

# The Power of Parkinson's Superstars



**T**hroughout Parkinson's Awareness Month, this past April, NPF paid tribute to "Parkinson's Superstars," calling on supporters to submit nominations for everyday heroes who make a difference in the Parkinson's community. This nationwide call, which began in February 2012, resulted in over 100 entries.

Among the nominees were people with Parkinson's, caregivers, healthcare providers and supporters who have helped overcome the challenges posed by the disease and have risen above them in extraordinary ways.

"By recognizing community superstars we were able to highlight and explain Parkinson's through the eyes of those who live it every day," said Joyce Oberdorf, NPF's President and CEO. "Their stories serve as important reminders that even one person can affect change, empower others and raise awareness about the disease."

Two superstars, Allison Smith-Conway from Laguna Niguel, CA and Wendell Cook from Sioux Falls, SD were honored as outstanding superstars amongst the group.

## Allison Smith-Conway



Diagnosed with Young Onset Parkinson's at age 32 after a battle with colon cancer, Allison has turned her many challenges into opportunities to grow and help her local community. She is actively involved in creating and organizing Parkinson's support groups, fitness classes and other events, and educates people about Parkinson's as a

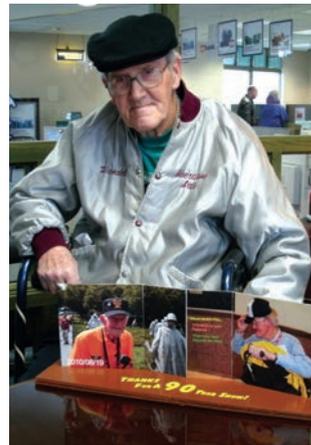
motivational speaker.

"It is such an honor to be recognized because it reaffirms my life journey," Allison said. "Being chosen as a Superstar reminds me how many people I have touched and gives me strength to continue to reach more."

It was this desire to reach people that motivated her to write a book about her struggle with illness, *"I Am Not Contagious."* The book is her platform to share her experiences and, in this way, empower people with Parkinson's to speak out.

"Parkinson's disease affects millions of people worldwide—breaking the stigma is half the battle," she said. "By being active and raising awareness, we can offer more resources and learn more about the disease and how to slow its progression."

## Wendell Cook



Living with Parkinson's for the last 15 years, Wendell's motto is "never give up." An avid bicyclist, at the age of 87 Wendell turned in his two-wheeler for a recumbent tricycle, refusing to allow his Parkinson's to interfere with his passion.

Along with his wife of 66 years, he founded "Team Wendell", a cycling team that has raised

money for Habitat for Humanity and Parkinson's research. He also transformed his talent for painting into a means to help people with Parkinson's through a signature art therapy project, "Parkinson's Art Cart."

As an active member of the Parkinson's community in South Dakota, he uses his creativity and optimism to encourage everyone to fight Parkinson's. "I want people to know that, yes, I have Parkinson's, but I still love life. I want to tell everyone that it is possible to fight this disease, smile at yourself and hold off the inevitable," he said.

**To view the Parkinson's Superstars Gallery, visit [www.parkinson.org/superstars](http://www.parkinson.org/superstars).**