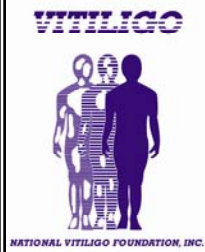




**A NATIONAL VITILIGO  
FOUNDATION  
VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR**



**MAGGIE HARGROW**



*[photos by Dave Collins/Academic Health Center Communications Services, University of Cincinnati]*

When kids notice Maggie Hargrow, she knows by the shocked looks on their faces they are curious about her—maybe even a bit scared. The braver kids always blurt out the same questions:

“Does that hurt?”

“Did you get burned in a fire?”

That’s because Hargrow, 66, of Avondale, Ohio has vitiligo, a relatively common condition that causes the skin to lose its pigmentation. Although scientists believe the condition is genetic, there is no cure for vitiligo. It most often occurs in

people with autoimmune diseases and first appears near the mouth, eyes, nose and joints. Hargrow's vitiligo started in 1975 with a single white spot at the corner of her right eye. Over the next 25 years, the condition has slowly crawled across her face and other parts of her body—including her scalp, hands, feet, arms and legs. "I'm thankful that I can legitimately answer 'no' to the kids' questions, but this disease has caused me emotional pain. People have been very cruel to me over the years," Hargrow says. "I can't go in the grocery store or even walk down the street without people staring at me or assuming I have some horrible, contagious disease. They sometimes shrink with disgust." No matter how resilient a person tries to be, she says, eventually those looks and comments hurt. For years, Hargrow says she has been embarrassed by her condition and hesitated to go out in public. She didn't share her feelings with her family—even though they continued to show her love and support. She became somewhat reclusive, her overall health declining as a result.

UC dermatological researcher Raymond Boissy, PhD, is working with the National Vitiligo Foundation to break down barriers for people with vitiligo as well as understand the genetic causes for the disease. Boissy organized a national conference—held in Cincinnati on October 2007—to help educate both patients and researchers about vitiligo. Hargrow says that vitiligo conference changed her life. "Before I went to the conference, I felt isolated and cut off from the rest of the world," she recalls. "But when I walked in and saw people just like me, it was like that covering of fear and self-loathing had been scraped off. "It gave me the confidence to come out of hiding, and reminded me that each day is one more beautiful day that God has given me to do something with my life. I try to think positively now and do more to conquer my fears." During the subsequent Vitiligo Conference in October 2008 Maggie volunteered extensively to facilitate the success of the meeting. Maggie said in addition to on site registration of people for the conference and providing a keynote lecture, she also gave every attendee she saw a big smile and hug. "Unlike vitiligo, smiles and positive feelings are contagious. I can't wait to spread them to other people like me," she laughs.