



# Brain Injury Association of Texas

## Newsletter

### Recent News & Events

Many thanks go out to our Regional Seminar Chairs, Eric Makowski, Tim Atchison, PhD, and Margaret Struchen, PhD for three very successful seminars in Austin, Amarillo and Houston this year! The seminars reached many new members, especially in the Panhandle area where folks are eager for us to come back.

And a special thanks to all our sponsors and exhibitors:

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## Walk for Thought Brings Awareness, Raises Much Needed Funds

By George Hatt

Alpha Phi Omega Nu Gamma Chapter hosted the Brain Injury Association of Texas second annual Walk For Thought on November 18th at Texas State University's West Athletic Field.

"Walk For Thought is a benefit walk for brain injury patients of Texas," said Samantha Graves, Service Chair of Alpha Phi Omega's Nu Gamma chapter. The proceeds go toward helping brain injury patients pay for continuing treatment and doctor visits.

Graves said that his chapter has been working for six months on the event.

"We've held regular meetings working out a lot of the major details, such as a place to hold it," Mark LeMense, President of the Nu Gamma Chapter, said. The Nu Gamma Chapter has also labored to make signs, design tee shirts, and work out sponsorships for the Walk For Thought, he said.

Boy Scout Troop 215 from Lockhart provided concessions at the event.

"Walk faster and get hungrier," shouted assistant scout master Ron McCandless to the walkers.

McCandless said that the troop will donate a portion of the proceeds to the Brain Injury Association of Texas.

Twelve teams participated in this year's Walk For Thought, bringing in several thousand dollars for the Brain Injury Association of Texas. "Between six and eight thousand dollars is a conservative estimate," Graves said.

Friends and family of people who have recovered from brain injuries, as well as recovering patients themselves, formed teams and collected \$20 per walker for the event. The teams also collected contributions from corporate sponsors and other donors.

"We are putting this team together in honor of my little sister Samantha, who suffered a brain injury January 1, 2005," said Desiray Dixon, team captain of Sammy's Brainiacs. Samantha was given a one percent chance to live by doctors, Dixon said, but "fortunately, she's here to walk with us" in the event.

Dawn Weiss, team captain of Leis by Lola, recovered from a brain injury and led

her team. "I had a 100 pound chandelier fall on my head at a restaurant three years ago", she said.

Walk For Thought has another significant function besides raising funds--it raises much-needed awareness of brain injuries. "The main purpose, I think, has to do with creating better community awareness about brain injury," said Les Young, former treasurer of the Brain Injury Association of Texas. "Brain injury is called the silent epidemic. It's one of the most significant disabilities of the 21st century, the biggest cause of death in children in the United States."

Rose Pelzel, the secretary-elect of the Brain Injury Association of Texas, underscores the need for public awareness. Her son Brian suffered a brain stem injury three years ago in a car accident. People with brain stem injuries "usually don't make it," she says. "The doctors the first week said that he would die. The second week he started breathing on his own."

"They said he'll live, but he's going to be a vegetable," Pelzel said. Defying the doctors' prognosis, Pelzel's son recovered--and is applying

for a drivers license at the first of the year, she said.

Brian's recovery is miraculous, but presents a special challenge. "He looks just fine," Pelzel said, "but his short term memory is not there, and he sometimes acts before he thinks."

"People don't know that he has a brain injury and that he doesn't mean anything by it," Weiss said.

"That's the problem with brain injury," Weiss said. "We can present very well." Weiss said that her healthy demeanor disguises her problems with memory, attention span, and concentration.

Eric Makowski, the president of the Brain Injury Association of Texas, says that timely rehab is the key to making success stories possible. "The medical community tends to agree that the most gain that you're going to get in rehab following a traumatic brain injury are going to be in the first 18 months," he said.

"If you don't get appropriate rehab in that time, people end up being left permanently disabled," Makowski said.

Makowski said that only five percent of people suffering brain injuries would have adequate resources to receive appropriate care.

"The tremendous medical cost up front is sort of addressed by insurance--if you have insurance," said Bob Johnson, Membership chairman of the Brain Injury Association of Texas. "But the long-term rehab is not adequately addressed by federal or state funding."

Johnson said that insurance offers limited resources for rehab, and does not address other services that patients and their families need.

"If people are permanently disabled due to cognitive problems, they end up in nursing homes and they end up in the street, getting in trouble with the law," Makowski said.

"The taxpayers pay for people in nursing homes, they pay for people in jail, they pay for people in the street," Makowski said. "So we always tell the legislature that if you get the right services at the right time, you save tens of millions of dollars over the course of each individual's life."

Makowski gave other statistics. "The cost of traumatic brain injury is \$50 billion annually," he said. "There are four times more people with brain injuries than people with AIDS and breast cancer combined."

Margaret Struchen, past president of the Brain Injury Association of Texas, said that this year's Walk for Thought has brought BIATX back into the fight.

"We just presented an award to Desiray Dixon, who in conjunction with APO, helped raise a considerable amount of funding for this event," Struchen said. "The Brain Injury Association of Texas has really been working to regenerate the organization over the past few years."

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## Bruce Todd Hosts Fundraiser for BIATX

Former Austin Mayor Bruce Todd has a new reason to celebrate this holiday season and he did so in style with several hundred friends on November 27, 2006, exactly one year since he suffered major head injuries in a life threatening bicycling accident. Todd and his wife Elizabeth Christian held a party to celebrate his recovery and thank people for their support at this time last year. Todd has used his accident to raise the level of awareness of brain injury in Central Texas and his party was no exception as he encouraged his friends to make a donation to the Brain Injury association of Texas.

Austin musician Steve Fromholtz who suffered a stroke and is now on the road to recovery provided the entertainment.

Todd says treatment and rehabilitation for all types of brain injuries continues to improve year to year. "The ability we have to come back through rehabilitation is excellent."

## Brain Injury Research in Texas: Building a Social Life after Brain Injury: Social Peer-Mentoring

Loneliness is one of the major problems that people can experience after traumatic brain injury (TBI). Research has shown that many people lose friendships that they had prior to their injury. For many, there are fewer people available in their social circle, and this problem can increase as time goes on after injury. Often, family members become the main source for social activities.

While this is not true for all people who have sustained a TBI, it is an all too common problem that can result in feelings of isolation. Having relationships with other is a key aspect to feeling like one "belongs" in a community. Some ways in which people can increase their social participation include participating in support groups or within Brain Injury Association of Texas. However, some people might benefit from direct assistance to find out about and participate in social activities in their communities and to meet new people.

Researchers at Memorial Hermann/TIRR Hospital and Baylor College of Medicine in Houston, Texas, are conducting a clinical trial to see if a social peer-mentoring program might be useful in meeting these goals. The project is being led by Margaret A. Struchen, Ph.D., who also serves on the Board and as Past President of BIATX. This innovative program pairs volunteers with brain injury trained as social peer mentors to individuals with brain injury who are interested in increasing their social activities. Social peer mentors attempt to help their partners with increasing how often they do social activities and increasing the number of people with which their partners can do activities.

This study is a type of study called a "randomized clinical trial." This means that the investigators are testing how the program works by randomly assigning people interested in being mentored (like the flip of a coin) to either receive mentoring right away or to be on a "wait-list" where they can receive mentoring after a 4-month delay. This kind of study design is the best way to see if any changes that might occur in social participation are due to the program itself, or whether they are due to other factors.

For those receiving social peer mentoring, mentoring will occur over a 3-month period. During that time, their social peer mentor will help them gain new skills and information about activities in their community. Social peer mentors will also help arrange and participate in social activities with their partners on at least a twice per month basis.

The research is being conducted right now in the Houston/Galveston metropolitan area. For more information about the project, you can go to the researchers' website at [www.tbicommunity.org](http://www.tbicommunity.org). (Click on the Research Projects button and then on the project listed as R1: Increasing Social Networking Opportunities after TBI.) You may also contact Ms. Diana Kurtz, research coordinator for the project at (713)383-5646 if you have additional questions or might be interested in participating in the project.

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## Crime Victims' Compensation Fund

Were you or your loved one a victim of a crime? If so, you may be eligible to receive financial help from the Crime Victims' Compensation Fund of Texas which is administered by The Office of the Attorney General of Texas. The money collected by Texas courts from convicted offenders is placed into this fund to help victims with no other means of paying for financial costs associated with a crime. The basic requirements are:

- 1) you must be a Texas or United States resident and the crime must have occurred in Texas
- 2) the crime must involve a Texas resident who becomes a victim in another state or country that has no crime victims' compensation benefit.

The following is a list of some of the eligible expenses:

- 1) Medical, hospital, physical therapy, or nursing care
- 2) Psychiatric care or counseling
- 3) Loss of earning or support
- 4) Loss of wages with regards to participating in the investigation, judicial proceedings, and travel
- 5) Care of a child or dependent
- 6) Funeral and burial expenses
- 7) Loss of wages and travel expenses related to getting medical treatment

There is a \$50,000 maximum benefit unless the injury is of catastrophic nature, which would increase the amount by \$75,000.

Other resources must be exhausted as the Crime Victims' Fund of Texas is a payor of last resort.

To view all eligibility requirement, eligible expenses, and how and when to apply for Crime Victims' fund visit <http://www.oag.state.tx.us/victims/cvc.shtml> or call 1-800-983-9933. To view a list of other states and their compensation programs go to [http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/ovc/help/voca\\_links.htm](http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/ovc/help/voca_links.htm).

## BIATX Treasurer Recognized For His Dedication

Les Young, BIATX Treasurer for many years, was recognized at the November Board meeting for his dedication to our members and Association. Margaret Struchen, President, presented Les with an award at Texas State University just prior to the walk for Thought. Les took over the responsibility of keeping track of the Association's finances during a difficult time, with financial records in disarray. His leadership has led to better fiscal policy and improved record and bookkeeping. Join us in thanking Les for his leadership and perseverance over many years. Although he will not serve on the Board in 2007 due to by-law requirements, Les has indicated that he will stay on as a volunteer.

## Calling All Support Groups and Local Chapters

If your support group information has changed or if you would like to become a local BIATX chapter, please drop us a line at [info@biatx.org](mailto:info@biatx.org), ATTENTION Annie Walker, Chapter Relations Chair. BIATX is interested in your activities and would like to find out how to better support your efforts across the state.