Meet Society board member: Peter Porrino

Peter Porrino, the new chair of the Society's national board of directors, and his wife, Andy, attended its Leadership Conference in Dallas last November.

When Peter Porrino started volunteering at the National Multiple Sclerosis Society almost

three decades ago, he was driven to do something about his wife's recent MS diagnosis.

In 1991 Porrino and his wife, Andy, were raising two young children in Connecticut. While Andy was shaving her legs in the shower one day, she noticed that she couldn't feel the razor blade on her right leg. Several MRIs later, they found out why.

Soon after, the couple was raising funds and taking on leadership roles at their local Society chapter.

"I fell in love with the Society and what it stood for, and the passion that everybody I met had towards the cause," Porrino says, "and it just sort of just kept going from there."

After serving on local boards, as well as the national board of directors, he was elected chair of the national board last November. Now mostly retired after a successful career as an insurance executive, he devotes an average of 15 hours a week to his role.

MS is personal to Porrino.

"There's nothing more important to me," he says, looking at his wife of 40 years. "If there's something I can do that might have a positive impact, I'm going to do it."

Through the years, the Porrinos and their two now-grown children have participated in Bike MS®, Walk MS® and special events, as well as other fundraising efforts, including Andy's workshops on creating greeting cards, which are then sold to benefit the Society.

"I found that the more involved I was, the happier I was," Porrino says. He particularly enjoys tackling big-picture issues at the Society, such as board structure, funding and strategic plans, to make sure that the Society is set up for success. On the top of his list, though, is tangible progress — particularly with progressive MS — and ultimately, a cure for the disease.

Andy Porrino's symptoms were mild during the first decade, but they eventually progressed and she now lives with secondary progressive MS. She uses a walker at home and an electric scooter when she goes out. For now, she hopes physical therapy will bring improvement.

The Porrinos estimate they have consulted 10 MS specialists over the past 31 years. They are frustrated and disappointed with what the last one said.

"Very honestly, there's nothing we can do," Porrino recalls the doctor told them. "You've tried everything. I can give you a false hope, but that's not what I do."

But as Porrino takes on his new role, he promises to do whatever it takes to make an impact for his wife and others with MS.

"It's about doing everything in your power to make her life better," he said. "It's about her and people like her."

Read about other Society board members.