

## Hearing Loss Association of America to host fundraising walk in West Windsor

Written by Wilson Conde Editorial Intern  
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New Jersey residents will have the opportunity to help raise awareness and funds for the state's hearing impaired through the Hearing Loss Association of America's sixth annual Garden State – NJ Walk4Hearing event 11 a.m. Sunday at Mercer County Park West in West Windsor.

Suzanne D'Amico of Staten Island, Walk4Hearing's northeast region coordinator, said the group organizes awareness and advocacy campaigns for the hearing impaired and provides services to them. At the local level, money the organization raises helps fund support group meetings, hearing assistance products and college scholarships for children with hearing loss, she said.

Walk participants are encouraged to form teams of donors, which would forward the money either in person the day of the walk, or through their website, D'Amico said. Fundraising teams that raise \$100 or more will get free T-shirts, she said.

The Walk4Hearing hopes to raise \$75,000 from this year's Garden State — NJ Walk4Hearing event, D'Amico said.

D'Amico said the Walk4Hearing events aim to educate the public on the facts of hearing loss.

"Hearing loss is misunderstood," she said. "People think it only affects those 55 years and older. It has many different causes and affects many different types of people."

These walks are also a chance to display products and services that help people who suffer from hearing loss lead independent lives, D'Amico said.

"It is important to us as the leading consumer advocacy group for the hearing impaired to highlight the new technology that is available to people," she said.

D'Amico also said she has a personal connection to these walks, since her 11-year-old daughter, Anna Belle, was born with hearing loss, and the walks remind her that there are other people like her. "It's been a tremendous influence on my child," she said.

Marci Friedman, team captain for the Deaf Blind League of New Jersey, said the organization organizes social events like luncheons and field trips for the members, as well as invites guest speakers to talk about topics such as health insurance regulations and new equipment for the deaf blind community.

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“Basically, it’s informative social networking,” said Friedman, of the Colonia section of Woodbridge.

Friedman, also a member of the Deaf Blind League of New Jersey’s recreation committee, said the fundraising walks benefit her organization because the proceeds from them help pay for these events.

“People with hearing loss tend to be socially isolated, so we try to raise funds for social events,” she said. “We thought it was a great venue for us to be able to raise funds.”

Friedman’s connection to the deaf-blind community is that she has worked as a sign language interpreter for 30 years, and has a brother with Usher’s syndrome, a medical condition related to blindness and deafness, she said.

There are several types of Usher’s Syndrome, but it usually causes people to be born deaf, and then become blind later in life, Friedman said.

Julie Troger, a member of the Deaf Blind League of New Jersey, said participating in the NJ4Walk4Hearing is a good way to advocate for those with hearing loss. “It’s a great way to encourage people to become aware of deafness, and to help the deaf community,” Troger said. “It’s a fun event.”

Troger, of Colonia, also said she enjoys being part of the Deaf Blind League of New Jersey, because of the welcoming atmosphere there. “Everybody is very warm and friendly,” she said. “They are a very nice group of people.

Another goal of the walks is to show there is no need to stigmatize those with hearing loss, D’Amico said.

“Forty eight million Americans have hearing loss, but people are embarrassed and don’t like to talk about it,” D’Amico said. “It is up to us to make it more mainstream.”