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March gladness

9-mile trek draws the clean, lean and green

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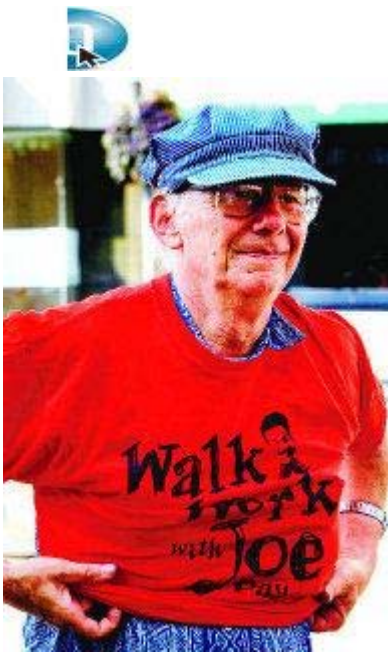
By [Joe Blundo](#)

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ERIC ALBRECHT | Dispatch photos

Walkers head south along N. High Street during the third annual Walk to Work With Joe Day.



Stuart Wright of the Clintonville neighborhood tries on the Walk to Work With Joe Day T-shirt he received in a raffle at the end of the event.

Walk to Work with Joe Day III attracted health enthusiasts, hikers and a political candidate. Even some teenagers got up early yesterday to participate.

So I'm calling it a success, although it will be some years before I know whether it saved the planet.

My annual 9-mile walk always begins with me standing in the dark on the Village Green in Worthington, wondering whether anyone will show up.

But they always do.

By the 7 a.m. start, about 75 people had assembled for the walk down N. High Street to Downtown. They ranged from people serious about conserving energy to people out for a good time. Or both.

Four women who call themselves the "Sophia Sisters" (*Sophia* means wisdom) showed up, in part because it was one sister's birthday.

"It's my 55th -- double nickels," said Mary Slaback of Westerville. "This is how I'm bringing it in."

She wore a party hat for the occasion.

The Sophias, who started as a group opposing President Bush and have since branched out to other causes, liked the walk's emphasis on reducing oil consumption.

Marilyn Marshall-Goetz of Westerville said she rides a bike with a trailer to the grocery store and her husband, Tom, bikes to work.

Their goal is to leave the car in the driveway as often as possible. They highlight carless days on the calendar.

"There's not enough of them yet," Marshall-Goetz said.

So, yes, I'm preaching to the choir on Walk to Work with Joe Day. We had people from the Ohio Department of Health, the Columbus Department of Health, the McConnell Heart Health Center and the energy-conservation arm of Columbia Gas.

Kent and Jenine Stanley of Minerva Park came with their guide dogs for the third year because having a walkable city is important to people who can't drive.

I also met dietitians, avid cyclists and hikers of one kind or another. Bob Neinast, who goes everywhere barefoot, came for the second year. This past weekend, he hiked barefoot at a state park.

"I'm a little footsore," he said.

Tom Kluesener of Reynoldsburg walked with a 43-pound pack on his back. He was training for a hiking trip in the Great Smoky Mountains.

Arriving Downtown about 10:30 a.m., he pronounced himself ready.

As usual, interviewing walkers put me way behind the pack, and I had to hitch a ride to catch up. So while everyone else walked 9 miles, I probably did about 8 1/4.

Other highlights of the walk:

Most determined

Susan Gruber of Bexley had to be at work in time to meet her kindergarten class at Our Lady of Peace school, at Dominion Boulevard and N. High.

She made it. By the time I passed by, she was standing on the lawn with her class, waving.

Best represented

Owing to the recruiting efforts of my daughter, Celia, we had about a dozen Thomas Worthington High School students, including a substantial percentage of the saxophone section of the marching band. (The kids had the day off from school.)

Also sending a healthy contingent was the Columbus Torah Academy.

"We're promoting health and wellness at our school," nurse Cathy Tran said.

The school had the day off for Yom Kippur.

Most official

We actually attracted a Columbus City Council member, Hearcel Craig. He was appointed in April and is running for a full term. I was the only presidential candidate.

Best salesman

Paul Bingle, treasurer of the Clintonville Community Fund, walked a mile or so to tout the glories of his neighborhood, including the new Adena Brook rain garden and the Whetstone Recreation Center, undergoing an expansion.

Luckiest

Sue Lewis, a retired dental assistant from Columbus, won the drawing for a pair of walking shoes. Others won T-shirts; everyone received a compact fluorescent bulb donated by American Electric Power.

Most cheerful

Kathy Trace came for the third straight time and thoroughly embraced this year's new wrinkle: picking up litter. Wielding tools provided by Keep Columbus Beautiful, she hauled in a lot.

"I think it's more fun picking up the trash," she said.

Fastest

Natalie Eader, a dietitian, and Pat Jones, a retired library worker, barreled Downtown in two hours and 15 minutes. They had just returned from a walk over the hills of San Francisco.

"Compared to that," Eader said, "this was like a piece of cake."

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- For more photos of Walk to Work With Joe Day, visit Dispatch.com/multimedia.

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