

## 'Volunteered' Davis enjoying work with Lupus Foundation

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ARKANSAS DEMOCRAT-GAZETTE

Gale Davis became involved with the Lupus Foundation of Arkansas Inc. the same way offspring have become involved in various charitable pursuits probably since time immemorial. She was "volunteered" by her mother.

Davis, a Sherwood resident, is originally from Hot Springs -- which is where Arkansas transplant Jamesetta Smith began the foundation in 1996.

"She had just been diagnosed with lupus in '95," Davis says. Lupus is defined by the Lupus Foundation of America (lupus.org) as "a chronic (long-term) disease that can cause inflammation and pain in any part of your body. It's an autoimmune disease, which means that your immune system -- the body system that usually fights infections -- attacks healthy tissue instead." Those at higher risk for lupus include women ages 15-44; Black people, Asian Americans, Hispanics, American Indians and Pacific Islanders; and those who have family members who have been diagnosed with lupus or some other autoimmune disease.

Smith, Davis says, "had gone through numerous years, many, many years, being misdiagnosed and nobody really listening to her -- 'You don't look sick. ... It's all in your head; it's just part of getting older,' that kind of stuff.

"So she wanted to start a foundation to help so that other people wouldn't have to go through what she had to go through."

Smith joined Davis' church in Hot Springs and immediately set about building a team of volunteers, Davis recalls. Her mother was one of the first recruits. Then, when Smith expressed a need for somebody to keep her books for her, "my mom, with her big mouth says, 'My daughter's an accountant. ... And she probably can help and do something.'"

Smith contacted Davis "And of course I said, 'Sure, I can. I can do that.'"

Today, after a hiatus from the foundation, Davis serves as co-chair of the Lupus Foundation of Arkansas Inc. Statewide Talent Show, and is gearing up for the inaugural Lupus Jazz Brunch, slated for noon-2 p.m. Saturday at the Presidential Legacy of Life Center, 812 Reservoir Road (catty-corner to the Professor Bowl in Little Rock) and featuring music by the Jose Holloway Xperiment. The brunch buffet will be provided by Gwen Hubbard, (Flava by Gwen), one of the foundation's volunteers, along with beer and wine.

"We're the ones hosting the [jazz brunch] for the foundation," Davis says of the talent show organizers. "We're part of the foundation, but we're kind of a stand-alone committee to do more of the entertainment aspect, to attract more attention to lupus."

### HITTING THE BOOKS

Her first time around with the foundation, Davis did the books until her children got to be school age and her twins began to have some medical issues. She stepped back from her duties but continued to support the organization's events. After her children grew up and emptied the nest, she was looking for something to do, knowing she'd eventually retire.

"I like to stay busy," she says. "I'm active with my church. And ... I've always liked doing community things, even when I was a kid. I always ... enjoy trying to inspire and uplift other people who may be downhearted or depressed or whatnot.

"I just love people. I'm a people person."

So when, about seven years ago, Smith was again looking to recruit volunteers, "I rejoined, basically, and got deeply involved in it," Davis says.



**Gale Davis**, co-chair of the Lupus Foundation of Arkansas Inc.'s Annual Statewide Talent Show and advocate for those with the disease, has a message for lupus "warriors" who have been too shy to reach out for help from the foundation: "I want to meet you. I want to know who you are; we want to help you. But we can't help you if you don't let us know who you are, and where you live." (Arkansas Democrat-Gazette/Helaine R. Williams)

Davis wasn't the only member of her family "volunteered" to do work for the foundation. Her sister, who worked for a rehabilitation center in Hot Springs, became involved when the foundation began doing 5K races. Again, Smith asked around for volunteers to perform such tasks as making posters. "And of course my mom says, 'Let me ask my other daughter; she might can help with that because where she works, they do a lot of sign making and art work and things like that.' And so my sister also got recruited.

"So it was like a family affair for us working with lupus."

The current chairman of the Statewide Talent Show is Jansen Goodwin, a local youth pastor and music producer, who came up with the jazz-brunch idea. As co-chair Davis is in charge of recruiting the volunteers "and doing that one-on-one talking to the 'lupus warriors' and things of that nature ... .

"It's easy for me to talk to people and I usually get them to do stuff that they normally wouldn't be doing," Davis adds with a laugh.

### INFORMATIONAL BOOTHS

In addition to making connections, Davis handles the foundation's publicity engagements. She makes sure the organization is represented via informational booths at various festivals, health fairs and other special events.

"We try to create a support system," Davis says. "And then, by me working with the foundation, I've met people who have lupus who've only just recently been diagnosed; some who've had it for years; some who've had it for five, 10, 20-plus years." New patients who contact the foundation can be put in contact with a veteran lupus warrior for networking and support "so [it] won't be such a scary journey for them."

Via Zoom, the foundation also does lupus discussions, featuring speakers -- doctors and pharmaceutical company representatives that deal specifically with lupus, the latest technology for treatment, and lupus medications.

At the organization website, [lupusarktalentshow.com](http://lupusarktalentshow.com), visitors can find the latest information in regards to lupus, new developments in the lupus world, medications, updates on doctors, resources, support groups, and a link to the national foundation.

"We also have access to other organizations ... localized organizations that try to help support lupus, and we can put you in touch with those," Davis says.

"Unfortunately, our biggest challenge is getting people to open up about lupus and [getting them] willing to share the fact that they have lupus," Davis says. Some people have shared with her that they have lupus, but when invited by her to an event, will protest that they don't get out much, don't like being around a lot of people, don't want people to know about their condition.

"It's like they're ashamed," she says.

# Lupus



**Gale Davis**, co-chair of the Lupus Foundation of Arkansas Inc.'s Annual Statewide Talent Show, is gearing up for the pre-show Lupus Jazz Brunch fundraiser, to be held Saturday (July 8) at the Presidential Legacy of Life Center in Little Rock. (Arkansas Democrat-Gazette/Helaine R. Williams)

## STILL A FAMILY AFFAIR

But she's working to change that. Meanwhile, volunteering with the foundation continues to be a family affair.

"Now I've gotten my daughter involved with it. She makes a lot of my posters. ... And she does a lot of our video work."

Although nine of 10 people with lupus are female, according to the national foundation, Davis tries to show that it's not strictly a female disease. "We have some male lupus warriors," she points out.

In addition to the jazz brunch, Davis is gearing up for the Statewide Talent Show itself. Its seventh iteration is scheduled for Nov. 11 at the City Center, 315 N. Shackleford Road in Little Rock.

The show survived covid; the foundation held its first and only virtual talent show when it hit. Although it's again in-person, it will still be livestreamed.

"It's open to anybody actually, from age 5 to 99-plus," Davis says. "You can do any type of talent; it doesn't have to just be singing or dancing. ... It's really open to any type of [talent act] as long as there's no fire or knives, swords or anything that could be harmful or dangerous to anybody."

Show auditions will take place from 9 a.m.-5 p.m. Sept. 30 and 3-5 p.m. Oct. 1 at In His Presence Worship Ministries, 2700 Pershing Blvd., North Little Rock. Registration is \$25. (Meanwhile, applications are being taken online; those who can't make the auditions in person can submit a video, but they will have to compete in person if selected.) Ten acts will be chosen to compete.

## 'SOME GREAT TALENT'

The show has provided proof, time and time again, that "we have some great talent right here in Arkansas," Davis says. She mentions vocalist Nia Renee Kelley, who in June competed in the Miss Arkansas Pageant as Miss Greater Jacksonville and won the Preliminary Talent Award. Kelley was one of two former contestants in the Statewide Talent Show to audition for "American Idol" two years ago. (In the talent show, she made it to runner-up.)

The show offers a \$1,000 first prize; \$500 second prize and \$200 third prize along with trophies and other possible rewards.

"It's great exposure for the entertainer, but it's great exposure for lupus as well," Davis says.

It's her desire to get the word out that, right along with the higher-profile organizations that help those with diseases, the Lupus Foundation exists. "We try to participate and help other nonprofits ... when they're having an event."

When the foundation sets up a booth at events, they have a volunteer sign-up sheet. People can also sign up to be volunteers, as well as donate, on the organization's website or by email: [info@lupusarktalentshow.com](mailto:info@lupusarktalentshow.com). The foundation also has a YouTube channel (LFOA, INC. Annual Statewide Talent Show), and a Facebook page.

"Anything that you can do to help support would greatly be appreciated," Davis says, adding that sponsorships are especially sought.

And she has a message for those lupus warriors who have been too shy to reach out for help.

"I want to meet you. I want to know who you are; we want to help you. But we can't help you if you don't let us know who you are, and where you live. So that's why anytime we have a table anywhere, I'll have [a] sign-up [list] and [ask] where I can communicate with you, [or] at least send a personal email to let you know what events we're doing. And then you can ... decide if you're going to come or not."

*Lupus Jazz Brunch, featuring the Jose Holloway Xperiment, noon-2 p.m. Saturday, Presidential Legacy of Life Center, 812 Reservoir Road, Little Rock. Doors will open at 11:30. Tickets: \$40 individual; tables of eight, \$320. Visit [lupusarktalentshow.com](http://lupusarktalentshow.com).*



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