatherings due to her arthritis pain. This disease has affected her whole family. Yet, she feels blessed to have their support through this difficult journey, and most importantly, Tonya knows she is not alone.

"My personal aspiration is to **LIVE FOR TODAY!** I'm not sure how I'm going to feel from day to day, and I don't know what the future holds. So, I try to make TODAY my best day ever," said Tonya. "I give a message of HOPE to the other individuals that have arthritis. You are not alone. Take charge of your fight against arthritis. Don't let it control you. Become educated, stay active and seek support from people that can help you through this life changing experience."

Join **Stepping for a Cure** for the 2016 Detroit Walk to Cure Arthritis to support Tonya and millions of Americans battling arthritis.

