

## Event honors woman, raises public awareness

Fund-raiser on May 14 in Garden City Park will go toward scholarships for people with lupus.

[By Ursula Watson / The Detroit News](#)

**GARDEN CITY** -- Latreese Nicole Fagan lost her battle with lupus in May 2001 at the age of 27 but her memory lives on with a scholarship that bears her name.

Fagan's parents, Bettye and Edgar Fagan started the nonprofit, Latreese Nicole Fagan Memorial Scholarship Fund Inc., in 2002 with the help of the St. Clair Shores-based Lupus Alliance of Michigan/Indiana, to educate the public on lupus and to help those with the disease pursue their academic dreams.

The Fagans will hold the third annual Lupus Walk in Garden City Park on May 14 to raise money for the scholarships, lupus awareness and research. The goal is to raise \$15,000.

Each scholarship is \$1,000 and is open to those with lupus between the ages of 17 and 25.

Bettye Fagan said Latreese was 13 when she was diagnosed with the disease. Fagan said doctors offered her and her husband little information about lupus.

"We were in shock," said Bettye Fagan of Detroit. "We were asking, 'What was lupus?'"

Lupus is a chronic autoimmune disease, which causes the body's immune system to attack healthy tissue and organs, causing inflammation.

The disease's symptoms mimic the symptoms of other diseases, which makes it difficult to pinpoint. People with lupus, Fagan said are plagued by chronic headaches, joint pain, rashes, low-grade fevers, fatigue and infections.

According the Lupus Alliance, the annual deaths by lupus has increased 60 percent. While the disease can strike anyone, it strikes African-American and Hispanic women disproportionately. The death rate climbs to almost 70 percent among African-American women between the ages of 45 to 64.

The Centers for Disease Control reports that one-third of all lupus deaths occur among people under 45.

Fagan said up to 1.5 million Americans have lupus and 90 percent are women.

Still very little is known about how the disease comes about, Fagan said.

"It could be genetic, viral, and environmental and then it could be a little bit of everything," she said. "There are so many ifs and buts."

Fagan said her daughter became an expert of her own disease. She was able to talk the medical jargon with the battery of doctors she saw often for her kidneys, heart and lungs.

"You name it, she had a doctor for it," Fagan said.

While Latreese battled her disease, which caused her to miss a year of high school, she remained active and dedicated to her studies.

She graduated top of her class at Mercy High School and went on to attend the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor where she was working on a bachelor's of science degree in industrial and operations engineering.

The university posthumously awarded Latreese her degree on April 27, 2002. Her parents, decked out in full cap and gown, accepted it in her place.

"Our daughter was a warrior," Fagan said. "I have never seen a kid fight so hard to live."

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