

PEOPLE

# Love of son, lust for life, celebrated anew at ALS fundraiser

**By Dana Slowiak**  
*The Northside News*

Former Northside resident Steve Weekes' legacy includes his son, his love of life, and a fundraiser he started six years ago.

The annual Rockin For a Cure, slated for April 29 at the Coliseum Bar, continues on without Steve. The event raises money for ALS research, the very disease that claimed Weekes' life in January 2005. He was 43.

Steve's motivation for starting the fundraiser was not only to find a cure but also to stick around for his son, Zach, who is now 11 and a half.

"His pride and one of his greatest joys was his son, Zach," said John Weekes, Steve's younger brother. "His drive and inspiration was to keep living for his son and watch him grow up."

ALS (Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis) is fatal neurological condition that slowly destroys the body's muscles. Also known as Lou Gehrig's Disease, it attacks the central nervous system (the brain and spinal cord), killing the motor neurons the brain and muscles use to communicate to each other. The brain no longer tells muscles how to function. As the result, the unused muscles die one by one.

Over time, the body can no longer perform basic functions like walking, standing, holding objects and vital life needs, like swallowing and breathing. The average life span after diagnosis is only three to five years.

There is no known cause or cure for

ALS. According to the ALS Association, most people are diagnosed between ages 40 and 70. Steve was younger than the average when he was diagnosed at age 36. As many as 30,000 Americans have ALS at any given time.

Upon learning his diagnosis in 1999 and discovering ALS was fatal, Steve took action. He realized that research was the key to finding a cure. While waiting in an ALS clinic for treatment with his siblings John and Monica, he decided a fundraiser was in order.

A natural fit for his fundraiser was the Madison Scouts Drum and Bugle Corps and the band Wall of Sound, two of Steve's passions. He performed with the Corps in the early 1980s and helped instruct the Corps for several years. In fact, he moved to Madison in 1981 with the sole purpose of becoming a member of the Corps. He was also the drummer in Wall of Sound.

Rockin For A Cure was born. The first event took place in 2000, less than a year after his diagnosis.

While his fundraiser continued to grow and strengthen each year, Steve's body moved in the opposite direction.

"Steve was a great mentor," said John. "He taught me snare drums as a kid. He had a good drive and a passion and dedication to life." John and Monica did not hesitate to put their own lives on hold and help Steve battle ALS. They decided to purchase a home near Warner Park just to help Steve with daily living as his disease



Photos provided by John Weekes

**Left: Steve and his son Zach celebrate the first day of kindergarten. Above: Steve was a member of the Madison Scouts Drum and Bugle Corps in the early 1980s.**

progressed.

One tragic side effect of ALS is that sufferers do not lose cognitive abilities as the disease progresses. They are fully aware of everything happening to their bodies. Weekes chose not to let this affect him and continued to plan and promote Rockin For A Cure and spent time with his family and son.

"Steve had a good drive, and a passion and dedication to life," said John.

The Weekes family spent a lot of time at close-to-home Northside events. Steve, Zach, Monica and John spent several summer nights enjoying the NESCO concert series since Steve could get there easily in his wheelchair. Steve was also a regular at Apple Fest and Rhythm and Booms. He continued to fight the disease until the very end, John said, and he outlived the normal life span for ALS. The disease finally claimed in on January 14, 2005, before the fifth annual Rockin For A Cure.

The fundraiser continues to remember Steve and share the story of ALS with the community. This year's event on April 29 features Madison Scouts Drum and Bugle Corps, Madison Scouts Alumni Reunion Drum & Bugle Corp, Chicago Royal Airs Alumni Drum & Bugle Corps and the Soul Brothers. The event takes at the Coliseum Bar at 232 Olin Avenue and begins at 6 pm. Tickets cost \$20, and all proceeds go to ALS Therapy Development Foundation.

**Event website**  
[www.rockinforcure.org](http://www.rockinforcure.org)



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