Buffalo Grove woman's efforts worth $50,000?

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A Buffalo Grove woman who is the driving force behind a not-for-profit agency working to end neuro-degenerative disorders is a finalist in a nationwide contest that could net her charity up to $50,000.

Ilyce Randell is director of Canavan Research Illinois, which raises money for research into Canavan disease and similar disorders.

She is one of seven finalists in the Zero Boundaries Woman contest sponsored by Diet Rite, and is hoping people who find her story inspiring will get online and vote for her.

The 39-year-old Buffalo Grove woman was nominated by her mother, Peggy Shapiro Nyeholt, of Des Plaines, who assists her in fundraising. Randell's son, Max, has Canavan Disease and has benefited from groundbreaking research funded by the foundation.

A "zero boundaries woman," according to the Diet Rite Web site, is someone who "won't let anything stop her from making a positive difference in the lives of others; whose unwavering commitment to the causes she believes in is an inspiration to us all, whether by setting an example or by being a friend …"

The contest will offer up to $25,000 each to the nominee and the nominator.

Randell says she and her mother would give the entire $50,000 to Canavan Research Illinois, to further the work of principal researcher, Dr. Paola Leone, at the Robert Wood Johnson Medical Center in New Jersey.

Randell's mother saw a print ad for the contest and wrote a heartfelt nominating essay in the middle of the night.

In part, it reads: "Ilyce's efforts have helped fund a gene therapy trial bringing hope (not only to the children battling Canavan) but also to millions of others suffering from diseases such as MS, ALS, and Parkinson's.

"In 2001, Ilyce was selected by Parkinson patients to deliver the … petition (signed by 13,000 chronically ill patients and 80 Nobel winners in support of stem cell funding) to HHS Secretary Tommy Thompson. She is a motivator of others and she brings out the best in people. As a voice for children with so few advocates, she has greatly increased awareness of Canavan Disease, as well as motivating others affected by life-changing situations."

The contest netted 480 nominees altogether. They were narrowed to seven this week by what Diet Rite calls an independent panel of judges.

Voting is open to the general public through May 1. People can vote as often as once a day.

To register and vote, go to www.dietrite.com

Randell has been honored as a local Make A Difference Day winner; has been given the

“Power of One” award by National Tay Sachs; and is referred to as “a profile in courage” by Illinois Sen. Richard Durbin.

Details on Canavan Disease are available at the Web sites www.savingmax.com and www.canavanresearch.org