

Racing against Huntington's disease

By Quill Enparchment
Citizen Lifestyles Editor

Many people throughout the United States never heard of Parkinson's disease until Michael J. Fox announced he was a victim of the disease.

Oftentimes a celebrity spokesperson is needed to spread awareness of an uncommon disease. Realizing this important role is Elk Grove tri-athlete Jamie Whitmore, who won the Nissan Xterra USA Championship in Lake Tahoe on Sept. 22.

Whitmore wasn't just racing for fame and glory. Her goal was to raise funds for the Huntington's Disease Society of America and Center of Excellence at UC Davis Medical Center.

In addition to competing in the race, her friends and family presented an exhibition booth at the event to help educate race fans about Huntington's disease (HD).

"I'm letting people know that every time I'm at a race, I will be there to spread awareness," Whitmore said. "People tend not to find out about an illness until somebody famous has it."

Huntington's disease is a hereditary neurological brain disorder that slowly robs the affected individual of the ability to walk, talk, think and reason. Every child of an affected parent has a 50 percent chance of inheriting the disease.

Whitmore's mother-in-law passed away from HD in July 1997. The athlete's 18-year-old sister-in-law was just recently diagnosed with the disease. The patient's name is being kept



Jamie Whitmore, winner of the Nissan Xterra USA Championship in Lake Tahoe, trudges uphill in the bike event, which she feels is her strongest aspect of the triathlon.

confidential in order to avoid medical-insurance discrimination.

There is no known effective treatment or cure for HD. Victims are left with very few choices as to how to manage their progress.

"You have to decide if you are going to live the best life you can," Whitmore said.

HD affects 30,000 Americans and places more than 250,000 at risk for developing the disorder. Approximately 1,000 individuals in Northern California are affected with HD and another 7,000 are at risk of developing the disease. The emotional, social and economic hurdles placed on the families of victims remains enormous.

"My biggest thing is to raise enough money to fund research," Whitmore said. "I want to race for a reason; that's what I'm all about."

She raised \$50,000 during Sunday's event, which encompassed bicycling, running and swimming. Her sponsors included K2, Full Speed Ahead, Michelin, Total Body Fitness

and Fleet Feet Sports of Sacramento.

Off the track, the 26-year-old Whitmore can be found working as a substitute teacher, cross-country track coach and associate at American River Bike Shop in Sacramento.

For more information, call the Huntington's Disease Society of America at 372-1894.