

5K walk raises awareness for homelessness in Michigan City

By **RICHARD CHAMBERS** Staff Writer | Posted: Saturday, September 27, 2014 5:22 pm

MICHIGAN CITY — Pirates with candy, clowns with balloons, a Zumba-style warm-up and singers from Hobart High School helped celebrate the start of the 5K Homeward Bound Community Walk on Saturday.

Michigan City's walk is one of 11 the Indiana Association for Community Economic Development promotes throughout Indiana to raise awareness about homelessness.

Jim Musial, executive director of the Sand Castle Shelter for Homeless Families, estimated that more people participated in this year's walk than did last year, when about 100 people came.

The walk, now in its 10th year, raises funds for the shelter and nine other nonprofit agencies dedicated to addressing homelessness: A Hand Up, Inc.; Catholic Charities; Gabriel's Horn Family Shelter; Grace Learning Center; Interfaith Men's Shelter; Keys to Hope Resource Center; La Porte County Habitat for Humanity; Michigan City Housing Authority; and Stepping Stone Shelter for Women.

Musial said the goal, besides raising funds, is making everyone in Michigan City and throughout La Porte County aware of the homelessness in the area.

Participation in the walk comes only with the request for donations or pledges.

Ed Merrion, program manager of housing services at Catholic Charities' Gary diocese and coordinator of the Interfaith Men's Shelter, said the walk raised \$10,000 last year.

This year, the business sponsors by themselves gave more than \$10,000. He said he hopes this year's walk will raise \$20,000, although he said that is placing his hopes high.

Businesses that donated the most include Blue Chip Casino; Fifth Third Bank; Hatfield Pest Control; and NIPSCO. About 20 other businesses also donated.

One of them was Captain Ed's Candy Island, which sells candy, furniture and other items. The owner, "Captain Ed" Beutner, and his son, John Beutner, came to the start of the walk wearing pirate



Homeward Bound Walk

The 10th annual Homeward Bound Community Walk began at Washington Park near the J.C. Stage and went through the park three times on Saturday.

costumes and passed out candy.

Ed Beutner said he has been working with the Sand Castle Homeless Shelter since he helped the Exchange Club with a toilet paper drive about two years ago. He now helps the shelter with events, including Christmas, and giving other items like candy, which he said is his favorite thing to do.

Ed Beutner said he is inspired by the many programs at the shelter, including its help to find jobs for people who come there.

"That is the highest and best use of a homeless shelter: Get people who fell off the rails back on," he said.

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Kathleen Taylor, convener and policy director for the Indiana Association for Community Economic Development, said all of these walks are organized by local groups, but her association helps with media needs, such as a website, and with logistics and insurance.

The association wants to send the message that homelessness is a problem for each community, but each community can do more to fight homelessness if its organizations work together.

Each community should address homelessness in different ways, depending on its own culture, she said. This was the association's sixth walk so far this year.

"They also look different in every city, which is what we want," she said.

The walk went through Washington Park on three different routes. When added together, the three routes comprise exactly 5 kilometers, Merrion said.

Eight members of a vocal group from Hobart High School sang at the J.C. Stage during the walk.

Dean Wolff, choir director at the high school, said his group sings at about 65-70 event each year, often for veterans events but also for company parties, cancer benefits or other charitable causes.

Don Przybylinski, vice president of the Michigan City Common Council, spoke at the beginning of the walk.

"It touches you deeply, or you wouldn't be here," he said.