



BY BRI KILROY | PHOTOGRAPHY BY EASTERSEALS

OVER THE EDGE: Once in a Lifetime Chance Round Two

This time last year, I got the unprecedented opportunity to rappel down the Plaza Towers, the second tallest building in Grand Rapids (just 52 feet shy of matching the River House Condominiums 397-foot height). It was the first year Easterseals Michigan partnered with Over the Edge special events rappelling company to offer extraordinary fundraisers the chance to rappel from the skyscraper. Although we participants voluntarily obliterated our comfort zones in exchange for this vertical venture, we couldn't erase the apprehension that comes with scaling down a 345-foot perch.

"I'd be lying if I said I wasn't scared," Denise Durkee, Director of Easterseals Michigan, told me last year as we discussed our anticipation levels for the inaugural event. This year, Durkee prepares for her second time rappelling down the Towers stating that last year's "nervousness" has transformed into "excitement."

"Among the feedback I received, people told me it was the most fun/terrifying thing they ever did," Durkee said on the prior participants who collectively raised \$85,000 for Easterseals Michigan's benevolent programs like LUNA (Look, Uncover, Nurture, Act), a service that aids children who have experienced trauma.

Durkee isn't the only one who found the experience so exhilarating that she's gearing up for a second year of rappelling down the building. Looking at the list of this year's rappellers at Overtheedgewestmi.com, you can see some have used a photo of themselves leaning into their harness with their back toward the miniscule city below as their profile picture; each with a victorious grin.

"We ask our clients [at Easterseals] to try something new every day and we're asking donors to also try something outside of their comfort zone," Durkee said.

Easterseals Michigan partnered with Over the Edge for the first time in 2016 to extend the challenge and thrill of stepping out of comfort zones to the community. The local nonprofit continuously improves the quality of life for individuals and their families facing disabilities. Through services they provide with a commitment to accept everyone regardless of financial capability, Easterseals Michigan works with children and adults facing the hardships that come with disabilities from autism and behavioral to trauma and medical.

Those who raise \$1,500 for Easterseals Michigan secure a harness for the public rappelling event, taking place September 23—three days into ArtPrize Nine, causing many passersby to pause and mistake it for a time-based ArtPrize installation. Booming music and a charismatic deejay narrating the brave souls' decent from above make Over the Edge an inviting event for sky and ground level participants.

If you want to support the cause but aren't quite ready to confront your fear of heights, you can visit Overtheedgewestmi.com and click the "rappellers" tab for a list of who is rappelling this year and how close they are to raising \$1,500. You can donate any amount to someone taking the plunge by clicking their name, which brings you to a donation page. Companies can also raise funds to "Toss Your Boss" over the edge; whether you do it because you think it's funny or you want to get back at your boss for making you work weekends, it's for a good cause.

What I remember most from my rappelling experience was that, in the preparation room where we were fitted for our harnesses and given a run-down on what to expect, the guides said "If you're not scared, there's something wrong with you." While that's not a foreign accusation to me, it heightened my awareness that I wasn't scared—I was eager!

Nothing compares to the moment I swung my feet over the edge of Plaza Towers and experienced the adrenalin rush that came with bouncing off the face of the skyscraper as I made my way to the ground. This once-in-a-lifetime opportunity is occurring again September 23, 10 a.m.—6 p.m., and Women's LifeStyle's editor, Elyse Wild, is seizing a place on the ropes this time and you are invited to join her.

To register for Over the Edge, visit overtheedgewestmi.com and begin fundraising! Easterseals Michigan provides fundraising support personal to help you reach your goal. For more information, call (616) 942-2081 or visit Easterseals.com and challenge yourself to rappel from your comfort zone into a life-changing adventure for you and the client's of Easter Seals Michigan.

What: Over the Edge 2017
Where: Plaza Towers, 201 West Fulton St.
When: September 23, 10 a.m.-6 p.m. (public). September 22, 4-7 p.m. (media).
To register: Visit Overtheedgewestmi.com or call Easterseals Michigan at (616) 942-2081.