

# Local resident shares story of MS



Photo by Bill Rosen

Allentown resident Brett Weber was one of the many "Faces of MS" that were displayed on the NASDAQ building when the National MS Society launched an informative website in March.

**By Fred Jerant**  
Correspondent

For someone who does not walk or drive, Allentown resident Brett Weber sure gets around.

Some days, he will be soaking up sunshine and fresh air in local parks with his service dog, Sophia.

Other days, he will be in the pool at the Rodale Aquatic Center for Civic Health, on the campus of Cedar Crest College.

Or he might be in art galleries in New York or Philadelphia, for exhibitions of his abstract artwork.

These days, you can also find him on [www.faceofms.org](http://www.faceofms.org), where he and 60 others describe their experiences in dealing with

multiple sclerosis.

The site was launched in March by the National Multiple Sclerosis Society to mark its 60th anniversary.

Its opening page displays a "generic" human face composed of tiny portraits of the individuals appearing within the site. By clicking on a portrait, you can hear and read each person's story.

"It's a good approach," Weber said, "because there's no single description of the effects of MS."

He explained that it affects different people in different

ways: cognitive ability, walking, overall stability, fatigue, mood shifts and others.

Weber and his parents were selected to appear on the site in part because of his ongoing correspondence with a representative of the MS Society.

"I knew they were planning something special to mark the Society's 60th anniversary," said Weber, "but being selected was really unexpected. I see it as a wonderful gift."

During the shoot, he learned that the session photographer also has MS.

"He said he was impressed to see a whole family working to make the best of a difficult situation," said Weber.

Public perception of MS varies widely, he said. Some people wrongly think it's contagious; others think it's an immediate sentence to life in a wheelchair.

Actually, there are several forms of the disease, each with its own set of symptoms.

Weber's form is the progressive/relapsing type, which hits five to 10 percent of the population. Unlike other forms of MS, Weber's is always "on," and will only get worse.

"I've found that I get attacks during time of high emotional stress," he said, "so I try to reduce stress as much as I can."

**"Of all the major illnesses in the world, MS is probably the most mysterious."**

— Brett Weber

Allentown resident

One of his favorite tactics is a special program for MS patients at the Aquatic Center. In addition to swimming, he participates in walking and weight-training exercises while in the pool.

Without the exercise, some of his muscles would eventually atrophy through disuse. But he also finds mental and spiritual benefits from the activities.

"There's a small community of us at the pool," he said,

## At a Glance

- **WHAT:** Faces of MS
- **VISIT:** [www.faceofms.org](http://www.faceofms.org)
- **MORE INFO:** on MS
- **VISIT:** [www.nmss.org](http://www.nmss.org); call 1-800-FIGHT MS; [www.nationalmssociety.org](http://www.nationalmssociety.org)
- **VIEW WEBER'S ART:**
- **VISIT:** [www.brokenart-gallery.com](http://www.brokenart-gallery.com)

"and we're always looking out for, and encouraging, each other."

Even on days he would rather stay in bed, Weber will go there, because he knows the others are expecting him.

Weber also finds healing forces in art. An accomplished painter, he has displayed his work in various venues in the United States. He is currently exhibiting at the Four Points Sheraton in Allentown.

Weber's Ph. D. in neuroscience gives him a special insight into this central-nervous-system disease.

"Of all the major illnesses in the world," Weber said, "MS is probably the most mysterious."

There's no known cause for MS, so searching for a cure is incredibly challenging.

But MS support does not come just from white-coated research workers. All of us can help make a difference, whether by providing emotional support, educating others or raising funds to help with research.

Want to know more? Then check out Weber's story at [www.faceofms.org](http://www.faceofms.org). Or view his emotional abstract paintings, and learn about his philosophy of mind, body and art, by visiting [www.brokenart-gallery.com](http://www.brokenart-gallery.com).

And for more information about MS in general, click on [www.nmss.org](http://www.nmss.org). Find a wealth of information about the disease, and about the many ways to help defeat it.

*Fred Jerant is a freelance writer.*