Volunteer Spotlight: Michele Fox

These days Michele Fox is wisely sheltering in place because of the COVID-19 crisis, but for several years, she has invested part of her every Monday as a volunteer gym runner in the Spinal Cord Injury Day Program. Her supervisor Kelly White says, “She has been a shining light here, helping keep our area and equipment clean while also developing relationships with our patients. She is definitely missed during this COVID craziness, and we can’t wait to have her back with us!”

Michele grew up in the Chamblee community as the third of four girls whose father worked first in the auto tire industry and later, in real estate. Her mother had a lifelong career in nursing and administration at Piedmont Atlanta Hospital, then volunteered there until she was 86! With two working parents, Michele and her sisters were raised to carry out many adult chores and responsibilities from a young age, but she always found time to play outdoors. Through scouting, church activities, and school service organizations she gained experience helping others, and her passion to serve has never left her.

After graduating from Chamblee High School, she completed her degree in elementary education and went on to teach in Gwinnett County. Within a short time Michele completed her master’s in the same field, then launched into a new adventure, accepting a third grade teaching job with the Department of Defense on an Air Force base near Tokyo, Japan. For the next five years, she taught children of Americans stationed there, in addition to tutoring Japanese high school students in English. During that time, she met her husband who was an Air Force officer. After moving to the U.S., her husband was deployed multiple times overseas to the Middle East, and Michele parented their son and daughter alone until he returned.

About 10 years ago, Harold Shepherd invited Michele’s mother, Eileen Houser, on a tour of Shepherd Center, and she brought Michele. The Shepherd Family and Eileen had a history – she had been working as a nurse administrator on James Shepherd’s floor when he had been admitted to Piedmont in 1973 after his injury. She got to know Alana and Harold during their visits to James. Michele was shocked, yet delighted at what she saw in the therapy gyms during the tour – the atmosphere was lively and upbeat! Music was playing, shouts of “You can do it!” could be heard – this was nothing like any rehabilitation atmosphere she had ever seen. She wanted to be a part of the remarkable work that she saw before her, and when she and her husband moved to Buckhead, she lived close enough to make her dream a reality.

Today, after three years of serving at Shepherd, her supervisor shares, “Michele knows no stranger and patients can feel her energy when she volunteers. She talks to everyone and makes them feel like they have been friends for years!” Michele understands and appreciates what she is a part of, sharing that one of the returning clients told her, “Going through therapy here is like driving a sleek BMW. When I go back to my home state and have therapy, it’s like driving a Ford Pinto.” We are very grateful to have Michele as a vital part of our volunteer program, and we love that she helps Shepherd continue the upbeat atmosphere she witnessed in that same gym on her tour years ago.
Dear Auxiliary members,

Welcome to the 38th year of the Shepherd Center Auxiliary! I am humbled to be this year’s Auxiliary president and ready to navigate these unfamiliar waters and our first without James Shepherd at the helm.

I’d like to give a huge thank you to last year’s president, Anne Worrell, who had no idea she would be closing out her term during a pandemic. I learned a lot this past year under her leadership. Anne is also who I have to thank for my 20 year involvement at Shepherd. As new college graduates we jumped at the chance to join Junior Committee – spend a weekend on a gorgeous farm for Derby Day? Yes please! As we aged, so did our involvement. I have proudly been a part of Shepherd Center Society, Peach Corps, Women Shaping Shepherd and now the Auxiliary. And my husband and daughter are now volunteering with me!

Though things will look different for at least the first part of our year, I know that as a whole, the Auxiliary’s dedication and love for Shepherd is unwavering. We will explore new ways to support our patients. Please feel free to reach out if you have any immediate ideas. I would love to hear from you.

As Jamie Shepherd said at his father’s memorial service, “There are no wheelchairs in Heaven.” What a touching visual that is and one that will stay with me for years to come. We are all truly blessed to be a part of such an exemplary institution doing extraordinary work.

With a grateful heart,

Kyle
Kyle Hinson
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Renewal deadline extended to May 29!
Renew online at shepherd.org/auxiliary.

Above: Kyle Hinson, her husband John and daughter Fannie Bradley are all involved in supporting Shepherd Center. It’s truly a family effort!
The Christopher & Dana Reeve Foundation, in collaboration with Shepherd Center, recently published “Restoring Hope: Preparing for Rehabilitation After Spinal Cord Injury.” The booklet aims to help patients and families learn about spinal cord injury, organize information, chart a path and choose a rehabilitation program.

“This project allowed us to develop a resource for families in their critical time of need and provide essential guidance for families making the most important decisions after their loved one is diagnosed with a spinal cord injury, which is: ‘where will they go for rehabilitation?’” said Diane Johnston, MSPT, director of professional education at Shepherd Center.

The 44-page booklet includes sections with education on spinal cord injuries, tips for getting organized for rehabilitation, information on how to compare and choose a rehabilitation center, and a glossary of commonly-used terms in spinal cord injury rehabilitation. Clinical experts, including physicians, nurses and physical therapists, among others, from the Reeve Foundation, Shepherd Center and Geisinger Health contributed and reviewed the booklet.

“Within the first day of a loved one sustaining a spinal cord injury, families are searching for information wherever they can find it,” said Bernadette Mauro, director of information and resource services at the Christopher & Dana Reeve Foundation.

“At the Reeve Foundation and Shepherd Center, we understand that families are overwhelmed, and we believe the result of this collaboration is an easily accessible resource with vital information centralized in one place.”

The booklets are being distributed nationwide to case managers, social workers and others at trauma centers. The booklet is also available on Shepherd Center’s website and on the Reeve Foundation’s website at christopherreeve.org.

The Christopher & Dana Reeve Foundation and Shepherd Center are both leading resources for patients and families dealing with spinal cord injuries. With their cooperative agreement with the Administration for Community Living (ACL) the Reeve Foundation’s mission is deeply aligned with ACL’s goal of empowering people with disabilities to live independently and actively participate in their communities. The Reeve Foundation is dedicated to curing spinal cord injury by advancing innovative research and improving the quality of life for individuals and families impacted by paralysis.

“The more collaboration organizations like ours have, the more support the spinal cord injury community will have,” Mauro said. “It’s all about making sure patients and families have the information they need to explore their options and make the choices that are best for them.”

The booklet is dedicated in memory of James H. Shepherd, Jr., Shepherd Center co-founder and long-time chairman of the Board of Directors and chief of staff. Shepherd is remembered for his lifetime of advocacy and achievement in the spinal cord injury community.

“The opportunity to collaborate with the Reeve Foundation to develop the ‘Restoring Hope: Preparing for Rehabilitation After Spinal Cord Injury’ resource booklet was a perfect match for our mission,” Johnston said. “In many ways, the resource represents the past 45 years of Shepherd Center’s foundation, evolution and commitment to serve individuals with spinal cord injury, allowing us to provide support and guidance to families all over the country.”
Exercise can improve mobility and perhaps if, how much, and how fast a person with multiple sclerosis (MS) might lose function. STEP for MS (Supervised versus Telerehab Exercise Program for People with Multiple Sclerosis) is a four-year study, funded by the Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute (PCORI). STEP for MS will enroll 500 participants to take part in a 16-week exercise program performed either at home, or in an exercise facility. STEP for MS hopes to provide people with MS information to guide their choice of exercise options.

If you are between the ages of 18 and 65, have MS, and trouble walking, you may qualify to participate in an exercise study called STEP for MS. The study aims to help people with MS know how to exercise safely. We also hope we will provide information to guide their choice of exercise options and improve their quality of life. Due to COVID-19, enrollment is on pause. We are currently requesting anyone who is interested in participating to email Erica Sutton at erica.sutton@shepherd.org so they can be added to our waiting list. Once enrollment opens back up, individuals on the waiting list will be contacted if they meet study qualifications.

Visit https://www.iconquerms.org/welcome-step-ms to learn more!