

City beat: Family matters

Pull together for matriarch, MS Walk

For a few precious hours on one special day, the Wolland family beat multiple sclerosis.

Lois Wolland did it, with her family's help, simply by showing up at an April 2003 breakfast for the National Multiple Sclerosis - Society's top fund-raisers.

Wolland, 60, has had MS for more than 20 years. The registered nurse found one day that she could not lift her left leg and had sporadic numbness in other limbs.

Both are early signs of MS, an incurable disease that attacks the central nervous system, usually of people between 20 and 50 years old. More than 400,000 Americans have the disease, according to the organization.

Harold and Lois Wolland have been together since they were 15 years old. "We were sitting on a bench in front of our high school when she told me we were going to have four kids," said Harold Wolland, also 60. Their children are Dana, 37; Glen, 35; Jahn, 33, and **Eden**, 28.

MS can produce a variety of ill effects. Over the years, Lois Wolland has had blood clots in her brain and legs, thyroid cancer and a tumor under the rotator cuff in her left shoulder.

And more.

Even as a neurosurgeon was diagnosing her disease, she experienced the vision disappear in one eye "like someone was pulling down a shade."

Two years ago, Harold Wolland, a contractor, and Lois Wolland moved from Monroe, Orange County, to the upper East Side to be closer to her doctors and their children, all of whom live and work in the city.

In March 2003, Lois had a stroke — caused by blood clots on the brain — so severe, Weill Cornell Medical Center doctors didn't expect her to live through the night.

She was saved by a team of interventional radiologists who warned her family that the surgery to help her was only slightly less likely to kill her than doing nothing at all.

It was a near thing — the two-hour operation stretched to six and the family camped out in the hospital the entire time — but Lois pulled through.

She was still in the hospital recovering in mid-March when she decided she wanted to attend the society's annual breakfast for walk fund-raisers.



Bedford for NEWS

Eden Wolland holds trophy she and her parents, Lois (left) and Harold, won as top fund-raisers in last year's Multiple Sclerosis Society's MS Walk. Lois Wolland has had MS for more than 20 years.

"They told me I could not go unless I could get in and out of a wheelchair," Lois Wolland said. "I had spent five months of last year in the hospital. I had to get to that breakfast because my family had gone through so much with me."

It meant three weeks of brutal rehab therapy, often with Dana urging her on.

But on April 6, 2003, Dana wheeled her mother into the breakfast.

"People said to see her come in the room made everything worth it," Eden said. "She was an inspiration to us all."

Eden organized the Loving Lois MS Walk team three years ago. The team raised \$16,000 the first year and \$41,000 the next.

Last year, the 35-member team raised more than \$66,000, making Loving Lois the top fundraiser of the more than 500 teams that participated in the walk.

Eden said they're looking to break that record this year. With 45 walkers enrolled and more than \$35,000 already pledged, that's a safe bet. The money comes from friends and friends of friends, Eden said, and includes no corporate cash.

"The Wollands truly represent what the MS Walk is all about — teamwork and a commitment to finding a cure for MS," said David Sobel, a vice president of the New York City chapter of the National Multiple Sclerosis Society. "Their devotion and dedication to Lois and to the walk is an inspiration to everyone who comes into contact with this great family."

"We rely on teams like Loving Lois to make our mission to end the devastating effects of multiple sclerosis a reality, and could not do it without them," said Ruth Brenner, president of the city chapter of the National Multiple Sclerosis Society. Lois' fight continues. She is taking an experimental drug in hopes of finding that elusive cure.

"It has been a hard couple of years," she said. "Without the support of my unbelievable family and friends, I don't know if I could have made it."

"She says we inspire her, but she inspires us," Eden said. "We will continue to walk until a cure is found."