

Local mom, daughter push walk for Crohn's

By Christy Barritt
Correspondent

Michele Credle hopes others will help her take steps toward raising awareness and finding a cure for Crohn's and colitis patients.

The Chesapeake mother is executive chair of the Crohn's and Colitis Foundation of America Southeastern Virginia Take Steps Walk, scheduled May 17 at Fort Monroe in Hampton.

Crohn's is a chronic bowel disease that causes inflammation or swelling of the digestive tract. In 2004, Credle's then 13-year-old daughter, Samantha, was diagnosed with the disease.

Samantha went from 104 to 61 pounds within six weeks due to digestive problems. The diagnosis turned the family's life upside down. Credle gave up her job as an interior designer and has become an unofficial expert on the disease. She said she has read almost 600 books dealing with IBD.

"Life just didn't throw us a curve ball," Samantha said. "It

did a 360 around mom."

The walk is 10K (6.2 miles) though participants don't have to walk the entire course. Portable toilets, water stops and health-food bars will be located along the route, for those with IBD, an inclusive term for either disease.

Walk organizers are hoping to have 600 participants and raise \$250,000.

"There are 243 children who live in Chesapeake with Crohn's or colitis," Credle said. "We support them, and it would be nice to see the people of Chesapeake come out and support us."

Credle also started the Hampton Roads Crohn's and Colitis Support Group, which meets on the first Saturday of every month at the Sentara Careplex in Hampton.

"The goal is to get the word out about CCFA, about Crohn's and colitis and about how much is in your community," Credle said. "It affects about 2 million people worldwide."

Today, Samantha is 16 and a sophomore at Oscar Smith High School. She's managing the disease

without the help of medications by eating organic and whole foods.

Samantha completed her first walk in 2005 in Chevy Chase, Md. Afterward, she told her mom that they should get involved with a closer walk, but none existed in Hampton Roads. When Credle called the CCFA headquarters, the executive officer encouraged her to start a walk. So she did.

"I think it's important to me because when I first started out with Crohn's I thought I was the only one," Samantha said. "...I think it's important is so kids won't feel alone."

The walk, which was previously called the Guts and Glory Walk, took place the last two years at the Dismal Swamp Canal Welcome Center in North Carolina. They moved the walk this year to encourage more participation.

Organizers also eliminated the registration fee. Anyone who raises \$100 or more will receive a free T-shirt. In addition to the walk, the event also will feature a battle-of-the-bands contest and IBD health fair.

For more information, visit www.cctakesteps.org.

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FAMILY PHOTO

Michele Credle, right, has become an official expert on Crohn's disease after her daughter, Samantha, was diagnosed in 2004. Now a sophomore at Oscar Smith High, Samantha manages the disease - without medication - by eating organic and whole foods.