

HLA-NJ News and Views

A Monthly Column from The Hearing Loss Association of NJ

By Peter Yerkes, Trustee, HLA-NJ

Walk4Hearing - Walk For Fun

Walk To Raise Money For People With Hearing Loss

October 13, 2012

Registration 9 a.m. Walk begins 10 a.m.

Mercer County Park West

West Windsor, NJ

www.walk4hearing.org

Ask a dozen people why they like the Walk4Hearing, and you get a dozen different answers.

Some say it's fun to be out-of-doors in a beautiful park. Some talk about the pleasure of being with other people with hearing loss, to share stories and coping strategies.

And some, like Lauren Harman, enjoy creating a team to share the experience—and to raise money for the Hearing Loss Association of New Jersey and its national parent organization, the Hearing Loss Association of America. **Walk4Hearing** is New Jersey's biggest and best fundraiser for programs and services that help people with hearing loss.

Starting a team can sound difficult, and some people feel awkward about asking friends and family for money. So I asked Lauren Harman, creator and captain of "Team Lexi," how she made her team such a success.

She started small, she said. She thought it would be a fun family activity to support her daughter, Lexi, who has hearing loss. They could walk together, and make a family donation. (To learn details of registering a team, go to http://hlaa.convio.net/site/TR?fr_id=2000&pg=entry . Or visit www.walk4hearing.org and follow the prompts).

"I signed up my family of four," she said. "Then I started mentioning to family and friends that we were going to do the Walk. I was completely taken aback by the amount of support."

Everyone, it seemed, wanted to know how they could take part. So Lauren explained how to use www.walk4hearing.org to join her team. That opens the door to participating in the 5K walk (3.1 miles) and to the fun of meeting new people, snacking on hot dogs and sodas and taking part in face painting and other activities for kids.

"If their schedule doesn't permit them to join in the Walk, I invite them to show their support through a donation." She also uses social media, such as Facebook and Twitter to spread the word.

Thanks to the hard work of Lauren Harman and others, the NJ Walk4Hearing raised \$52,000 last year. Sandy Spekman is another team-builder who had to overcome feeling awkward about reaching out for donations. "When I first started walking, I just walked," says Sandy Spekman. "I didn't want to ask people for donations. I didn't like doing that." But the more she thought about it, the more reasons she found to ask people to join her team, "Hear Ye! Hear Ye," or at least to send a donation. She thought of programs such as scholarships for college freshmen with hearing loss, and HLA-NJ's success in bringing captions to live theaters in New

York and New Jersey, in advocating for people with hearing loss in Trenton and in public education.

So she began telling people about the Walk, and about the importance of helping people with hearing loss.

“The more we bring in, the more we can do to eradicate the stigma of hearing loss,” she says.

For Jennifer Vistoso, the team started as a family tradition and took off from there as the family spread the word to friends and relatives. “Every year, our team grows. We have special team shirts made and the kids look forward to getting their faces painted, and to bouncing in the bounce house.”

This year, her team has a new member: Gabriella Vistoso.

It’s doubtful she will be walking, though. At the end of July, Gabriella was only 3 ½ months old. Maybe in 2013.

Wayne Roorda, this year’s Walk chair, hopes more and more people will follow the example of Sandy Spekman, Lauren Harman and Jennifer Vistoso.

Even if you don’t form a team, Wayne says, he hopes people will come or donate.

“It is fun...and you get to meet people and perhaps to renew friendships from the past,” he says. “We have been able to raise awareness of hearing loss issues throughout the state.”

To learn more, view the new **Walk4Hearing** movie at the **Walk4Hearing.org** website.

To learn more about HLA-NJ and our scholarship program and the new Assistive Device Demo Center at Montclair State University, please contact Arlene Romoff at info@hearingloss-nj.org.

We also invite you to visit our website at www.hearingloss-nj.org, or to attend one of our local chapter meetings in Bergen, Monmouth/Ocean or Middlesex County, and our newest Morris County chapter. Dates, places and times for chapter meetings are available from info@hearingloss-nj.org.