



National Office
P.O. Box 3696
Oak Brook, IL 60522-3696
877-969-0010

For Immediate Release

FROM: Wayne Loder
Public Awareness Coordinator
The Compassionate Friends
(Toll free) 866-964-4000
E-mail: wayne@compassionatefriends.org
Website: www.compassionatefriends.org

Conference and “Walk to Remember” to Unite Families Living with Loss of a Child

Dearborn, MI, July 5, 2006—Patricia Loder, Executive Director of The Compassionate Friends says she believes there’s a good chance parents will be attending a July national bereavement conference next week in southeast Michigan who at this point are completely unaware they will have a reason to be there.

“It’s truly unfortunate, but we know from past conferences that there will be parents attending whose child will have died a month, a week, or just a few days before our national conference,” said Loder. “No one ever wants to think it can happen to them, but the sad fact is that every day thousands of families are added to the millions across the United States who carry the pain that comes with the death of future dreams, whether their child died as an adult, teen, youngster, or before birth.”

The Compassionate Friends (TCF) 29th National Conference will be in Dearborn, Michigan July 14-16 and up to 1300 bereaved parents, siblings, grandparents, and professionals are expected to attend. The Compassionate Friends, with main offices in Oak Brook, Illinois, is the country’s largest self-help bereavement organization with nearly 600 chapters across the United States, including every state, Washington D. C. and Puerto Rico.

Chet Szuber of Michigan, who made national news when he received the transplant of his daughter’s heart, even as he grieved her death, will be a featured speaker at the conference. Other speakers include: Marilyn Heavilin, three time bereaved parent and author of the bereavement best-seller “Roses in December”; William Ritter, bereaved parent, retired minister, and author of the book “Take the Dimness of My Soul Away: Healing After a Loved One’s Suicide”; and Pat Loder, TCF’s executive director who is a twice bereaved parent, and a bereaved sibling. The conference will feature more than 100 workshops on various grief topics for parents, siblings, and grandparents and there will be a host of other activities.

A pre-conference Professionals Day will be held Thursday, July 13 for professionals who care for individuals at the scene, at the hospital, or during the funeral process and provide support for bereaved families after the death of a child. CEUs will be available for social workers, counselors, and nurses. All others will receive certificates of completion.

Eric Hipple, the popular former quarterback of the Detroit Lions, will be honorary Grand Marshal of The Compassionate Friends seventh annual “Walk to Remember” Sunday, July 16 at 8 a.m. Hipple, whose son, Jeff, died by suicide in 2000, will lead the two-mile walk.

“This is one of the ways in which I’m trying to help others like myself who have had a child die,” says Hipple. “The Compassionate Friends is an inspiring organization dedicated to helping those across the United States who have been devastated by the death of a child within their families.”

“This walk is very symbolic because, while our children cannot physically be with us, their memories will always be carried within our hearts,” adds Loder.

Drawing from Michigan and surrounding states, as well as those present for the conference, more than 1,000 people are expected for the walk.

“This is our seventh ‘Walk to Remember’ and we are constantly amazed at how many people participate in some way,” observes Loder. “Even those who are not able to come to Dearborn are sending us the names of their children and volunteers carry them during the walk. We know of people flying in from as far away as Texas just to participate in the walk.”

Last year the names of nearly 10,000 children who had died were carried during the walk. Those who wish to have a child’s name carried during the walk may do so by visiting The Compassionate Friends Walk to Remember website at www.tcfwalktoremember.org.

Those who wish to learn more about the conference, or locate one of TCF's nearly 600 local chapters, may visit www.compassionatefriends.org or call The Compassionate Friends National Office toll-free at 877-969-0010. Registration for the conference, the pre-conference Professionals Day, and the "Walk to Remember" will be accepted at the door, although pre-registration has ended. Worldwide, TCF has a national presence in an estimated 29 countries.

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