

Health & Style



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The whole grain story

Not every product boasting of whole grains is worth eating **PG 3**

Fashion 5

Swimsuit anxiety and a solution for the blistering summer **PG 2**

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'All downhill' for kidney disease awareness

Volunteers to rappel down 24-story Legg Mason Tower

By Joe Burris
THE BALTIMORE SUN

Eagerness to spread the word about kidney disease is enough to drive local residents up a wall — or down a tower.

On June 19, some will take to the side of the 24-story Legg Mason Tower in Harbor East, then rappel down one of Baltimore's most prominent skyscrapers as part of a fundraising approach by the National Kidney Foundation of Maryland.

Rappel for Kidney Health is designed to raise awareness about a disease that affects one in nine Marylanders.

Each participant must raise at least \$1,000 in advance. On the day of the event, they will undergo a brief training



BARBARA HADDOCK TAYLOR/BALTIMORE SUN PHOTO



Pat Machate, a nephrology social worker from DaVita Dialysis, will be rappelling down the Legg Mason Tower with others June 19 to raise money for the National Kidney Foundation of Maryland. Her poster describing the event is on the right.

If you go

What: Rappel for Kidney Health
When: June 19
Where: Legg Mason Tower, 100 International Drive
Fee: \$1,000 in donations
Information: 410-494-8545 or kidneymd.org

exercise and receive a rappelling time slot. Then they will take the elevator to the 24th floor and head to the balcony, where they will rappel one floor down for a practice run.

The actual rappel will be from the 23rd-floor balcony to the fourth-floor balcony.

"I'm just going for it; once you get past the first step, it's all downhill from See **KIDNEYS**, page 6

FROM PAGE ONE

Rappelling for kidney disease

KIDNEYS, *From page 1*

there," said Connie Simmons of Rosedale, who has been involved with the kidney foundation for 20 years but hasn't attempted to scale any structure since taking part in a rock-climbing outing in the Shenandoah Mountains as a freshman in college — in 1980.

The rappel is organized by Over the Edge, a company that provides such events for nonprofit organizations in North America.

"It's an out-of-the-box fundraising opportunity for us to not only make the public aware of who we are and what we're doing, but to draw a new audience to the organization," said Kelly Meltzer, foundation director of special events.

While much national attention has focused on cancer, hypertension and heart disease, kidney disease hasn't been as prominent, said Dr. Matthew Cooper, director of kidney transplantation at the University of Maryland Medical Center.

The National Kidney Foundation said that more than 26 million Americans have kidney disease, while millions of others do not know that they are at risk for getting it. And more than 1,000 Marylanders are awaiting a kidney transplant.

"We've lost an appreciation of how prevalent kidney disease is," Cooper said. He added that identifying kidney disease early "allows us to prevent the throes of kidney failure."

The foundation is resorting to unorthodox measures to spread awareness about the disease. And local residents — some who have been affected by the disease, oth-

ers who have not — are willing to assist.

Pat Machate, a dialysis social worker from Baltimore, said that initially she was reluctant to sign up. But then a colleague encouraged her to do it and gave her a \$10 donation.

"It sounds like something that is once in a lifetime," she said, "a fun thing to do to help my patients."

Others like Laurie Isner-Miracle of Glen Burnie know firsthand the effects of kidney disease. Last year, she donated a kidney to her husband, Michael. In the process, she said, she learned much about the disease and transplantation.

Isner-Miracle said that in addition to rigorous testing, she had to lose 35 pounds to be fit enough to donate the kidney to her husband.

"They took my left kidney and put it in his right side, in the hip, for protection," she said. "They leave the original kidneys there; people who go through those kinds of surgeries are very sick" and doctors chose not to do further procedures to remove her husband's failed kidneys.

"I was fortunate to be a match for my husband," she added. "People out there should not be afraid to take a leap of faith to donate a kidney to someone they love."

Isner-Miracle said that initially, she had reservations about scaling down the side of the Legg Mason Tower. "I had it pinned on my wall for a couple of weeks, and I said to myself, 'I don't know if I can do this,'" she said. "But then I said, 'It's a challenge, and that's what I was going to do.'"

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