

Fundraiser with Mary McDonnell

September 25, 2002

The Lyme Disease Association and the Greenwich Lyme Disease Task Force are hosting Time for Lyme in New York on October 18 at Manhattan's Sky Club at 200 Park Ave. on the 56th floor. The event will raise funds for Lyme disease research and education, and will consist of a cocktail reception, live and silent auctions, and live entertainment. Over five hundred people from the Tri-State area are expected to attend the benefit. Lyme Disease Association spokesperson and Event Honorary Chair, Mary McDonnell (Oscar-nominated actress in Dances With Wolves) will appear at the event. Honorary Committee members include Jayni and Chevy Chase, Tommy Hilfiger, Sonia and Paul Tudor Jones, Magee Hickey and Ellen and Chuck Scarborough.

According to the Centers for Disease Control, Lyme disease is the fastest growing infectious disease in the United States after HIV, and the nation's number one vector-borne disease. The national Lyme Disease Association (LDA) and its affiliate the Greenwich Lyme Disease Task Force (GLDTF) want to see that change, and are fighting to find an accurate test to determine active infection and, eventually, a cure for Lyme and other tick-borne illness.

Children are at greatest risk for contracting Lyme disease as they often play in and around tick infested areas. Symptoms of Lyme can include nausea, extreme fatigue, joint pain, cardiac issues, severe headache and a general inability to lead a normal life. Diagnosis is difficult because current blood tests are often inaccurate, and the multi-systemic nature of the disease leads to difficulty in diagnosis.

"The lack of a sensitive diagnostic test to confirm active infection is the key problem in the field of Lyme disease

treatment," said Dr. Brian Fallon, Associate Professor in the Department of Psychiatry at Columbia University and a well-known authority on the neurological manifestations of disseminated Lyme disease. "The absence of such a test leaves doctors in the uncomfortable quandary of not knowing what treatment to choose, and places patients at risk for developing a more entrenched illness."

Lyme disease is caused by the bacterium *Borrelia burgdorferi*, and is transmitted through the bite of an infected tick. According to the CDC's latest statistics, cases of Lyme disease reported to the agency increased eight percent in 1999-2000, but many experts, including the International Lyme and Associated Disease Society (ILADS), believe that Lyme disease is underreported by tenfold due to lack of knowledge about the disease and stringent reporting criteria.

"More than 160,000 people are infected each year, and the one-size-fits-all approach for treatment that many doctors use is often inappropriate," said LDA President and ILADS Board of Directors member Pat Smith.

The Greenwich Lyme Disease Task Force and the Lyme Disease Association have agreed to partner with Columbia Presbyterian Medical Center of New York, and are working to open the Columbia Lyme Disease Research Center, the first of its kind in the nation. The Center, under the direction of Dr. Fallon, will conduct research on Lyme and other tick-borne diseases, and will treat patients. The GLDTF and the LDA are endowing the Center, and \$3 million is required to make the Center operational. Substantial private and corporate donations are needed to fund this research effort, which will be a primary focus of Time for Lyme in New York. Funds raised at the benefit will also be directed at Lyme disease education and prevention awareness.

"I have seen first hand the suffering that comes from Lyme infection," said event co-chair Dana McAvity of the GLDTF.

"Those of us who have suffered with Lyme and all those who may be infected in the future need this Center. Time for Lyme in New York is an important first step in getting the funding. It should be a wonderful evening."

The Greenwich Lyme Disease Task Force and the Lyme Disease Association are non-profit organizations. Tickets for the benefit begin at \$250 per ticket, and are tax deductible to the extent allowed by law.