



Perris News

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Perris Supports Annual March of Dimes Walk

More than 1,500 children, parents and grandparents put on suntan lotion and hiking shoes to walk six miles and raise money to fight premature births and the birth defects they cause.

The event was the March of Dimes annual walk through downtown Riverside, which began and ended Saturday at Riverside Community College. Participants raised \$600,000 for birth-defect research.

Perris City officials, employees and residents helped organized, supported and took part in the yearly walk to save babies lives.

Perris City Councilwoman Rita Rogers serves as the Inland Empire Division Director of the March of Dimes, and she kicked the event off.

Mayor Daryl Busch read a proclamation of support. City Manager Richard Belmudez, Assistant City Manager Ron Carr, Deputy City Manager Darren Madkin, Human Resource Director Isabel Lugo and IT Supervisor Arturo Cervantes helped count funds raised from the effort.

Rogers said the March of Dimes is making a difference. But that would not be possible without the walkers who gave up a good chunk of their weekend to take part.

"When I took this job 11 years ago, 96 babies died every day in the U.S.," Rogers told the crowd. "Now only 78 babies die daily. I know 18 more babies live every day thanks to the efforts of all of us combined."

Rogers said premature births are the leading cause of infant mortality. The March of Dimes has been fighting since the 1930s to prevent them.

Mayor Busch said the City was glad to support such a worthy cause.

"This is a great event," he said. "You don't realize the severity of the problem until you come to an event like this. Battling birth defects to help newborn children is a great purpose."

Busch took the podium to remind everyone to have a good time, but to remember that the purpose of the walk was no laughing matter.

Perris resident Maureen Gutierrez said she was marching in memory of her daughter, Whitley, who died just five days after birth in 2008. The little girl, born four weeks premature, suffered from fatal lung problems.

"The pain never goes away," said Gutierrez, 28. "I would not want any other parent to feel the way I feel." Gutierrez led a contingent that included her sons, Waylon, 4, and Weston, 2-and-a-half and several friends. They called themselves "Whitley's Walkers" and they all wore pink t-shirts that bore the slogan: "Please help little babies...no parents should feel like we do."

Event organizers released 21 white doves in honor of children lost to premature births and birth defects. They held a moment of silence in their honor too.

Helping March of Dimes wipe out birth defects was Sara Cowan, this year's March for Babies Ambassador. In April 2006, Sara was born prematurely and weighed just one pound, 15 ounces. After spending 99 days in a neonatal intensive care unit she was able to go home with her family in Fontana. Thanks to research funded by March of Dimes and the care and support of her family, Sara is a healthy, active 3-year old, and joined March of Dimes efforts to help prevent premature births.

Her mom, Amanda Cowan said the help of volunteers like those who ran Saturday made her daughter's spectacular recovery possible.

"We are very grateful," she said.

See photos from the event:



Perris City Councilwoman Rita Rogers, Inland Empire Division Director of the March of Dimes, kicks off the annual walk to stamp out birth defects.



City Mayor Daryl Busch chats with Riverside Mayor Ron Loveridge prior to the walk.



Perris resident Melissa Gutierrez walked in honor of her daughter, Whitley, who died last year after she was born prematurely.