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**Non-profit, Operation Shooting Star, appoints a National Ambassador**

Frankford, DE – Operation Shooting Star (OSS), an Autoimmune Disease Advocacy organization, announces that it has appointed Gretchen Schoenstein as its first National Ambassador. The position was created to help bring national attention to the organization’s mission to raise awareness of Autoimmune (AI) Diseases and the connections between them, while working to provide advocacy and research funding in this field.

“Steadfast and compassionate, Gretchen embodies all of the things we could hope for in our first national ambassador,” said Audrey Fisher Killen, Founder and Executive Director of OSS. “Upon meeting Gretchen, it was immediately evident she would be a valuable asset. She will help us bring attention to this cause across the country with her inspiring personal story and connection to Autoimmune Diseases.”

According to the National Institutes of Health, an estimated 24 million Americans suffer from one or more of over 80 known Autoimmune Diseases. As researchers continue to focus on these diseases individually, it’s likely that they will identify common keys to the individual cures. Progress made in searching for a cure for one disease, could mean progress for them all. To date, Operation Shooting Star has donated over \$20,000 to autoimmune disease research, standing by its motto - “Wish, Believe, Achieve...Cure One to Cure All.”

“I’m honored to be Operation Shooting Star’s first National Ambassador,” said Schoenstein. “OSS’s work led by Audrey – an AI warrior herself - is exactly the motivation I needed to get me over the finish line of my 50th half marathon. Since then, understanding the connection between all the various autoimmune diseases has become a focus of mine. The opportunity to work with OSS and Audrey to help raise awareness and money for research, which will support so many people fighting every day, is a dream come true given my own journey. I’m committed to doing everything I can to help move the mission forward.”

Diagnosed as an adolescent with Hashimoto’s, an Autoimmune Disease affecting the thyroid, and in 2006 with yet another AI Disease, Sarcoidosis, which affects the lungs among other things, Schoenstein has been committed to raising awareness of AI diseases while helping others seek treatments and diagnosis. Schoenstein’s Sarcoidosis diagnosis upended both her personal and professional lives, but she did not allow it to defeat her. Instead, her diagnosis motivated her to find something that she could control, if only for 20 minutes a day, like running. This was a symbolic goal for Schoenstein, because when she was diagnosed, she was told by her doctors that she would never be able to run again. Schoenstein began training for her first half marathon in 2010, and in 2016, completed her 50<sup>th</sup> half marathon.

It was while preparing for that 50<sup>th</sup> marathon milestone that Gretchen decided she wanted her running to mean something even more, something to reflect her reason for running in the first place as it pertained to her AI disease struggles. So with a simple web search, a match was made and she connected with Audrey Fisher Killen. From then on, Schoenstein and Killen have teamed up to fight AI diseases and spread awareness.

“Gretchen is perfect for the job of National Ambassador because she works from the heart everyday as she fights her own personal battles and overcomes them with grace and humility. I am confident that she will use her incredible motivation to advance the fight against AI diseases, alongside OSS,” said Killen.

On December 2, 2018, Schoenstein celebrated completing her 75<sup>th</sup> half marathon.

*Operation Shooting Star is a 501(c)3 Charitable Organization whose mission is to raise awareness and funds for research, and provide advocacy for Autoimmune Diseases. For more information, please visit [www.operationshootingstar.org](http://www.operationshootingstar.org) or call 302.524.8292.*

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