



Contact: Joe Vargo, Perris Public Information Officer
Phone: 951-956-2120
jvargo@cityofperris.org

March for Babies Relay Saves Lives

Organizers of Perris' upcoming March for Babies Relay say the 9-hour fundraiser is a great chance to stamp out premature births and their related side effects while enjoying a great time with family and friends.

The Oct. 17 relay at Foss Field Park will highlight ways parents can prevent birth defects from the earliest days of pregnancy until the time of delivery, said Perris City Councilwoman Rita Rogers, Division Director of the March of Dimes.

The length of the walking relay is symbolic in itself, Rogers said. One hour for every month of pregnancy. "We just think it is so important to get the word out that so many birth defects and their associated illnesses and syndromes can be prevented by proper pre-natal care," Rogers said. "Perris has always been supportive of our efforts to help babies. We're expecting a great turn out for our Babies Relay."

Rogers said the City is sponsoring a relay team, as are schools, churches, businesses and civic groups. She expects more than 500 people to attend the upcoming Relay, which has a goal of raising \$30,000 for the March of Dimes. Among the dignitaries scheduled to take part in the Relay is Sara Cowan, 3, who was born 13 weeks premature and survived through respiratory therapy developed by March of Dimes-funded research.

"We are saving lives," Rogers said.

Perris Mayor Daryl Busch will make remarks during the opening and closing ceremonies. Luminarias—candles placed in bags to honor healthy babies, survivors of premature birth and their families as well as infants who did not survive—will be lit at the end of the day's events, creating a haunting glow over the field.

"We are eager to take part in this event," Busch said. "Birth defects and premature births affect a lot more children than you might think. We in Perris take pride in being a family-friendly community, and this event lets us celebrate those values."

Allyson Mallory, assistant principal of Good Hope Elementary School in the Perris Elementary School District, said educators want to take up the fight against birth defects.

"Babies grow up to go to kindergarten," Mallory said. "We want all our children to be healthy and happy, and have the best chance to excel in school and in life."

Cynthia Shain Smith, director of development for the California Chapter of the March of Dimes, said while the fundraiser is serious business, people who come to Foss Field should look forward to a great time. She expects teams to adopt individual theme—like Hawaiian or Superhero garb—to help pass the time. Bring a tent and some soft drinks, sandwiches and munchies, she advises.

"There is nothing hard about this event," Smith said. "Take your time, have fun walking around the field. Hang out with the other teams. Enjoy the day. We want the day to reflect Perris' commitment and support for healthy babies." Her passion is personal.

Smith said her 23-year-old son was born 10 weeks premature with mild cerebral palsy. Although he is in college now and doing well, today infants born 10 weeks premature often suffer no birth defect, the result of technology, treatments and medications made available through March of Dime support.

Perris Team Captains meetings will take place prior to the Relay. They will be held at 5:30 p.m. on Sept. 23 and Oct. 7 in the Cesar Chavez Library Community Room. To register for the event, or to learn more about the March for Babies Relay, call 951-892-7922 or 1-888-4-BABIES or visit www.marchforbabiesrelay.org



Perris Mayor Daryl Busch, Councilwoman Rita Rogers, the March of Dimes' Cynthia Shain Smith and Perris Police Lt. Dan Feltenberger at Perris City Hall. They met to discuss the City's upcoming March for Babies Relay in October.



Councilwoman Rita Rogers, a Division Director for the March of Dimes, discusses the daylong fundraising event during a conference in City Hall.