

Andrew Dunn Walk/Run a success



Photo by Dianne Hamill

Participants hit the pavement in the sixth annual Andrew Dunn Walk/Run May 12.

By Dianne Hamill

The sun shone brightly as 800 participants of all ages came together to raise awareness for mental illness last weekend.

Participants – some wearing T-shirts bearing the pictures of loved ones lost to mental illness – laced up their sneakers to take part in the Andrew Dunn Walk/Run in Oakbank.

Organized by Dunn's mother Judy and Brenda Balinski along with countless volunteers, the five and 10-kilometre event marked its sixth anniversary on May 12.

Named after Judy's son Andrew – who took his own life in 2006 after suffering with mental illness – early estimates indicated this year's event raised \$50,000 in support of the Mood Disorders Association of Manitoba.

In addition to providing the food and drinks

for the event, organizers credited the Oakbank Co-op for contributing a whopping \$2,200 of that money through the sales of cards and Mother's Day cakes.

But for Judy Dunn and those connected to the walk, the event is about more than just dollars and cents.

"It has always been about raising awareness (about mental health)," Dunn said. "The more people we can get talking about it – that's what we've set out to do in the first place."

Since its first steps in 2007 in Birds Hill Park, the walk has continued to grow – bringing together people from across the province to raise awareness about the issues and services available for those living with mental illness.

"If it goes up (participation) even a little bit – I know we're connecting with people and making a difference," Dunn said fol-

lowing the race.

The day also featured performances from Big Daddy Taz and Canadian recording artist Robb Nash along with a host of family-friendly activities.

Organizers also unveiled the winner of the 2012 poster contest. Based on the theme 'What does depression mean to you', Steinbach's Ray Heidinger's claimed the top prize of the 14 entries. His artwork will be used as the T-shirt design for the 2013 event.

And just days after the last participant crossed the finish line, the countdown had already begun for the next year's event.

"As long as we're making a difference we'll continue," Dunn said.

For more information on the Andrew Dunn Walk/Run, as well as mental health resources and program information, visit www.andrewdunn.org