

Support 'March for Babies' premature-birth research

MY TURN

The March of Dimes is investing millions of dollars in research, education and awareness programs to find the causes of premature birth and develop ways to save babies from being born too soon.

Each week here in Arizona 1,850 babies are born and of those, 243 babies (or 13 percent), are pre-term at less than 37 weeks in the



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womb, according to the March of Dimes.

Many of these babies have very low birth weights, making them susceptible to future complications including bleeding in the brain, underdeveloped lungs, blindness, hearing impairment, learning disabilities and cerebral palsy. Of those born each week in Arizona, approximately 13 will die before their first birthday.

The March of Dimes is investing millions of dollars in research, education and awareness programs to find the causes of premature birth and develop ways to save babies from being born too soon. Today, it will hold the "March for Babies" fundraiser, in which I'm leading a team to walk in memory of my first son, Nathan, who was born at 20 weeks and passed away shortly after his birth.

My second son, Malachi, and daughter, Makaiah, also were both born prematurely at 34 weeks. Fortunately, they were both healthy enough to leave the hospital after short stays in ICU. I know, without a doubt, that March of Dimes research helped save their lives.

This is why the March of Dimes is important to me and for Arizona. When my employer, CIGNA, became a national sponsor of the March for Babies, I didn't hesitate to help. At Cigna Medical Group's Deer Valley Health Care Center, I've seen how preventive care for moms, from head to toe, can reduce many of the complications and costs associated with an unhealthy birth. A lot of pain and suffering can be avoided, too. The best birth outcomes

don't start in the delivery room. They are the product of planning, education, a healthy pregnancy, and good medical and dental care.

Nathan would have been 10 years old this year on Thursday and I can't think of a better birthday present and way to honor him than by walking on today with the March for Babies. I am proud to support such a great cause to help fund the research necessary to help these little miracles.

This year the march will cover six miles, and thousands of individuals and team walkers from corporations, small businesses, elementary and high schools are expected to attend. Will you?

The writer lives in Tolleson. Information about the March of Dimes and the March for Babies:

www.marchofdimes.com/arizona or www.marchforbabies.com.