

# Organization spreads awareness

BY YVONNE M. DARLING  
Of Suburbanite

Anita Kaufmann was an outgoing and vibrant woman who desperately wanted to dispel the myths surrounding epilepsy, a condition caused by the misfiring of cells in the brain.

"Anita always had such an intriguing mind. She must have had a premonition because she left a list of instructions," said Debbie Josephs of Kaufmann, whose untimely death last November led to the recent launch of the Anita Kaufmann Foundation.

Josephs, a brunette, first encountered the flaxen Kaufmann in the third grade, she said.

The two were best friends in middle school, at Teaneck High School where both graduated in 1972 and straight through adulthood.

"Debbie was always in and out of our house. She and Anita were very close," said Peter and Hanni Kaufmann, Anita's parents.

After college Anita Kaufmann became a successful New York City headhunter, recruiting lawyers for top firms. Today Josephs, a Teaneck resident, is an advertising executive.

It was a perfect friendship until the days leading up to Nov. 26, 2003. Kaufmann had been in a coma for several weeks.

"We don't really know what happened. She apparently fell out of bed in the middle of the night," said Josephs, who will forever remember Nov. 26 as the day her best friend eventually died at the age of 49.

Kaufmann suffered brain trauma as a result of a riding accident as a teenager. The Kaufmann family said their then 15-year-old daughter had been attending a sleep-away camp when she fell off a horse.



STAFF PHOTO BY YVONNE M. DARLING

Teaneck resident Debbie Josephs holds a photograph of her best friend Anita Kaufmann, who died last November. Josephs recently started the Anita Kaufmann Foundation to educate the public about epilepsy. The foundation plans to offer scholarships to Teaneck High School seniors next year.

She missed four months of school and never fully recovered, they said.

According to Josephs, the accident caused scar tissue to build up on Kaufmann's brain, triggering epilepsy, a condition that affects more than 2.3 million Americans, according to the Epilepsy Foundation of America.

Kaufmann began experiencing onsets of seizures in her 30s and took seizure-preventing medication because she wasn't a candidate for surgery, said Josephs.

"She was never satisfied with the medication that was available to epileptics," added her father.

Despite the myths surrounding

epilepsy not everyone with the condition has seizures that cause them to fall to the ground and shake. Some people spit or exhibit some other kind of uncharacteristic behavior, said Josephs.

Kaufmann, a graduate of the University of Pennsylvania and Georgetown University, was diagnosed with partial complex seizures.

She would often remove her clothing during her bouts, recalled Josephs candidly. Her first seizure took place at a spa, where shortly after the experience she was humiliated and told to leave the premises, said Josephs.

Subsequently, the embarrass-

ment following the event led Kaufmann to come up with the idea for the Anita Kaufmann Foundation, which was recently established to increase awareness about epilepsy.

"Our mission is to teach the public not to fear epilepsy and brain trauma," said Josephs, who is spearheading the foundation. She plans to create a website and coordinate local events for National Epilepsy Awareness Month in November.

Anyone wanting to find out more about the Kaufmann foundation may contact Josephs at [debj34@aol.com](mailto:debj34@aol.com) or at P.O. Box 11, New Milford, NJ 07646, she said.

The foundation also plans to

work closely with Chores-for-Charity, which was started as a way to raise money for FACE, Finding A Cure for Epilepsy and Seizures based at the New York University Medical Center.

The Kaufmann Foundation will also offer the first of its scholarships to students of Kaufmann's alma mater, Teaneck High School.

Students of the Class of 2005 who complete a senior project that educates the public on epilepsy or brain trauma and includes a teaching or public awareness component will be eligible to compete.

Grade-point averages and standardized test scores will not be a factor, or even considered, in deciding who will receive one of the several scholarships.

The scholarships, ranging from \$500 to \$5,000, will go to the students who most vividly and colorfully express the foundation's mission the way Kaufmann would have if she could have done it herself, explained Josephs.

"We want to see creativity in the ideas," Josephs emphasized. A student, for example, could come up with a logo for the foundation, she said. Other students, she continued, may want to produce a public awareness campaign using posters and a TV commercial about epilepsy.

In addition to the local scholarships, the foundation is funding an epilepsy awareness campaign in southern Israel via the Soroka Medical Center in Beersheba. Kaufmann loved to travel to Israel, where she was laid to rest last year, said her mother.

Joseph said Kaufmann put aside most of what she earned to one day start the foundation. She even left a list of instructions for starting the foundation in Josephs' care.

"I was her best friend. This foundation will be Anita's legacy," she said.