



Xbeacon

Virginia Beach

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MOUNT TRASHMORE

November stroll will raise epilepsy awareness

By Nora Firestone
Correspondent

LYNNHAVEN

Kristina Foster jokes that she has "random bouts of unconsciousness" to explain her epileptic seizures.

The Kempsville High junior can have a grand mal seizure at any time.

She's had three at school. Another came on the day of her sweet 16 celebration, which resulted in an injury and postponing the fete.

Kristina is one of about 3 million Americans affected by epilepsy. The neurological disorder produces brief disturbances in the normal electrical functions of the brain.

These electrical surges cause seizures often characterized by temporary physical changes in a person's consciousness, bodily movements or sensations, according to the Epilepsy Foundation.

Recurrent seizures often lead to the need for medication and limits on diet and activity, which can dramatically impact a person's lifestyle.

"But epilepsy doesn't define you," Kristina said. "It's a medical problem, like any other."



NORA FIRESTONE

That's a message the Epilepsy Foundation of Virginia strives to deliver to the estimated 70,000 to 80,000 affected statewide.

An affiliate of the national foundation, the state nonprofit assists individuals with epilepsy and seizures, and their families, and promotes education and awareness throughout Virginia.

Local services include family support groups, low-cost

summer camp, medication assistance and Family Fun days, said Tanya Eldert, the organization's southeastern regional director.

On Nov. 4, the foundation's southeast region will host its major fundraiser. About 150 people will take part in the fourth annual Epilepsy Awareness Stroll for Hampton Roads at Mount Trashmore Park.

Eldert hopes the event will

Epilepsy affects Kristina Foster's lifestyle to a degree. For instance, the Bellamy Woods teen said, "All my friends are driving, and I'll have to wait until my neurologist gives the go-ahead."

Going?

What Epilepsy Awareness Stroll for Hampton Roads

Where Mount Trashmore Park, 310 Edwin Drive

When 2 p.m. Nov. 4

Cost Free. Commemorative T-shirt with \$20 donation.

Info Register on site or at www.efvase.org.

what isolated, sentiments common among children with epilepsy, he said.

Simmel, 30, credits his parents with instilling confidence in him through basketball, a sport which boosted his development of motor and social skills.

Before the stroll around the lake, Simmel will demonstrate his athletic prowess, share his personal story and offer tips to young people and parents about balancing epilepsy with good nutrition, exercise, good sleep habits and medication.

"You can't spend your life on the sidelines," he said.

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raise at least \$5,000 for continuous operations of the Virginia Beach office. Ninety-seven percent of those funds, Eldert said, go directly back into the community.

The festivities will kick off at 2 p.m. with Harlem Wizards basketball showman and motivational speaker "Mighty Mike" Simmel.

Simmel has experienced seizures since childhood. He felt self-conscious and some-