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Craig Ruding

The [Sailing Sclerosis](#) project, *Oceans of Hope*, is circumnavigating the globe in order to raise awareness and change the perceptions of multiple sclerosis. The project is the first of its kind to engage and include a crew living with MS. As a result, the sailboat will emphasize ability instead of disability.

On April 19, our very own New Jersey Metro chapter member Craig Ruding will be setting sail on *Oceans of Hope* and traveling 1,800 nautical miles. His journey will begin in Samoa, an island in the South Pacific Ocean, and end in the “City of Sails,” Auckland, New Zealand.

Craig was diagnosed with MS in 2003. A woodworker by trade, Craig noticed something was wrong with one of his eyes and assumed there was a foreign body in it. After visiting the doctor, he was diagnosed with optic neuritis (an inflammation of the optic nerve) and, concurrently, MS. Shortly after, he went on a trip to Disney World with his son.

“We saw *The Lion King*, and I thought, ‘Hakuna Matata – it means no worries.’ And, our walk team was born. We celebrated our 10th anniversary last year,” Craig said.

Hakuna Matata is captained by Craig’s wife, Kathy Ruding. This friends and family Walk MS team has participated in the New Jersey Metro Chapter’s Walk MS Belmar/Lake Como since 2004. Over the past 10 years, the team has collectively raised more than \$45,900, working hard to raise funds and awareness in its community.

This past fall, Craig was told about “a MS sailboat entering New York Harbor” by a co-worker and was shocked he had never heard of it before. An avid sailor, sailboat owner and Boy Scout leader of 20 years, Craig has taken several week-long sailing excursions in the Caribbean.

“I told my wife about *Oceans of Hope*, and she told me I was doing it,” Craig said. “So I applied for a spot on the crew. The whole application process took about two weeks. They were so excited for my application because I was a Category 1 applicant which means I have very little imbalance. They needed me for an ocean crossing.”

Craig will join the sixth crew of the trip and will sail for 26 days on a 1996 Challenge 67. He will join a Bosun (senior crewman of the deck), a doctor and crew members from Denmark, Amsterdam, Australia and Minneapolis.

Craig looks forward to meeting his fellow shipmates, “We are already corresponding by email in order to get to know each other before the trip,” he said. “Before we actually set sail we will have a few days anchored in Pago

Pago [the capital of American Samoa] to become more acquainted.”

When *Oceans of Hope* docks in New Zealand, Craig will attend the Annual Scientific Meeting (ASM) of the Australian & New Zealand Association of Neurologists (ANZAN), the largest regular gathering of neurologists in Australasia.

“The neurological convention in Auckland is the ending to our trip – in the ‘City of Sails.’ I’m excited that they want me to be a part of it,” said Craig.

This year, ANZAN 2015 ASM will take place from May 12 to May 15. Speakers from across the world will present immunology updates, neuroimmunology cases and more. University of Melbourne Associate Professor Helmut Butzkueven is even scheduled to present an MS drug trial update.

“People who don’t know what MS is, they take a step back,” Craig explained. He expounded, “I have MS, but it’s not contagious.”

According to the Sailing Sclerosis website, the *Oceans of Hope* project “aims to broaden the horizons of those who perceive themselves as trapped by their condition, either physically or mentally, and inspire them to realize that they still have potential to achieve great things.”

For Craig, this mission aligns perfectly with his own. His journey on *Oceans of Hope* will allow him combine his love of sailing with his desire to raise MS awareness.

“I want to make people aware that just because you have a disease, you can do stuff that other people can do. You have MS, and you’re going on a sailboat.”

Interested in tracking Craig’s journey or learning more about Sailing Sclerosis and *Oceans of Hope*? Visit www.sailing-sclerosis.org.

For more information on Craig’s Walk MS team, Hakuna Matata, or to donate to his team, visit, <http://main.nationalmssociety.org/goto/HakunaMatata2015>.

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