

Barbara Natali: Taking Steps For Brain Injury

The Brain Injury Association of New Jersey's Walk for Thought / Cycle for Safety can mean many different things for many different individuals. For Barbara Natali of North Bergen, this year's event is a momentous occasion: It will be the first time she participates without the help of a wheelchair or cane.

"I feel so liberated," Barbara said. "It took a lot of hard work and praying to God to get to this point."

Barbara was in a wheelchair for four-and-a-half years after sustaining a brain aneurysm six years ago.

Before the aneurism Barbara was extremely healthy, swam as part of her daily routine. One morning she just woke up and couldn't breathe. Her first instinct was to call for help, which did save her life as she was rushed to the hospital and later medivacked out to a medical facility that could potentially save her life. She later found out about the aneurysm, and that it was the type that only 2 percent of people survive. "I was in great shape. This could've happened to anyone," she said.

Now Barbara is walking in an event to help raise awareness and funds for brain injury. "I want people to know just how crucial this is," she explained. "The support and funds are very important to people with brain injury."

Barbara says she hopes to help other people in any way possible. Because of her rehabilitation, she is walking unaided, once



again active and currently volunteers at an assisted living home helping with arts and crafts and serving as a companion.

Since the injury Barbara has gone through much occupational, physical, and cognitive therapy at Rehabilitation Specialists in Fair Lawn. Rehabilitation Specialists is a community re-entry rehabilitation facility for those affected by a brain injury.

Rehabilitation Specialists is a coordinating partner of the Walk for Thought / Cycle for Safety.

The event will take place at two locations on October 17: Saddle River County Park, Dunkerhook Area, in Paramus; and Washington Crossing State Park in Titusville. For more information, or to make a donation to Barbara's walk, please visit www.bianj.org.

As Barbara prepares for the walk she has advice for other individuals with brain injury who might be going through some of the same things she has. "Be patient and take it one day at a time," she said. "Baby steps will get you to your goal." This, Barbara said, was a valuable lesson taught to her by her father.