

# Able and Willing

*Hebron grad Monica Whipps hasn't let epilepsy hold her back, and now she gives back as a fundraising dynamo for an area support network.*



**From left to right: Mike Harris (Abilities Network's Board of Directors), Tracy Pruitt (Abilities Network's Board of Directors), Monica Whipps, Lee Ann Kingham (Abilities Network executive director).**

Photo courtesy of Abilities Network

by Caryn Sagal  
Community contributor

**A**s a baby, Monica Whipps had febrile seizures. After experiencing severe head trauma in high school, the seizures returned and she was diagnosed with juvenile myoclonic epilepsy.

Fortunately, the condition has been well controlled with medication. After graduating from Mt. Hebron High School, Whipps proceeded to earn a bachelor's degree in imaging and digital art from the University of Maryland-Baltimore County and a master's degree in education from Loyola College. She taught kindergarten for five years and is now the office administrator for Blackboard Inc. in Owings Mills.

Now a Columbia resident, Whipps, 36 wanted to give back.

"I feel fortunate enough to be as controlled and able as I am, but I know that not everyone with epilepsy can say

that," she said.

After seeing a sign in her doctor's office about the National Epilepsy Foundation of America, she went online for information about the local chapter and discovered Abilities Network, a Towson-based 501(c)3 organization that provides individualized services to people in Maryland with disabilities.

The nonprofit was established in 1964 as the Epilepsy Association of Maryland by neurologists and parents of children with epilepsy who saw a need for more resources to help individuals with epilepsy.

Its name changed in 2000 to reflect

its broader scope of services, which now includes: Autism Services, Community and Employment Partners, Epilepsy Services, Healthy Families of Baltimore County, Project ACT (All Children Together) and Senior Services.

"Our mission is, 'to challenge the community to acknowledge the value and equality of people of all abilities,'" said Lee Ann Kingham, Abilities Network's chief executive officer. "We help clients to create a personal path to independence by seeing abilities, not disabilities."

Whipps attended an Abilities Network meeting and joined the epilepsy support groups for adults in Towson and Laurel.

"Everyone is really nice and supportive," she said.

After learning that Abilities Network wanted to have a volunteer for the National Epilepsy Foundation of America's National Walk for Epilepsy, she jumped at the opportunity and started an Epilep-

sy Foundation of the Chesapeake Region (EFCR) team.

For the past two years, she participated in the two national walks, as well as Abilities Network's signature fundraiser, Walkabout Abilities.

Continuing as team captain for "Monica's Mob," she is gearing up for the seventh annual Walkabout Abilities, which takes place Sunday, Sept. 22, rain or shine, at Goucher College in Towson.

More than 300 people are expected to gather for the family-friendly event, which will feature music from a DJ, face painting, a moonbounce, art activities, breakfast and refreshments including Baskin & Robbins ice cream sundaes, courtesy of the Coleman family. Plus, top participants will win prizes.

"It's a great event," Whipps said. "In addition to the walk, there are fun activities and ice cream, and I even won a prize for being a top fundraiser last year, which really surprised me."

Her 2012 National Walk for Epilepsy and Walkabout Abilities teams raised a total of \$4,000, and her 2013 National Walk for Epilepsy team raised \$2,470.

For these accomplishments, Abilities Network presented Whipps with the Outstanding Fundraiser Award at its 2013 Annual Awards ceremony.

Not resting on her past success, she is hard at work soliciting Walkabout Abilities contributions from family and friends to help Abilities Network continue to provide quality services to individuals and families in need,

To donate to "Monica's Mob," visit <http://tinyurl.com/monica-s-mob>

*Caryn Sagal is senior vice president of Lawrence Howard & Associates, a Baltimore-based public relations firm.*



Monica Whipps, right, gets a hug from Abilities Network executive director Lee Ann Kingham. Photo courtesy of Abilities Network

# 74K

In the United States, one in every 100 people suffers from seizures or epilepsy. In the Chesapeake Region, there are about 74,000 individuals with epilepsy.

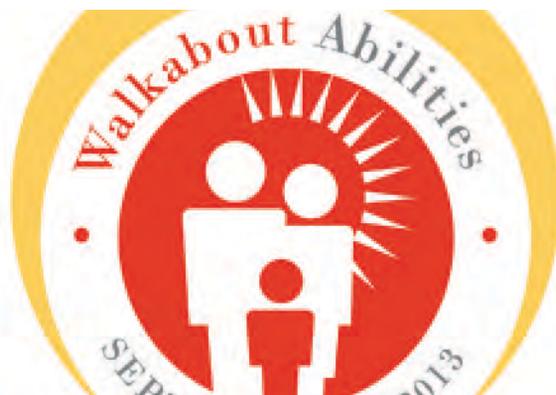
**Epilepsy is a condition in which an individual experiences more than one seizure over a period of time. A seizure is a change in sensation, awareness or behavior brought about by a brief electrical disturbance in the brain. A seizure is a temporary change in a person's movements, sensations, or consciousness caused by an abnormal electrical discharge of the nerve cells in the brain. There are many different types of seizures; not all are convulsions.—Abilities Network**

## ABOUT WALKABOUT ABILITIES

- On-site registration starts at 8:30 a.m.
- The two-mile walk around the Goucher College campus will begin at 9:30, following welcome remarks and warm-up exercises.
- Registration includes admission, as well as an event T-shirt, refreshments, activities and entertainment.
- The cost is \$15 for ages 12 and older and \$10 for younger children. Admission is free for kids 3 and younger. Sponsorships are also available.
- For registration, sponsorship or volunteer information, visit [www.abilitiesnetwork.org](http://www.abilitiesnetwork.org) or call 410-828-7700, ext. 1229.

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The Walkabout Abilities takes place at Goucher Sept. 22. Image courtesy of Lawrence Howard and Associates