



A line of walkers extends down the bike path from Temple Israel along Walnut Lake Road all the way back to the Jewish Community Center on Drake Road.

Thousands walk to mark Israel's 43rd birthday

By Greg Kowalski
staff writer

The area Jewish community came out in force Sunday to pay tribute to Israel on its 43rd birthday during the annual Walk for Israel in West Bloomfield.

More than 8,000 people participated in the 3.5-mile walk, which was sponsored by the Jewish Welfare Foundation and the Israel Independence Day Committee.

"It was an opportunity for the Detroit area Jewish community to come out on a day and show support for Israel," said Marta Rosenthal, who served as walk chairman, along with Robert Orley. Walk co-chairmen were Jeff Spoon, Ken Korotkin and Kathy Wilson-Fink.

Among the area people scheduled to participate were Southfield Mayor Donald Fracassi, Oak Park Mayor Charlotte Rothstein, State Sen. David Hongman and Bloomfield Township Trustees Judith Holtz and Dennis Vatsis.

This year's walk was especially meaningful because of the recent war and new peace talks in the Middle East, Rosenthal said.

'Of all the years we've had the walk, this was an extremely important one. Israel is the only democracy in the Middle East region.'

— Marta Rosenthal
walk co-chair

"OF ALL THE YEARS we've had the walk, this was an extremely important one. Israel is the only democracy in the Middle East region," she said, and it is the only ally in the area the United States can rely on. "Israel will survive despite the persistent confrontations punctuated by Stud missile."

The walk has been held for eight years. This year, nearly 500 Russian Jewish immigrants participated. For many, it was the first opportunity they have ever had to express their religion in a public forum, according to the Jewish Welfare Federation.

Children and teens from school and youth groups, and members of such organizations as B'nai B'rith

Youth Organization, Russian Jewish War Veterans and the National Council of Jewish Women, as well as synagogues, temples and secular schools.

"People just enjoyed being out with their families," Rosenthal said. The walk began at 11:30 a.m. and took an hour. It just managed to beat the afternoon rain.

Rosenthal had special praise for the West Bloomfield police, who were "fabulous. They were very cooperative." So was the Oakland County Sheriff's Department, which provided mounted police officers to accompany the walkers.

All in all, "It was wonderful," said Rosenthal.



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Marilyn Kohn walked for Israel Sunday with her children, Rachel, 6, (left); Jacob, 1; and Britta, 4.

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Molly Spalter
Syra rides on
the shoulders
of her dad,
Rick Spalter
of Southfield.