

Couple taking walk for March of Dimes

BY BRIAN CLARK
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Kerri Kopacz was at Moses-Taylor Hospital with a migraine headache last year when she began to have contractions.

Ms. Kopacz had been pregnant for 30 weeks — 10 weeks shy of a normal pregnancy. When her baby's heart rate dropped to about 40 beats per minute, doctors decided to perform an emergency Caesarean section.

Abigail Kopacz came into the world at 4 pounds 4-1/2 ounces. She spent 19 days in the neonatal intensive care unit while she learned to eat. She was fed by a syringe through a tube while in the hospital.

"You're devastated (seeing your baby hooked up to the

Take a stroll

What: The March of Dimes' WalkAmerica

When: Registration begins at 8 a.m. Sunday. The walk begins at 9 a.m.

Where: Nay Aug Park

Course: 3.2 miles

SOURCE: PENNSYLVANIA CHAPTER
OF THE MARCH OF DIMES

tubes)," Ms. Kopacz said. "You feel helpless."

A year ago Saturday, Bob and Kerri Kopacz brought Abigail home. Today, they will celebrate a year of good health by participating in the March of Dimes' WalkAmerica.

Ms. Kopacz, a registered nurse at Moses Taylor, raised

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\$640 for the March of Dimes event, which will start at 9 a.m. at Nay Aug Park.

"For everything they did for us and everything we've got ... I feel like I owe it to them," Ms. Kopacz said.

Since it was founded in 1938, the March of Dimes has worked to prevent premature births. The WalkAmerica pro-

gram raises money for research and programs to help premature babies.

One in eight babies is born prematurely, according to the March of Dimes organization. The group has also seen a 30 percent increase in premature births since 1981, said Jamila Patton, a spokeswoman for the state chapter.

"We don't know why it happens," Ms. Patton said.

Premature babies are at risk for physical disabilities and cerebral palsy because their lungs, eyes and brains may not be fully developed, Ms. Patton said.

Abigail received supplemen-

tal oxygen the first day, her parents said. She was under special lights and wore goggles to protect her eyes.

Now Abigail happily pulls over a box of plastic blocks. Her blue eyes sparkle as she shakes each block then spreads her toys across the floor.

Her father smiles at his first-born daughter. Abigail has grown to be a normal-size toddler and tests show she suffered no damage, he said.

Participating in the WalkAmerica program is a tribute to "showing what neonatal care can be now," Mr. Kopacz said.

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