

Local WalkAmerica is April 26

BY DOUG JOHNSON
STAFF WRITER

Hundreds of western Wayne County residents will join millions of people all over the United States for the March of Dimes WalkAmerica on April 26 and 27.

The six-mile Plymouth/Hines Drive walk to save babies will take place rain or shine in Hines Park on Saturday, April 26. The honorary chairs of this year's WalkAmerica in Hines Park are Wayne County Executive Robert Ficano and Kroger president Jon Flora. Ficano, who lives in Livonia, said he expects to take part in the walk.

"This is the biggest fund-raiser for the March of Dimes has," Ficano said. "Today, their focus is premature births, and the care extended to babies both pre- and post-natal. The tragedy is a lot of moms don't get care until the eighth or ninth month of pregnancy."

Ficano praised the March of Dimes van program for poorer mothers-to-be. "Even the driv-

ers are trained to see how they are doing with their pregnancy," Ficano said. Ficano said that Wayne County's infant mortality rate is "too high." Ficano also serves on the M of D board.

Walks are also planned in Detroit, at Metro Beach, and in Troy on Sunday, April 27.

Proceeds raised by WalkAmerica help the March of Dimes save babies through programs of research, community service, advocacy and education. One example of local March of Dimes funding is the Healthy Baby Services, which provides free transportation vans to clinic appointments for low-income pregnant women and their babies in Wayne and Oakland counties.

Among the local companies participating in WalkAmerica is Kroger Company of Michigan. Associates and top executives from Kroger have supported WalkAmerica for several years. Together, they have raised more than \$600,000 to help advance March of Dimes efforts.

Comcast is a statewide sponsor of WalkAmerica in

Michigan. WalkAmerica sponsors in Hines Park are Integrated Health Associates, TCF Bank, Pfizer, Comcast, FedEx, Northwestern University, The Home Depot, Pepsi and Rock Financial.

People gather donations from friends, family members and business colleagues. Based on how much they raise, walkers can qualify for incentive items.

The March of Dimes is a national voluntary health agency whose mission is to improve the health of babies by preventing birth defects and infant mortality. Founded in 1938 with the help of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, the March of Dimes funds programs of research, community services, education, and advocacy to save babies.

People interested in signing up for WalkAmerica can do so by calling (800) BIG WALK. They also can register online at www.marchofdimes.com. More detailed information is available on the March of Dimes Web sites. djohnson@oehomecomm.net | (734) 459-2700



Genie Parker leads her class in Tai Chi Chuan.

TAI CHI

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ods. The Wu family's style is the one Parker has trained under. She became a disciple in 1992.

"I never set out to be a teacher," she said. "I loved it so much. I discovered I had a knack for it, so I started to teach."

She noted Tai-Chi is even being considered a sport category in the Olympics.

Parker teaches four classes at Botsford Health Care Continuum and at her Wu's Tai Chi Chuan Academy in Ann Arbor.

She said the people in her classes become like a family as they help each other with

the moves.

"It's a big responsibility," she said of leading a group into the 108 positions of Tai-Chi.

"People look up to you as a way to relieve stress," she said.

"It's a vast art form, changing your approach to stress and healing." The Wu-style of Tai Chi is a sequence of motions that take the body's joints through their natural rotations, while also learning concentration and relaxation.

Because of the martial art's low impact, seniors like the program, said Parker.

"My oldest student is in her 90s," she said.

Parker said people are

welcome to stop in to see whether they would like to join. They can also learn more through

www.wustyle-annarbor.com

Edward Hodges, 83, chairman of the Botsford Hospital board of directors, takes the class once a week.

"It's a peaceful kind of thing," he said. "It helps with my balance, and it's useful in terms of my joints."

He said he likes the class-

es. "For older people, there's a probably a benefit."

For more information about the program, call Parker at (248) 229-1060.

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