Parkinson Pathfinder

Summer 2026 Wisconsin Chapter Edition

The Power of Play

Finding Light Again *p.5*

Ping Pong for Parkinson's *p.8*

apda AMERICAN PARKINSON DISEASE ASSOCIATION

Summer 2026 Wisconsin Chapter Edition

Table of Contents

COVER PHOTO

Ljubomir Medenica (LJ) has lived in Alaska since 2006. He worked as a professor at the University of Alaska Southeast and retired in 2024, when he was diagnosed with Parkinson's. After his diagnosis, LJ started playing ping pong intensively. Since then, he has attended two major international tournaments, the French Open (September 2025, where he won a silver medal in his group) and the World Championship in Italy (October 2025).

apda AMERICAN PARKINSON DISEASE ASSOCIATION
WISCONSIN CHAPTER
Strength in optimism. Hope in progress.

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APDA'S MISSION

Every day, we provide the support, education, research, and community that will help everyone impacted by Parkinson's disease live life to the fullest.

Sometimes the things that bring us the greatest benefit are also the things that simply make us smile.

Summer often invites us to slow down, spend time with those we love, and rediscover the simple pleasures that bring meaning to our days. In this issue of *Parkinson Pathfinder*, we explore a theme that may seem unexpected at first, but one that is increasingly recognized as an important part of living well with Parkinson's: the power of play.

When we hear the word play, we might think of childhood. But play is really about something much deeper. It is about curiosity, connection, creativity, movement, and joy. It is about finding activities that make us want to keep showing up—not because we have to, but because they enrich our lives.

In these pages, you'll discover how enjoyable movement can support both body and mind, meet individuals who have found renewed purpose through shared activities, and learn why fun and laughter are not distractions from the challenges of Parkinson's, but essential companions along the journey.

One of my favorite messages in this edition is that life with Parkinson's does not have to revolve entirely around symptoms and schedules. There is still room for friendship, music, competition, creativity, and quiet moments of connection. Sometimes the things that bring us the greatest benefit are also the things that simply make us smile.

My hope is that these stories encourage you to try something new, revisit something you once loved, or perhaps look at an old favorite in a different way. Because even in the face of Parkinson's, there is still space for joy—and perhaps that is one of the most powerful forms of resilience we have.

Wishing you a summer filled with moments that make you smile.

With hope and optimism,

Lianna Badran
Regional Director, Marketing & Communications

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The Power of Play

Why Enjoyable, Engaging Activity Matters in Parkinson's

When people hear the word exercise, they often picture something structured: a walking plan, a class schedule, a set of therapy drills, or time on a stationary bike. All of those can be valuable for people living with Parkinson's disease. But research and real-world experience point to something equally important: movement may be easier to sustain when it feels enjoyable, mentally engaging, and meaningful. In other words, play matters.

This article is not meant to suggest that every idea here is settled science, but rather to bring together research, observation, and reflections on movement that may resonate with people living with Parkinson's.

That idea is not just feel-good advice. It reflects a growing understanding of what helps people with Parkinson's keep moving over time. Exercise is one of the most powerful tools available for managing Parkinson's symptoms. It can support balance, flexibility, strength, mobility, and overall quality of life. Emerging research also suggests that regular exercise may play a role in slowing functional decline.

But Parkinson's care is not only about whether a person can exercise. It is also about whether they will want to keep doing it. That is where play comes in.

For someone with Parkinson's, play does not have to mean games in the traditional sense. It can mean any activity that combines movement with enjoyment, curiosity, rhythm, challenge, skill-building, or social interaction. Dance classes, tai chi, yoga, singing with movement, drumming, group fitness, interactive games, and recreational sports can all fall into that category.

This broader lens matters because Parkinson's affects much more than tremor or slowness. It can also influence posture, gait, balance, reaction time, multitasking, mood, and confidence. Activities that are playful or immersive often challenge several of those systems at once. A dance class, for example, may involve rhythm, balance, memory, coordination, and social connection in the same session. Tai chi blends controlled movement, attention, posture, and weight shifting. Music-based movement and drumming can add timing, cueing, and mental focus.

These are not just fun extras. They are meaningful ways of asking the brain and body to work together in real time.

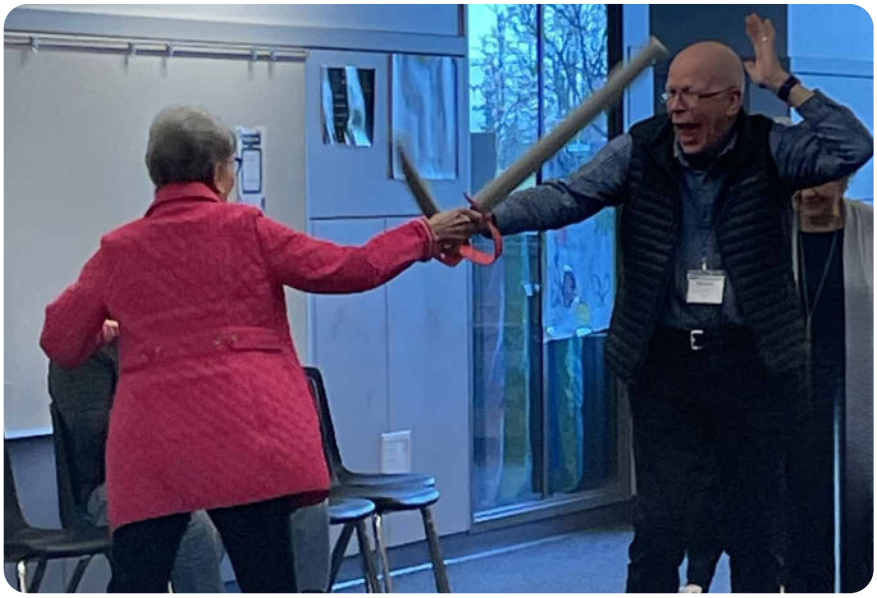
That has caught the attention of researchers. One area of growing interest is dual-task training, which combines physical movement with a second challenge such as attention, rhythm, or another cognitive task. This is especially relevant in Parkinson's because daily life rarely happens in a single-task environment. People walk while talking, turn while carrying objects, or move through busy spaces while processing information. Research suggests that this kind of combined

What Counts as Play?

Play can look different for everyone. For someone living with Parkinson's, it might include:

- Dance or movement classes
- Tai chi or yoga
- Drumming or music-based exercise
- Interactive fitness games
- Recreational sports
- Group exercise with a social element
- Activities that involve rhythm, timing, skill, or friendly competition

The best choice is one that feels enjoyable, appropriate for your abilities, and realistic to return to again and again. APDA's Upcoming Virtual Events calendar highlights programs such as yoga, tai chi, singing, and more.



training may help improve gait, balance, motor performance, and aspects of daily function.

Dance and rhythm-based movement have also drawn increasing attention. Studies suggest these approaches may support motor function, confidence, and quality of life. Exergaming and other interactive exercise formats are also being explored, with researchers examining how they may affect physical function, cognition, balance, and fall risk.

One of the most important takeaways from this body of research is that exercise does not have to be boring to be beneficial. In fact, enjoyment may be part of what makes it effective.

That matters because consistency is everything. A person may fully understand that exercise is helpful for Parkinson's and still struggle to stick with it. Symptoms, fatigue, motivation, transportation, access, and confidence can all get in the way. Research on exercise adherence shows that people are more likely to stay engaged when an activity matches their interests, feels achievable, and offers a sense of satisfaction or connection.

That insight is powerful. It suggests that the best activity is not always the one that looks most clinical or impressive on paper. It may be the one a person actually wants to do again next week.

This does not mean every fun activity is automatically safe or right for every person. Parkinson's symptoms vary widely, and exercise should be adapted to the individual. The goal is not to chase novelty for its own sake, but to find movement that is challenging enough to matter, safe enough to sustain, and enjoyable enough to become part of everyday life.

That may be one of the most hopeful messages in today's Parkinson's research: movement does not have to feel grim to be meaningful. Sometimes the activities that look the most joyful are also doing serious work.

For people living with Parkinson's, and for care partners helping support healthy routines, this opens an encouraging door. Movement can be purposeful without feeling punishing. It can be therapeutic without feeling like treatment every minute. And it can offer more than just physical benefits. It can build confidence, spark connection, bring variety to the week, and remind people that life with Parkinson's still has room for challenge, creativity, and enjoyment.

That is the real power of play.

A New Way Forward:

How One Playful Pursuit Changed Life with Parkinson's

Q & A with **Dwight Slade**

Living with Parkinson's often means adapting, adjusting, and finding new ways forward. Sometimes those ways come from unexpected places—a dance class, a golf club, a paintbrush, a ping-pong paddle, or another activity that brings movement and enjoyment together. In this conversation, one Dwight Slade, PWP, shares how discovering a playful pursuit helped restore confidence, spark joy, and bring a fresh sense of possibility to life with Parkinson's.

Can you tell us about the activity you discovered—or returned to—and how it first became part of your life with Parkinson's?

As much time as I spent in front of audiences and wanting their attention, off stage, I really don't like people that much. So, I was reluctant when Whitney and I started going to a local support group. But I was lured back by the free muffins.

It was at this support group that I learned about the YMCA Rock Steady class. A new friend, Dennis, said that you get to beat the holy hell out of the bag. There is something very cathartic about hitting that bag. I try to go to this class two days a week, and it's been several years now.

What drew you to this particular activity, and what made you want to keep going with it?

Now I love seeing the people at class. It's a group I never knew I needed, and now I don't want to miss it. At the end of class, we put our hands in for a cheer, which usually references something colorful about our hatred for Parkinson's. I feel a lot of camaraderie in that moment, and I carry it with me long after class.

In what ways, if any, has this pursuit changed how you feel physically, emotionally, or mentally?

Parkinson's has already taken so much from me. I want to keep up doing things that help my mental and physical strength. Getting to class keeps me moving, and it boosts my attitude.

Did it shift your outlook on Parkinson's or on what you felt was still possible for you? If so, how?

Well, when I'm with my PD friends, I don't feel so alone with the disease.

Were there any challenges, fears, or hesitations you had when getting started, and how did you work through them?

I found some negativity in people attending groups, or at exercise class, but I had to stop and remember I was there for me. Besides, it would be far more off-putting if I walked into a Parkinson's class and everyone was on cloud 9.

The first time we went to the indoor rock climbing class, they said guys a lot older than me were climbing the wall. Out of bravado, I said, "I can do that." It was excruciating, but the coaches were so encouraging, and I trusted them. Before I knew it, I was at the top, ringing the bell.

What would you say to another person living with Parkinson's who is hesitant to try something new, playful, or outside their comfort zone?

As a wise person once said, "Try not to take life too seriously." ■

Dwight Slade is an award-winning American stand-up comedian known for his sharp observational humor, intelligent storytelling, and energetic stage presence. He began performing at 14 alongside his longtime friend and fellow comedian Bill Hicks, helping launch a career that has spanned more than four decades. Slade has appeared on HBO, Comedy Central, and *The Tonight Show*, and has performed at major comedy festivals throughout North America and internationally.

A winner of both the Boston Comedy Festival and the Seattle International Comedy Competition, he is widely regarded as one of the Pacific Northwest's most accomplished comedians. He was diagnosed with Parkinson's Disease in November 2020. Dwight performed his last professional show in Alaska in September 2021, and his wife, Whitney Slade, was in the audience. Dwight and Whitney currently live in Boise, Idaho, with their Chihuahua Poodle Winston Slade.

Finding Light Again:

How Shared Activities Can Bring Joy Back into Life with Parkinson's

Q & A with **Whitney Slade**

When Parkinson's becomes part of daily life, it can be easy for routines to revolve around schedules, symptoms, and responsibilities. But joy still matters. In this interview, care partner Whitney Slade shares how fun, shared activities helped restore a sense of connection, lightness, and togetherness—and why those moments can be more powerful than they may seem.

"Dwight and I met in a comedy club, so our relationship started out pretty entertaining. He was a stand-up comic going on 40 years performing on stage, and I speak fluent sarcasm, pretty much exclusively. Between the travel (not all of it glamorous), brainstorming and writing together, and just the simple act of not taking ourselves too seriously, we always found the fun in both adventure and the day-to-day.

While "joy" isn't the first word that comes to mind when I think of Parkinson's, I believe there are still many ways to discover something new, or a new way of doing something you've always done, that brings a smile to you and your partner.

Before I share a few of the ways we find joy, I offer this tip: SLOW DOWN. The grand gestures, the extravagant trips, the surprises, and the dramatics are likely few and far between. Maybe they aren't over, but the sooner you start to let go of the expectation from your partner, the healthier your relationship will be. And you will start to let in the little things. The things that really matter and eventually the only things you and your partner can share.

I don't say this to be dismal. I say this to be real and to encourage you to start noticing them. The sooner you do, the more you will appreciate all the things you can still share together."

When did you begin to realize that fun and shared activities were more than just a break in the routine—that they were actually important for both of you?

When I felt like Parkinson's was starting to define us. I don't want every question to be about how we are doing with Parkinson's. Could it just be, " How are you doing?"

I started to think about what we used to love and how I could approach those things a little differently with Parkinson's in our lives. We both need activities

“I don’t want every question to be about how we are doing with Parkinson’s. Could it just be, “How are you doing?”

that have nothing to do with the disease. We have always loved getting massages and have found it to be the perfect combination for us. Between Dwight’s muscle soreness and my stress, we both need time to decompress and work out the kinks.

But I knew I wouldn’t enjoy my time off if he was home alone. And he needed me to advocate for him and be sure he was comfortable in a massage room with a total stranger. So, we started going to couples’ massage. One room, two therapists. The perfect outing.

They also know us very well at our neighborhood nail salon, where we frequently get manicures and pedicures together. These activities bring joy, relaxation, self-care, and a boost in self-esteem for both of us.

What kinds of shared activities have brought the most joy or lightness into your lives, and what made those moments meaningful?

We both love to read, but it has become too difficult for Dwight. And audiobooks are great, but we are listening separately. So, I started reading books aloud. We found that we looked forward to bedtime more. We could put our phones away, talk about the story’s progression, and look forward to hearing what happens next.

We also started recording stories together. Writing can become tricky, even on a computer, and Dwight doesn’t like the pressure of video, so we do voice recordings right on the phone or the laptop. We might be talking about a trip we went on, and I grab the phone and ask him if I can record the story. Or we may make a plan to chat about a chosen topic.

The stories range from a favorite memory of his mom to a funny story from early comedy days. Sometimes he just talks, and sometimes I dig deeper or make it more interview-style, which also helps to prompt more details. We can also transcribe the recording. I know I will treasure these forever, and we can share them with family and friends.

How have those activities helped your relationship beyond the day-to-day caregiving/care-partnering role?

Even if just for a few minutes, he is my partner, my husband again.

Stopping to give someone your undivided attention is very intimate. It can be as simple as listening to a song that used to bring us joy and swaying together next to the dishwasher. Say “Hey, Google, turn it up” and embrace the moment, embrace your partner.

With this disease, we experience so much loss of the things we used to do. I am always searching for new ways to enjoy the old things we love.

We are big fans of Broadway and especially love the best seats. But sitting in the middle is a nightmare when you have what feels like a four-minute intermission to make it to the restroom and back to your seat. We now have some great ADA seats that let us quickly get up to the restroom line.

We used to love taking out our tandem bike; just being on the bike brought us joy. People would wave at us, and we adored the attention. Dwight had always been in the front seat, in charge of the brakes, gears, and direction. But now I ride in the front, and all Dwight has to do is pedal. We are together, with no risk of getting lost or separated, and we can still share this experience.

Were there any activities you tried that surprised you by how helpful or enjoyable they turned out to be?

Looking at old photos and remembering those adventures, talking about the best parts and the worst. It has helped me to remember how many adventures we had together, even in our short time before the diagnosis. I thought it would make me sadder, but instead I feel grateful. I'm not looking back thinking, " Oh, we don't have that anymore, I think, "Wow, we did some really cool stuff together."

We loved to take long walks along the river. Now we just go straight to our favorite spot and set up our chairs and snacks. We get the same result, just a little differently, and we can take in more of the best parts, listening to the water, watching our dog swim, and enjoying the wildlife.

What challenges have you faced in making time or space for these shared moments, and how did you work through them?

Everything about this disease is challenging. I have always been a planner, so this has been a big change for me. Making an appointment or plans with friends and needing to cancel at the last minute can be frustrating.

Living "a 36-hour day" and often feeling exhausted is tough. I work hard not to put expectations on the activities we do together. If we sit together in the sun for just 10 minutes, or if we do a voice recording and need to pick it up later, it counts. I cherish enjoying a frozen yogurt or singing together in the car. I just focus on being patient and flexible.

A few years ago, I was really starting to miss our travels. I'd never gone on an RV trip, and I thought that might be fun. Well, Dwight wasn't driving anymore, and so I was responsible for maneuvering this gigantic thing around. I avoided going in reverse for four whole days, but we did survive. If we try that again, I'll probably ask my friends with RV experience for some tips.

What would you say to another care partner who feels guilty prioritizing fun when life with Parkinson's already feels so serious?

There is no way of knowing how much time we have in this role. If we don't make time now, then when? And by the way, these activities are not just for our partners; they are for us too. This is the hardest job I've ever had, and at the end of the day, I judge myself harshly. The loudest voice in my head says I'm not doing enough. So, if I can bring some joy to our day-to-day, I feel that might be one of the most important things I can do.

Ping Pong for Parkinson's: Q & A with Karen Staebell

What sparked the Ping Pong Parkinson group in Madison, and what need were you hoping to meet?

Nenad Bach, the founder of PingPongParkinson®, had done an interview with the Davis Phinney Foundation. Subsequently, talk of the PingPongParkinson® organization was shared during our Rock Steady Boxing® (RSB) class.

Our RSB coach, Patti Batt, asked our group whether anyone was interested in playing ping pong. About a dozen people raised their hands. The next question asked was, "Who wants to help get it started?" Carol Cameron and I stepped up and got the program running over the winter of 2022/23.

How is a typical session structured (from warm-up to cool-down), and what simple adaptations keep it safe and welcoming for all stages?

As participants arrive, they have the opportunity to socialize and practice juggling. At first, people practice tossing and catching scarves, then move on to balls, and eventually to juggling techniques.

Ten minutes into the session, the group leader gathers everyone for gentle stretching, vocal exercises, and facial exercises. Individuals are reminded to be aware of their abilities and limitations. If balance is an issue, people are reminded to position themselves near a stable fixture such as a wall, table, walker, etc. All individuals, regardless of age or mobility limitations, are encouraged to work to their own abilities.

The remaining hour is dedicated to playing ping pong. We've found that rotating to a different partner every ten minutes or so challenges the more experienced players while helping the less experienced players become more proficient.

Which parts of ping pong deliver the biggest Parkinson's benefits in your experience (e.g., balance, reaction time, dual-tasking, mood)?

Ping pong is a whole-brain activity. We know that different parts of the brain are responsible for various functions: planning, balance, socialization, muscle control, quick reactions, etc. The variety of requirements in ping pong makes it an excellent exercise option for individuals with neurodegenerative diseases. Additionally, one walks away from the experience with an adrenaline high that can last multiple days for some.

What partnerships or resources make the program possible, and what support do you still need?

PingPongParkinson ® Madison, WI chapter is very fortunate to partner with four generous organizations.

The Madison Table Tennis organization allows our group to use their tables, nets, and space dividers free of charge.

The East Madison Community Center allows us to use their gym for two-hour sessions twice a week at a discounted rental rate.

The UW Occupational Therapy Kinesiology department supplies us with student volunteers every fall and spring semester.

Ping Pong Wisconsin

Classes are free for participants, courtesy of APDA of WI.

Classes are on
Thursdays (10:00 - 11:30 AM) and Sundays (2:00 - 3:30 PM)

East Madison Community Center
(Gym), 8 Straubel Court, Madison, WI

Preregistration is not required, but we recommend bringing a water bottle to stay hydrated during the session.

Questions?
Email pppmadisonwi@gmail.com.

APDA WI pays for any supplies and equipment replacement, as well as the monthly rental fee for the space at the community center.

For readers who want to join or start a club, what are the first steps you recommend?

Go to the PingPongParkinson.org website and read about the international organization. You will also find a link to "Find a Chapter" https://www.pingpongparkinson.org/find-a-chapter anywhere in the world. If there isn't one listed in your area, you can start a chapter by following the step-by-step set of instructions at https://www.pingpongparkinson.org/start-a-chapter

Making Friends Through Parkinson's Exercise Groups

By **Bill Ryan**

Building social skills and Interpersonal relations are important components of Parkinson's exercise groups and classes, as they add interesting conversations, new friendships, and a supportive community. New friends overcome the isolation faced by some, provide support for people having difficulty with their diagnosis, and provide a sense of belonging to a group that shares similar challenges and goals.

Principles from Dale Carnegie's How to Win Friends and Influence People provide ways to be an active listener, provide sincere appreciation to build lasting relationships, emphasize genuine connections, etc. These principles are especially useful in Parkinson's activities where declining motor skills can lead to apathy and depression.

Here are some of the activities participants in the Wisconsin Chapter of APDA have pursued to maximize the physical and social benefits of Parkinson's exercises:

- **Bicycling Team** members who extended a hand to me along the 330-mile Erie Canal Trail last year provided kindness through encouragement and a sense of achievement. After the long trip, we sang a song on a historic downtown Street corner, celebrating the kindness of Ed, my kidney donor who made the trip possible for me. Calling attention to Ed's gift provided our bicycle team with purpose and thankfulness.
- **Ping Pong Parkinsons** provides us an opportunity to revive old skills, develop new skills while focusing on physical, cognitive, and social elements. Supported by the APDA Wisconsin Chapter, it also allows participants to just be silly kids while listening to oldies. The friendships within the two ping pong groups are strong, and ping pong organizers typically plan a couple of parties a year for all the participants to get to know each other.
- **Dance, including the Tango**, can take people out of their comfort zone, but The University of Wisconsin Kinesiology Department focuses on creating a fun and judgment-free experience for all. The sessions are filled with positive reinforcement by the instructors, giving individuals sincere and specific compliments on their dance followed by suggested changes if needed.
- **Rock Steady Boxing** works on balance, strength, and endurance under the high-energy but caring supervision of a wonderful coach. Her sincere personality makes our sessions about supporting each other within our family of boxers. One of the first things we do in class is to go around a big circle and introduce ourselves to each other, usually in a funny way. As Dale Carnegie reminds us, most people appreciate being called by their name.

- **Middleton PD Wellness Group** and support groups elsewhere in the region provide us with a monthly opportunity to invite others to join us and share ideas that they might find beneficial. Be a good listener. Encourage others to talk about themselves and let the group take ownership of sessions.
- **Strength building** provides the foundation for health in many ways. Here we are given the opportunity to encourage and support the efforts of other strength builders in the proper use of weights and machines. This is an opportunity to give honest, sincere, and specific appreciation for effort. Help participants act enthusiastically regarding strength building, so that they become truly enthusiastic about this important form of exercise.
- **Walking**, either independently or with an assisted device, is a core part of most physical therapy assignments. APDA-Wisconsin Chapter hosts a walk at least once a year, which draws a large group for a very social activity. This might be a good time to practice smiling and strengthen those muscles that may impact the first impressions people have of us.
- **Parkinson's Exercise Classes** include stretching and flexibility exercises, aerobics, and balance. These exercises can really help improve their range of motion and reduce stiffness. This is another opportunity to practice giving positive reinforcement. Participants of some exercise classes come early or meet after the session in an informal support group.
- **Yoga for all and Tai chi** can help improve stability and reduce the risk of falling. I remember being new and uncertain about myself in yoga class. At the same time, the instructors were interested in sincerely welcoming new participants in their class and making them relaxed.
- Other programs such as **indoor rock climbing**, **singing loud**, or **pickleball** are being formed in communities across the country. They need participants' help and commitment to see them grow and provide new resources for those with Parkinson's.

In the end, Parkinson's exercise groups are more than just about physical fitness. They provide Important benefits that involve the entire community in an emotionally supportive way. By helping us build new friendships, we are supported by people who we can relate to and are also interested in living life to its fullest. And if you don't know what to say to another class member, offer works of praise, appreciation, or simply a question.

Bill Ryan, Board Member of the Wisconsin Chapter of APDA, served as a Dale Carnegie Instructor after college. Throughout his career, he has reflected on Dale Carnegie's teachings as a guide for getting along with others. In 2013, Bill received a Parkinson's diagnosis at age 55. In addition to following the medical advice of his movement disorder neurologist, Bill believes that the Dale Carnegie principles have helped him develop strong social bonds and exercise programs with people in the Parkinson's community.

APDA Wisconsin 2026 Optimism Walk

SCAN ME

Sign up today and start making an impact!

Green Bay Optimism Walk

Saturday, September 19
Green Bay

Join the Green Bay Optimism Walk!

The Green Bay Optimism Walk for Parkinson's is less than two months away—so now is the time to register, start a team, and get your fundraising underway. 💙

On Saturday, September 19, our community will come together to celebrate strength, resilience, and the power of standing together for everyone affected by Parkinson's disease.

Whether you are living with Parkinson's, supporting someone you love, honoring someone special, or simply looking for a meaningful way to give back, your participation can make a real difference.

Every dollar you raise helps APDA Wisconsin provide local support groups, wellness programs, educational resources, and services for people with Parkinson's and their families—while also funding research toward better treatments and ultimately a cure.

Walk, donate, volunteer, or create a team—every action helps ensure that no one faces Parkinson's alone.

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Join APDA's Legacy Society and Leave a Lasting Impact

The American Parkinson Disease Association (APDA) is committed to supporting people impacted by Parkinson's disease by increasing access to education and wellness, building community, providing support, and investing in research.

Including APDA in your will helps improve lives and costs you nothing today. Join other supporters in our APDA Legacy Society by including APDA in your will or trust, and invest in a brighter future for everyone living with Parkinson's.

August is Make-A-Will Month— a perfect opportunity to create your legacy.

Take the next step: Contact an estate planning attorney or create your will online for free using Giving Docs.

Reach out to us at **apdawi@apdaparkinson.org.** to learn more.