

The Score's In: Erika's Lighthouse – 1, Stigma – Zip

It was a bad day for stigma.

Picture it. Almost 700 friends of Erika's Lighthouse Foundation, sporting bright orange t-shirts, cutting a 2-mile swath through Hubbard Woods, Sheridan Road, Downtown Winnetka and back to Hubbard Woods Park. Balloons, pets and dozens of informational signs designed to educate, inform, remind, and encourage people everywhere to "get depression out of the dark" by blasting stigma.

[More]

"A Sea of Orange!"

Even the casual observer would have realized this is a day not quite like any other as members of the popular North Shore band, "Troubled Identity" decked in blazing orange t-shirts set up camp around noon at the Hubbard Woods Gazebo, and let it rip. Washburne Middle School's Borderline Band played a set, and at 1:00 PM, they were joined by 101FM The Mix.

By 2:00 – registration time – the park was virtually filled with orange t-shirted walkers from Wilmette, Kenilworth, Glencoe, Hubbard Woods, Northfield, Northbrook, Prospect Heights, Gray's Lake, Glenview, Evanston, Lake Forest, Skokie and Chicago, as well as Winnetka.

All rocked up and ready to take to the streets to blast the stigma of adolescent depression.

At 2:15, the Harris Lion arrived and after a brief photo-op, Ginny Neuckranz, co-founder with husband Tom, announced the official start of the Walkathon. At 2:30 sharp they were off! Talking, laughing, visiting – sharing stories, sharing contacts.

Once back at the Park, walkers were treated to food and water provided by Kraft and Hinckley Springs, more music and a rockin' raffle of items and services donated by some of the North Shore's finest businesses.

Stigma didn't stand a chance.

Different this Year

This is the Foundation's 7th Annual Walkathon. And it seems they're just warming up. "This year is different in two ways," according to Dianna Devine, Annual Walkathon Chairperson. "New venue – and broader reach. We're adding 'teeth' to our mission of 'getting depression out of the dark.'"

No Ordinary Walk in the Park

Sunday's Walkathon was the culmination of months of intense preparation.

“We had some terrific people to help with logistics,” says Chairperson Devine. “I can’t thank people enough for helping us bring it off.”

That help included Winnetka Police Chief Joseph DeLopez, Sandra Barefield and Mark Hornstein of the Winnetka Police Department, the Winnetka Park District’s Lee Volpe and staff, the Village of Winnetka and its manager, Doug Williams, Winnetka Fire Department’s Rob Brown, the Winnetka Chamber of Commerce, Winnetka Police Officers Anne Marie Boba and Jeff Purchase.

A grant from Wilmette helped promote the Walkathon.

This year’s sponsors included 101.9 fm The Mix, Kraft Foods, Hinckley Springs Water, and Harris Bank. Local merchants who generously donated certificates and goods for raffle baskets included E-street, Gray Boutique, T.L. Fritz Sporting Goods, Beat Street and The Book Stall.

“We also want to thank the community – everybody who let us put a sign or balloons on their sidewalk or lawn...everyone who drove cautiously looking out for our walkers...we are so grateful!” adds Neuckranz.

Adds Devine, “It truly takes a village and we couldn't have done this without everyone's support. We are very fortunate to live in a community such as this. We are so grateful to so many who have come together to help this organization grow. In the midst of all of life's challenges, the generosity and compassion people continue to show, is amazing!”

A big shout out goes to the Haven Youth Board. “Their face-painting booth made sure our walkers looked good while doing good” adds Heather Steward, ELH Teen Coordinator.

Worth it?

“According to even our preliminary feedback, absolutely,” says Devine. “More people came, more people saw, more people asked questions and we hope, learned a little.”

It is estimated that 15 and 20 percent of youth will suffer from at least one depressive episode before they reach adulthood; less than 33 percent of teens with depression get help, yet 80 percent of teens with depression can be successfully treated. Adds Neuckranz, “That’s the light we’re trying to shed on depression! Hopefully, Sunday’s efforts lit a few bulbs.”

The Message – You are not Alone.

“The coolest thing happens each year,” offers Steward. “People actually wear our shirts all year long. You see them everywhere! Even at college. It’s so awesome to think our message is reaching that far.”

“It’s our fervent wish that when people see someone wearing one of our shirts – and this year’s are particularly hard to miss! – they will pass the word or be comforted that they are not alone,” adds Neuckranz.

For more information about Erika's Lighthouse, the Red Fags Middle School Curriculum, Teen Panels, Teen Club or to order the Parent Handbook on Adolescent Depression, please visit www.Erikaslighthouse.org.

Erika's Lighthouse Foundation is a 501(c)3 not-for-profit organization, headquartered in Winnetka, IL, whose mission is to shed light on adolescent depression by breaking the stigma associated with it.

All photos courtesy Robin Subar

- **Teens link up to shine light on adolescent depression at last Sunday's Erika's Lighthouse "Rock 'n Rally" Walkathon in Hubbard Woods Park.**
- **Raffle – Generous donations help ELH Raffle raise funds.**
- **Face Painting – Haven Youth Board makes doing good look even better.**