

CONFIDENTIAL - **DO NOT REPRODUCE**

© American Heart Association. All rights reserved.



Kathleen Hanover, Public Relations Consultant
Copywriting Sample: Press Release

kathleen@kathleenhanover.com • (937) 475-1515

SEVEN-YEAR-OLD HEART DEFECT SURVIVOR NAMED AMERICAN HEART WALK AMBASSADOR

"Team Joshua" Raises Over \$4,000 for Cardiac Research



(Dayton, Ohio) August 14, 2000 - Born with two life-threatening heart defects, Troy resident Joshua Hennessy is alive today thanks to the kind of cardiac research funded by the American Heart Association. The second grader is giving back by helping the American Heart Association raise research funds as the official Ambassador of the 2000 American Heart Walk, scheduled for 8:30 a.m. on Saturday, September 16th at Carillon Historical Park in Dayton.

First-time parents Heidi and Kelly Hennessy rejoiced at the birth of their son Joshua, who by all appearances, was a perfect baby boy. They spent the first day of his life calling friends and family with the news of his birth. But during his 24-hour checkup, Josh turned a deadly blue, his body starving for oxygen. His pediatrician came back to Heidi and Kelly with a devastating diagnosis: their baby had a profoundly deformed heart. Josh was born without a tricuspid heart valve, so one chamber of his heart had never fully developed. Ironically, another serious defect, a hole between two chambers, allowed some blood to flow—enough to barely keep Josh alive. His parents, fearing he would not live through the night, had Josh baptized in the hospital nursery.

The night was long and agonizing. "We knew that we had to be strong for Josh. So Kelly and I started creating a list of all the positive things surrounding our situation. I have to admit that it was not easy that first night. We focused a lot on how strong we could be, how much we loved each other and Josh," says Heidi. (Against all odds, Josh survived his first night of life, but would not be out of the woods until his first heart surgery at the

age of three months.) "We added to our list each day," continues Heidi, "and read the full list each night before we went to bed. Our list, which we still have to this day, includes things such as 'found a cardiologist that we trust and respect,' 'tubes taken off,' and 'medicines stopped' to finally, the greatest one of all, 'Josh is coming home.'"

By the time he was three, Josh had survived two other open-heart procedures. Today the rambunctious seven-year-old takes blood thinners and blood pressure medicine each daily, and sees his cardiologist every six months.

"We are not sure of what the future will hold for Josh," says Heidi. "Our focus is on each day to make it positive and as normal as possible." Most people who do not know Josh's history would not realize that he has such a serious heart defect. Josh spends most of his days riding his bike, playing ball and hanging out with his friends. He loves animals and nature, and might like to be a veterinarian or a rancher when he grows up. Josh is also in Tiger Cubs and sings in his church choir.

In addition to serving as the American Heart Walk Ambassador, Josh and his family have formed "Team Joshua" to raise donations for the Heart Walk. The team set a goal of raising \$3,000, which they have already more than surpassed, a month before the event. Josh is developing his public speaking skills as Heart Walk Ambassador, speaking in front of his church congregation, and at the American Heart Association's Heart Walk Kickoff on July 1st. He is also excited about appearing on television and radio to promote the Walk.

"When asked to support the American Heart Walk, we did not hesitate to say yes for several reasons," Heidi Hennessy continues. "The first was to raise awareness that heart disease affects many people, not only adults but children as well. Second, our hope is to help raise money for research to help prevent heart disease and find new ways of treatment. Thanks to people who participate in the American Heart Walk, so many strides have been made in heart research and treatment. Had Josh been born 10 years earlier, he would not be with us today. Finally, it is our wish that Josh will be able to provide hope to families who are faced with a similar situation."

As a survivor of heart surgery, Josh will be one of hundreds of Heart Walk participants wearing an official red baseball cap on September 16th. Identified by their headgear, the "Red Caps" are survivors of heart disease, heart surgery, or stroke. As the official Red Cap sponsor, Fifth Third Bank is providing the hats free of charge to cardiovascular disease survivors who collect donations and participate in the Heart Walk.

The American Heart Walk is a national American Heart Association event held in over 1,000 locations nationwide that has raised more than \$170 million since 1994. This year's goal is \$87 million to be raised by over 500,000 participants nationwide. The Montgomery County Walk aims to raise \$275,000, with 3,500 participants from more than 300 companies and organizations.

The event is presented by Miami Valley Hospital and Good Samaritan Hospital, members of the Premier HeartCare Network, with support from Agilent Technologies, Fifth Third Bank, Merrill Lynch, and United Healthcare. The Walk's media sponsors are 2 News-Your Weather Authority (WDTN-TV), Lite 99.9 (WLQT-FM), and Suburban Newspapers of Dayton.

Serving as honorary co-chairs for the Walk are Bob and Mary Nutter, son and daughter-in-law of the late Ervin J. Nutter. A prominent local businessman and philanthropist, Ervin J. Nutter passed away in January of 2000 after a series of strokes.

Participants of all ages are expected to join in the Walk, and enjoy other attractions including a free health fair, live entertainment, and a kids' zone. The 2- to four-mile course runs along the Miami River Corridor, starting and ending at Carillon Historical Park. Each walker who raises \$100 or more will earn an American Heart Walk T-shirt, and other thank-you prizes are available. For information, or to register a Walk team, call the American Heart Association at (937) 224-3571, ext. 41.

###