

Walk4Hearing Surges Past Its Targeted Funding Goals

Church Group Sends Valued Assistance to Aid Walkers

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More than 820 members and supporters of the Hearing Loss Association of New Jersey and their families walked Sunday, October 20, 2013 at the Sixth Annual Garden State Walk4Hearing at Mercer County Park West in West Windsor as they collectively raised both awareness and record-level funds for hearing loss prevention and education programs. At last report, the Garden State Walk4Hearing had raised nearly \$87,000, significantly more than originally targeted, according to Walk chairman Wayne Roorda, and Northeast Regional Coordinator Suzanne D'Amico.

HLA-NJ and the Walk4Hearing organizers want to publicly thank and credit the success of this year's walk to the efforts of many. According to Ms. D'Amico, "the top five fundraisers for the 2013 walk were Rachel Root, Maxx Wortman, Jared Ceitlin, Ruth Smith and Jared Root." In addition, said Roorda, "we want to thank leaders and walkers in the top 10 Alliance Teams, including Team Zachy, Noa's Team, Summit Speech School, Team Maxx Man, Team Gabriel, Team Lexi, Team Ceitlin, the Toms River Piggies, Ava's Voice and Team Stavac."

HLA-NJ organizes awareness and advocacy campaigns and provides services for individuals with hearing loss throughout the state of New Jersey. It already has five functioning chapters in Bergen, Middlesex, Ocean/Monmouth and Morris Counties and the South Jersey Shore. At the local level, monies the organization raises from the Walk help fund support group meetings, assistive listening and hearing assistance products, and college scholarships for high school students with hearing loss.

In addition to participating members and their families, HLA-NJ and the Walk4Hearing Committee want to extend heartfelt thanks and appreciation to the leaders and members of the estimated 100 volunteers from the World Mission Society Church of God who turned out to help. Church of God members wearing their characteristic yellow shirts were seen in every corner of the park cheering for the more than 800 walkers, cooking and serving food, overseeing children's games and activities, and even maintaining restroom facilities throughout the day.

As part of their ongoing Smile Campaign, Church of God volunteers were eager to support HLA as they strive to raise awareness for an issue that affects nearly 850,000 New Jersey residents with some form of hearing impairment. Their volunteers traveled as far as two hours from four different branch churches and worked from early morning to late afternoon to encourage and provide assistance to the hundreds of walkers, and to the event itself.

"Hearing loss is widely misunderstood," says Roorda. "Many people think it only affects people over 55 years of age and older. It has many different causes and affects many different age groups. Walks like this provide a chance to display and showcase different technology products and personal support services that are available to help people with hearing loss to lead independent and productive lives."

"It's important to us as the leading consumer advocacy group for the hearing impaired to highlight the newest technologies that are available to help people," D'Amico added.

"Forty-eight million Americans have hearing loss," she continued, "but many people are embarrassed and don't like to talk about it," D'Amico said. "It's up to us to try to make it more mainstream. Another goal of these walks is to show there is no need to stigmatize people with hearing loss."

“Some 30 of every 1,000 school-aged children experience hearing loss, while nearly one-half of all seniors over age 75 are affected by this seemingly invisible loss of hearing, making it the third most common public health issue after heart disease and arthritis,” she says.

Ruth Smith, one of the leading fundraisers for this year’s walk, said, “I enjoyed doing the fundraising and next year I plan to do better. This year was harder because of the economic situation, but I still kept going. I’m also planning on going out to different places next year because I still feel that many folks are not aware of the extent of hearing loss.”

People with hearing loss cannot enjoy a dinner in a noisy restaurant. Ordinary smoke alarms will not awaken them. And, with thousands of U.S. armed forces now and soon returning from service in Iraq and Afghanistan with hearing loss, more and more people will need help than ever before.

For more information about HLA-NJ, please write to joel.strasser@hearingloss-nj.org