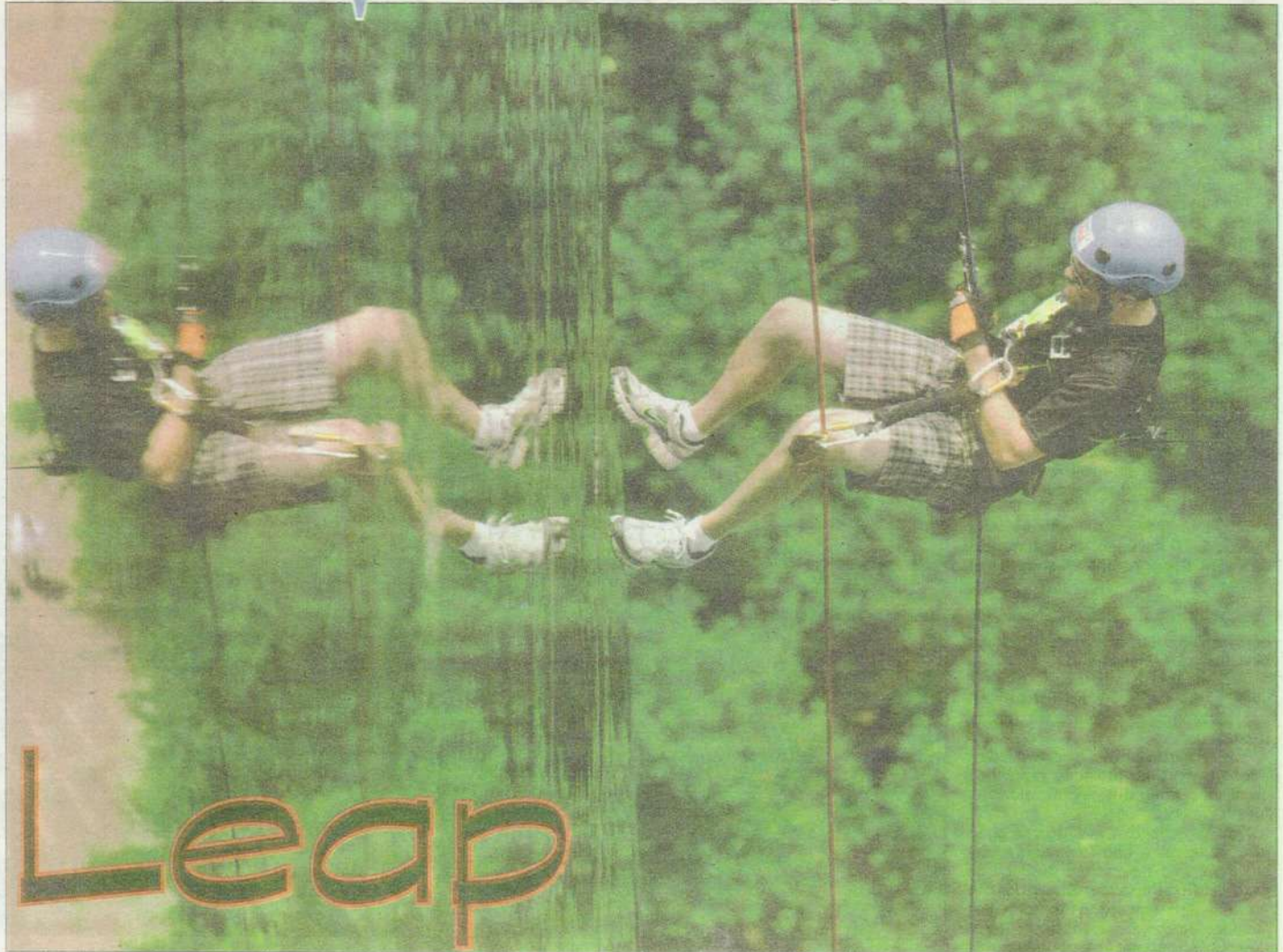


# The View

from the neighborhoods



STAFF PHOTO BY MATT ROTH

# Leap of Faith

Fundraisers make jump for National  
Kidney Foundation Page 32

# Leap of Faith

By Mary T. Robbins Phelan  
mrobbins@patuxent.com

Gordon Nahas may have discovered a new hobby.

The 68-year-old Ellicott City resident rappelled down the side of the Legg Mason Building, in downtown Baltimore, June 19 in a fundraising event to raise awareness about kidney disease.

"It was a great experience. I loved every minute of it," said Nahas, who had never rappelled before the Rappel for Kidney Health event. "I cannot wait to do it again."

The National Kidney Foundation of Maryland hosts fundraisers throughout the year, including wine tastings, walks and, for 25 years, an annual gala.

This year, though, the Towson-based foundation decided to take a different approach.

The foundation gave anyone who raised \$1,000 the opportunity to rappel down 20 floors of the 24-story Legg Mason.

The organization always had an annual gala each year, called The Gift of Life Gala, but attendance declined over the years, Nahas said.

"We thought it was time to make a change," he said. "We needed to have another option or resource for raising funds."

They heard about Over the Edge, a company that provides rappelling events for nonprofit organizations in North America.

"We thought this would be a good idea. It was new and fresh and something we had never done before," he said. The first Rappel for Kidney Health was actually supposed to take place last summer at the First Mariner Tower downtown, but when the building was sold, organizers had to cancel it and look for a new venue for this year.

Participants received instruction during a training session and practice rappel from the 24th to the 23rd floor. During a preview event, "guest" rappel-



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Kidney transplant recipient Gordon Nahas, 68, from Ellicott City, takes a deep breath before descending from the 23rd-floor balcony to the fourth-floor balcony of the Legg Mason Tower in the Harbor East area of Baltimore June 19. Participants who raised more than \$1,000 for the National Kidney Foundation of Maryland were eligible to rappel down the skyscraper.

On the Cover: Greg Jacobson, 30, from Ellicott City, rappels down the Legg Mason Tower. Jacobson's mother, Cindy, of Padonia, is a transplant recipient. He also serves on the National Kidney Foundation Maryland board of directors.

lers included former Baltimore Orioles' catcher and current MASN broadcaster Rick Dempsey, and Brooke Poklemba, Miss Maryland 2009.

Each participant was placed in a harness with ropes that were controlled by staff members from Over the Edge.

"I'm on the 24th floor and they tell you, 'Let go and lean back,' and that was the hardest part," Nahas said. "But then you see the boats in the harbor look like dots and it's an exhilarating experience."

Greg Jacobson, 30, another Ellicott City resident, also took the plunge.

"It was incredible," said Jacobson, who was rappelling for the first time. "It was pretty much surreal. By the time you get to the 24th floor on the elevator, your ears have popped and you are like, 'Oh man, what have I gotten myself into?'"

During the training exercise, it started to sink in.

Jacobson said it took about five minutes for his brain to process what was about to take place.

"It was getting kind of real at that point, how high up I was and what I was about to do," said Jacobson, 30. "It was a really cool experience. I got to see Baltimore from a while different angle."

"We thought this would be a good idea. It was new and fresh and something we had never done before."

Gordon Nahas, 68,  
Kidney donation recipient

Foundation of Maryland comes from personal experience.

Nahas became a kidney transplant recipient seven years ago through a cadaveric donor, meaning the kidney was transplanted from a donor whose brain suffered irreversible damage. In Nahas' case, the donor was a 27-year-old male who had been in a tragic accident.

"I was very fortunate in that I had what they call a zero mismatch," Nahas said. "It was deemed a perfect match. The odds of that happening are 1-in-10,000."

After being on a waiting list for almost five years, Nahas received a call from his surgeon at 2:30 in the morning with the news that a donor had been found.

"He said I met the gold standard and that there was a young kidney with very few miles on it."

How does he feel several years after the transplant surgery?

"Outstanding. I run circles around

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Gordon Nahas goes through rappelling training, led by Justin Britcher, left, from Hamilton, and Caleb Vesely, from Flagstaff, Ariz., on the 24th floor of the Legg Mason Tower.

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everyone," Nahas said. He still works as a consultant and operates his own practice, Small Biz CFO Advisory Services, which provides CFO services to small businesses that cannot afford the services of a CFO on a full-time basis.

When he is not working, he loves to travel, to ride his Harley-Davidson, pursue his passion for digital photography and "to keep generally busy."

He is married and has a grown son, Kristopher, of Owings Mills, who was all set to be a living donor for his father until the phone call came from Nahas' surgeon in the middle of the night with news of the cadaveric donor.

Nahas' kidney disease stems from one of five birth defects, he said.

"One of these birth defects was a pair of deformed kidneys," Nahas said. It was not until he was 28, when he was taking a test for life insurance, that he found out something was wrong with his kidneys.

"I was told I had excessive protein in my urine," Nahas said. After a series of X-rays and other tests, he was informed by his doctors that both of his kidneys were deformed.

He was told to take care of himself, to maintain a healthy lifestyle and to watch his blood pressure.

"Twenty-five years later, I got to the point where the condition of my kidneys had deteriorated to the extent that

I had to go on dialysis for nine months prior to my transplant."

Today he is a member of the board of directors for the National Kidney Foundation of Maryland and he also served on the Rappel for Kidney Health committee.

The foundation provides public education, supports research and raises awareness of kidney disease, which affects one out of nine people, according to its website.

Meanwhile, Jacobson began supporting the National Kidney Foundation when he was 14, participating in its volleyball and golf tournaments. Like Nahas, he sits on the foundation's board of directors and supported the idea of trying a new method to raise money.

"Galas are kind of stuffy and a little outdated," said Jacobson, an IT project manager. "And the foundation is really trying to focus on tapping into a younger base. The rappel is kind of sexy. It's a new event, which is exciting."

Jacobson has kidney disease that runs in his family. Last summer, his mother, Cindy, of Padonia, received a transplant. His 27-year-old brother, Shawn, of Charlottesville, Va., has kidney disease as well.

He said he will rappel again next year.

"It's as much to support the foundation and it is for the excitement," he said.



STAFF PHOTO BY MAIT ROTH

Watch out for that first step! Greg Jacobson goes head over heels on his way down the Legg Mason Tower. Sight safety supervisor Brian Dickerson, from Houston, and Zeb Severson, from Aberdeen, foreground, keep Jacobson steady while regaining his composure.