State Senator Mitch Seabaugh presented the Proclamation to Georgia Lyme Disease Director Liz Schmitz during a Lyme Disease Awareness program at the Georgia State Capitol Monday, May 3, 2010. Thanks to GALDA volunteer Windy Blair for leading the campaign for Awareness Month across our state.

Liz welcomed citizens to the Lyme Disease Awareness event hosted by Georgia Floor Leader and Representative Matt Ramsey and The Georgia Lyme Disease Association.

Georgia Governor Sonny Perdue
Issues State Proclamation Declaring May 2010 “Lyme Disease Awareness Month”
Addressing the Issues:

Why Do We Need to Increase Lyme Disease Awareness in the Southeast?

Liz addressed the audience about the serious lack of recognition and the underreporting of Lyme disease in the Southeast and the true need to increase awareness.

Liz encouraged the review of reporting practices, stating that the severe underreporting of human Lyme cases in the Southeast contributes to the lack of recognition, causing many patients to remain undiagnosed and untreated. She shared stories of cases being dismissed and never reported or counted, and how reporting practices and case definitions - what defines and is counted as a Lyme case - in Georgia and other states, differ drastically from the Northeast. It is virtually impossible to compare true case numbers or statistics.

Troubled that the restrictive CDC reporting case definition is often used as diagnostic criteria by medical providers, Liz explained Lyme patients’ serology often doesn’t meet reporting criteria. She described the unlikelihood of false positive tests and the importance of educating medical providers and citizens about tick-borne diseases. Liz expressed her great concern that - despite the lack of county-by-county prevalence studies, and the years of published scientific evidence documenting the presence of numerous strains of Borrelia burgdorferi across the Southeast - patients with histories of tick bite, rash, symptoms, and positive Lyme test results (even some meeting strict CDC reporting criteria), often report their cases are dismissed as “false positives” without any further investigation or treatment. With a bacterial infection so insidious, the consequences of untreated disease can be dire- permanently disabling patients and ruining people's lives. Even if the science is still emerging, allowing patients with Lyme and tick-borne illnesses to go untreated, in many cases, is cruel and inhumane. Liz said these reports warrant further research funding and immediate investigation to protect citizens across the South.
Dr. Alan Smith, Entomologist and Associate Professor of Biology at Mercer University, traveled from Macon to share his eye-opening research findings at the Lyme Disease Awareness program in Atlanta. He and his students have documented pathogens, including those causing Lyme disease and Ehrlichiosis, in a surprisingly large percentage of ticks in some areas around Macon. He has inspired his students to become tick-borne disease researchers. Dr. Smith, who has presented his findings at various scientific conferences in the South, reported from a unique perspective...he contracted Lyme Disease in Georgia, twice, himself. We’re grateful for Dr. Smith’s work and for his fascinating presentation.
University of Georgia student Lyndsay Sweeney describes the physical, emotional, and financial devastation she and her family have suffered due to Lyme disease. During high school south of Atlanta, her infection was not recognized early when treatment would have been more effective. She was misdiagnosed with mono and went untreated for Lyme because her positive test results were dismissed as “false”. She and her family had to seek costly treatment outside our state. Lyndsay continues to work to educate others about Lyme disease.
Kevin Wall wants to help others by sharing his story. He described his tick bite, huge, classic rash, and how he developed nearly every symptom of Lyme disease. He tested positive, but was not treated adequately. He went on to develop severe problems. When he consulted a specialist, he was shown the flawed Georgia statistics and told his positive Lyme test was a “false positive” and that he had a better chance of winning the lottery than having Lyme disease. Kevin’s health continued to deteriorate but all other conditions were ruled out. Only when he sought help outside of Georgia, from a physician who understands Lyme disease, did he begin to get his life back. As with most Lyme disease patients we hear from, Kevin says his case was not reported and counted in our GA State statistics.
Jackie Morgan, RN, of Powder Springs, Georgia describes the struggles her husband, Norman, has endured due to lack of recognition and treatment of Lyme in the Southeast. Previously a healthy husband & father, Norman was a tennis player, camper, and hiker. He now spends most of his time confined to a wheelchair. His illness has severely impacted the entire family. They admirably all want to warn others.

Isaac Tillotson, Air Force officer (ret.), businessman, husband, and father of three, spoke about how his course in life changed drastically when he contracted Lyme disease in western Georgia in 2001. Isaac thought he had a spider bite and became very ill and experienced difficulty walking. He explained that patients often look fine on the outside, but feel horrible on the inside. He, also, must travel out of state to find understanding of this illness. He hopes others will educate themselves about Lyme disease.
Something just didn’t sound right when doctors told Pharmacist Ann Hansford “we don’t really have Lyme here.” She knew of several patients in her east Georgia area being treated for the disease. Her son’s pericarditis and collapsed lung were not recognized as symptoms and he was misdiagnosed and subsequently went untreated. This resulted in years of her son’s needless suffering that has taken a huge toll on their family. We thank Ann for sharing her family’s story to help create awareness.
Chelsea’s strong sentiments that sick children shouldn’t have to travel hours outside of the state to seek adequate understanding and treatment of Lyme disease drew thunderous applause from the audience.

After years of treatment, she has returned to school and is a responsible, outstanding student with hopes of becoming a doctor.

Despite their horrific tale, young Chelsea and her family are courageously determined to keep positive attitudes and to help others by speaking out.

Chelsea Ashworth missed years of school due to Lyme disease. Both she and her brother contracted the infection in northeast Georgia when they were ages 10 and 8. Like many children with the disease, Chelsea’s digestive system was severely afflicted resulting in the need for a feeding tube insertion. Unable to find medical treatment locally, she described her and her family’s unbelievable journey.
Georgia Lyme Disease Association volunteer Windy Blair discussed some of the tragic cases of Georgia children with Lyme disease. She then told the story of Alabama's Krymson Feazell, a sweet 9-year-old who went hunting with her daddy and came back with Lyme. She was misdiagnosed and untreated for a year, tested CDC positive at Yale, and is currently on oxygen and in a wheelchair. The family must live separately—the dad in one state holding down a job, the mother and daughters in another—so Krymson can get Lyme disease treatment.

We must recognize that Lyme Disease is here, so that it is diagnosed and treated EARLY, when the disease is more curable and before permanent damage occurs. This disease can devastate the lives of children, adults, and families, and even cause death.

Georgia citizens unite to create awareness about the dangers of Lyme disease and tick-borne illnesses in the South.
The Georgia Lyme Disease Association presented two Awards of Appreciation at the event— one to Dr. Jim Oliver of Georgia Southern University for his research of tick-borne pathogens in the Southeast and another to David J. Volkman, MD, PhD, for his numerous contributions to Lyme research & his ongoing commitment to protecting public health.

Georgians affected by Lyme disease traveled from across the state, braving a torrential downpour and crawling traffic to attend.
Thank you!

Georgia Lyme volunteers Windy Blair (left) and Jill and Jeremy Salter helped make the event at the Georgia Capitol a great success. Because of Windy’s hard work & dedication, Governor Perdue declared May 2010 LYME DISEASE AWARENESS MONTH across Georgia. Many Georgia cities are declaring it Lyme Awareness Month, too, thanks to her efforts in assisting our other hardworking volunteers. Jill Salter (right) played an integral part in organizing the reception following the speakers. Both she and Jeremy helped set up and tear down at the event, and provided supplies and refreshments.

Special thanks to Governor Sonny Perdue, Representative Matt Ramsey, Senator Johnny Isakson, Jason Skipper, Senator Mitch Seabaugh, Sharon Wilder, Nancy Negris, Dr. and Mrs. Alan Smith, Dr. Jim Oliver, Dr. David Volkman, The Sweeney Family, The Tillotson Family, The Morgan Family, The Ashworth Family, The Hansford Family, The Wall Family, The Jahn Family, The Rader Family, The Blair Family, The Nash Family, Minnette Johnson, Susan Sutphin, Natalie Rutledge, Rhonda and Jerry Stapleton, Diane McKenna, Gibbs Frazier, all of our terrific advisors, The Lyme Disease Association, California Lyme Disease Association, Andy and the folks at Open Eye Pictures, CBS-TV Atlanta, Jayeli TV, and Focus On Metropolitan Atlanta and to scientists and medical professionals everywhere who continue to advocate on behalf of sick Lyme and TBD patients.

We’re grateful to all of our volunteers and speakers and to all who came out to show their support.

We appreciate the constant love and support of our friends and family members.