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# DOWN SYNDROME

## A FAMILY'S JOURNEY



Wyatt smiles while getting medicine from his mother.



Hundreds of people begin the walk during the 11th Annual Lehigh Valley Buddy Walk in Breinigsville. The Kupinsky family is shown at the far right, followed by the Waksmunskis.

# Walking a mile to raise millions

By KAREN CIMMS  
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With their entire family in tow, including 6-month-old twins Shane and Wyatt, the Waksmunski family of Mahoning Township recently joined close to 1,000 others for the 11th Annual Lehigh Valley Buddy Walk in Breinigsville at Valley Preferred Cycling Center/Rodale Fitness Park.

The Waksmunskis took advantage of a beautiful autumn afternoon to join other supporters of those with Down syndrome in raising money and awareness. It was one of the twins' first public appearances. Both boys were diagnosed with Down syndrome shortly after their birth in March.

Although the boys didn't get to participate in the actual walk, as the one-mile trek coincided with the time they needed to be fed, it gave their parents Eric Waksmunski and Mary Anne Christo, and 3-year-old brother Jesse, a chance to meet other Down syndrome families, such as the Kupinsky family from Coaldale.

"I really liked the event," said Waksmunski of his first Buddy Walk. "What I liked best about it was meeting the people. A lot of the people that we met have been following us on Facebook, so they knew the story."

He said his wife, Mary, had a very positive experience as well. "Mary really, really enjoyed some of the mothers that she met there. That was really important to us."

And just as important, said Waksmunski, was raising money for the Eastern Pennsylvania Down Syndrome Center (EPDSC). "That's obviously why we were all there."

The Waksmunskis have raised \$2,245 thus far, and



Jesse peeks into the house from the porch before leaving for the Buddy Walk.

will continue to accept donations until Dec. 31.

"People are still donating," said Waksmunski. "I'm still receiving checks. Donations are still coming, and that's good. The support that we've received has been overwhelming. People have come forward, and have been really awesome."

The goal of the EPDSC for this year's Buddy Walk was \$85,000, but it has fallen short thus far, having collected only \$62,000. As donations are accepted through the end of the year, EPDSC coordinator Maria Floryshak hopes that some ground will be made over the next three months.

Last year, Buddy Walk events across the country raised over \$10 million.

Those who would like to donate online, can go to "Shane and Wyatt's Journey With Down Syndrome" on Facebook, become a member of the page and then click on "Events," and then follow the directions there; or send a check to Eric Waksmunski, P.O. Box 214, Lehigh, PA 18235. Make checks out to Eastern PA Down Syndrome Center, or contact Waksmunski directly at [ericwaxy@ptd.net](mailto:ericwaxy@ptd.net).

According to Floryshak,



Eric Waksmunski gets a reaction from Shane as he gets the twins ready to leave for the Lehigh Valley Buddy Walk.



Eric carries Shane out of the house on their way to the Buddy Walk. Shane's heart monitor is in the bag over Eric's shoulder.



The Waksmunskis arrive at their base camp in the infield of the Valley Preferred Cycling Center for the Lehigh Valley Buddy Walk.



Eric Waksmunski carries 3-year-old Jesse as he walks in the Buddy Walk at Valley Preferred Cycling Center in Breinigsville, with his wife Mary Anne Christo.

90 percent of the money raised by the local Buddy Walk will stay in this area for use by the EPDSC, which provides medical evaluations, education and

family support. Donations also cover the salaries for three coordinators and an office manager, as well as rent for its facility. There are three

physicians on staff, only one of which receives a nominal fee for services. The other two are volunteers.

The EPDSC also holds a conference each year, in addition to hosting several social events, such as a picnic and holiday party, as well as offering special programs.

While the Waksmunskis continue to collect money for this year's Buddy Walk, their thoughts are already turning to next year's event.

"I expect next year we'll be bigger and better organized than we were this year," said Waksmunski. "We'll definitely be in it next year. We're already looking forward to it."

Meanwhile, as the Waksmunskis were participating in the Buddy Walk locally, Shane and Wyatt made their "big screen debut."

A picture of Christo and the twins was shown on the jumbo screen in Times Square in a NDSS video that featured 300 photos of children and adults with Down syndrome.

The picture was taken by Waksmunski when the boys were in Janet Weiss Children's Hospital in Danville. His brother, Brian, submitted it to the NDSS.

"He thought that was the best picture at the time of both babies and with mom," said Waksmunski. "Personally, I agree. I love that picture."

To see the NDSS Times Square video, visit the NDSS website at [www.ndss.org](http://www.ndss.org).

To read all of the stories in the TIMES NEWS series "DOWN SYNDROME: A family's journey," visit [www.tnonline.com](http://www.tnonline.com) and look for the link on the left side of the page.



COURTESY OF NDSS



Olivia Kupinsky, 5, gets a ride on her father, William Kupinsky's shoulders, as her mother, Carolyn Kupinsky, left, and sister Sam McCarthy, 12, center, carry signs for Team Olivia.



Sam McCarthy helps her sister Olivia down the embankment of the track at the velodrome.



Olivia Kupinsky enjoys the view from her father William's shoulders during the Buddy Walk.