

Valerie Greene

Her Fire Within

One Woman's Commitment To Do The Impossible

SOMEONE YOU SHOULD KNOW

by Adrienne Brice

Eight years ago, at the age of 31, Winter Park entrepreneur **Valerie Greene** suffered a massive stroke that paralyzed the left side of her body. Doctors told her she might never walk or talk again. Eight years later, Greene is an Orlando Stroke Hero, one of the top fundraisers in the country, author of a book to be released in June, and as energetic as ever.

"For the first year, I was very depressed," Greene said. "Then I looked in the mirror and said, 'Look here, we're going to beat this.'" Through medical and holistic treatments, Greene overcame her stroke. She learned to crawl, walk, and speak all over again.

After her amazing recovery, Greene dedicated herself to spreading stroke awareness and encouraging stroke survivors. In 2003 she trained for the Disney Marathon held in January 2004 and raised over \$10,000 in pledges for The American Stroke Association. She was named the top fundraiser in the country for **Train To End Stroke** program, thanks to the overwhelming support from the Winter Park community. Greene's 13.1-mile walk would be an achievement for anyone, but for Greene, it was a triumph—both physical and mental. "It was challenging for me," she said, "but my spirit kicked in."

Last year, the American Stroke Association named Greene the Orlando Stroke Hero for her remarkable recovery and tireless dedication to the stroke awareness cause. Greene said her mission is to educate. "People need to realize that anyone can have a stroke, even a young healthy person," she said.

Greene pointed out that every forty five seconds someone has a stroke, and many can be treated within the first three hours if the signs are recognized immediately. Sudden numbness, dizziness, trouble seeing, and severe headaches are all warning signs that Greene said often go unnoticed. Greene insists that people should call 911 if they experience any symptoms.

Recently, Greene has begun a new mission to help get stroke legislation passed. She has traveled to Tallahassee on several occasions to speak on behalf of the American Heart Association and to lobby for The Florida Stroke Act, which will help ensure that EMS systems and stroke treatment hospitals across Florida are capable of providing timely and effective treatment for stroke victims. In April, Greene will travel to Washington for the Congressional Stroke and Heart Lobby day.

Now, in addition to speaking about stroke awareness, Greene is busy preparing to release her book, **The Fire Within**, her

true story of triumph over tragedy. Greene hopes the book, which is based on her journals from her experience, will encourage people to do the impossible. "We all have obstacles in life, and we can overcome them if we have faith and believe that better things will come," Greene said.

For Greene, better things have come. When she isn't busy with speaking engagements and fundraisers, Greene plays golf, spends time with her five nieces and nephews, and enjoys her home in Winter Park with her cat. "I've received a lot of national exposure lately," she said, "but Winter Park is my home, and I'm very grateful for all the support that the Winter Park community has shown to me."

When asked about her goals for the future Greene smiled and said, "Oprah here I come!" May is National Stroke Month, and Greene hopes her role, as the Orlando Stroke Hero will help her tell her story to millions on national television.

If you have any questions about Greene's speaking schedule or would like to pre-order a copy of her book, visit her website at **www.thefirewithin.net**. Greene's book will be released nationally this summer, but look for an advance release date in Winter Park. ■

Warning Signs of Stroke

- Sudden numbness or weakness of the face, arm or leg, especially on one side of the body
- Sudden confusion, trouble speaking or understanding
- Sudden trouble seeing in one or both eyes
- Sudden trouble walking, dizziness, loss of balance or coordination
- Sudden, severe headache with no known cause

Not all these warning signs occur in every stroke. If some start to occur, don't wait. Get help immediately!
Stroke is a medical emergency - Call 911

For more information about stroke,
Call **1-888-4-STROKE** or
visit **StrokeAssociation.org**

