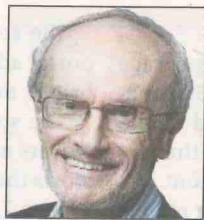


Debbie Bruce's epic efforts to aid the allergy-vulnerable

Relentless one-woman offensive reduces sting of anaphylaxis, says John Stewart



JOHN STEWART
Column

In April, a young woman having a cocktail at Door FiftyFive in Port Credit didn't realize its decorative froth contained egg whites.

She went into anaphylactic shock, her body's dire reaction to allergies. She hadn't packed her EpiPen.

As desperate friends screamed, the security guard ran down the street to grab an EpiPen from The Crooked Cue where he also worked. The young woman survived.

It's quite likely that EpiPen wouldn't have been

there but for Debbie Bruce.

The 37-year Mississauga resident didn't say that as she told the story to councillors.

As an Erindale hockey mom years ago, Bruce scouted safe places for her sons and other allergic players to eat. That's how she met Crooked Cue owner John Pappas. She sourced safe pizza dough for the team party. After hearing her pitch, Pappas happily put an EpiPen alongside his defibrillator.

Bruce was at council to ask for EpiPens in all community facilities. She'd

helped convince officials to add them to fire trucks, where they've already saved lives.

Since Bruce innocently began advocating, she's escalated to deputations, lobbying ministers, media education, research boards and negotiations with airlines and fast food chains.

It's harder than you think to get the logical thing done.

The 66-year-old doesn't understand the indifference she encounters.

The founder of the Canadian Anaphylaxis Association says the life-long medical condition is a disability with a duty to accommodate that's almost never treated that way.

"There's a whole 'roll your eyes' thing. They think it's helicopter parents worrying too much about their kids."

City staff have reservations about restocking EpiPens, liability and training ("blue to the sky, orange to

the thigh" doesn't seem like a big learning curve.) They'll study it more.

Councillors wondered why, for around \$13,000, there's hesitation.

Then they testified. Pat Saito's husband was rushed to a Florida hospital after a hornet bite caused a whole body

rash. Karen Ras's daughters have nut allergies. Chris Fonseca's son administered an EpiPen when a fellow runner was stung. Ron Starr found a woman in a mall parking lot slurring her words, asking for her purse. Inside, he found the EpiPen he administered.

Former MP Brad Butt says, "from a macro level, this is a no-brainer. But when you talk to the departments and staff, everybody starts to lawyer up."

He helped Bruce get unanimous federal approval supporting her cause. "Her perseverance is in-

credible," he says.

Frustrating as it can be, Bruce is steadfast. If she gets disillusioned, she reads heartfelt thank you notes.

"Last summer I attended my first Argos and Blue Jays games with Debbie, made possible because of her initiating nut-reduced

zones," says 21-year-old Mississaugan and Western University student Alessia Dzwigala. "I will have an anaphylactic reaction simply by inhaling nut-contaminated air."

When Pinball Clemons dropped by to support Bruce, a lifelong Argos fan (until they traded Chad Owens), Dzwigala was doubly-blue thrilled.

"Debbie has been a mentor in my allergy-related projects at Western," she says.

And done a public service for all of us by keeping vulnerable people safer through intense applications of personal will.

- John Stewart is a retired long-time journalist with The Mississauga News. His column, My Back Pages, appears each week.

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