



**OPNFF**

Ohio Practitioners' Network for Fathers and Families

[www.opnff.net](http://www.opnff.net)

**December 2008  
Newsletter**

## *A Time and Season for Change*

*By Calvin Williams, OPNFF President*

It was a dark and stormy night. No – really, it was. OPNFF began on such an evening in Philadelphia, PA, back in 2003. Amidst Arroz con pollo and Congris (red bean rice) at the Cuba Libre Restaurante, three men hand-picked the Network Planning Council that would ultimately become the first OPNFF Board of Directors. I felt so fortunate to be there. How humbling to be valued and trusted to personally recommend people, and help decide on first steps in launching this unique and cutting edge work.

Why this reminiscence? At this writing, and after three years at the helm, I have decided to step aside as President of the OPNFF Board of Directors. It is truly a “step aside” as the organization has a great person and leader at the ready to replace me and because I will continue serving and contributing to the mission of this important and necessary organization.

You know what I treasure most about that evening in Philadelphia? That the three of us – Steve Killpack, Muqit Sabur and myself - took on our duty with passion, great enthusiasm for what’s possible, and importantly, great solemnity. We looked each other in the eyes and worked from our hearts to develop a list of names of those we wanted to be involved and those we knew should be involved. The integrity began there and to this date hasn’t wavered a bit. From the three of us then to the current members of the Board, OPNFF has been about integrity, clarity of mission, professionalism and results.

Ohio is a special place made all the better by tremendous efforts on many fronts to improve the lives of children and families. In national election cycles, it is said early and often that, “As Ohio goes, so goes the nation”. If that’s true, then – based on the work of OPNFF over the past four-plus years, our 650 members, the partners and

supporters in state government and in local communities across the state – the nation should have a clear, strong agenda for making sure that all children have a committed, nurturing, effective and loving father in their lives. Ohio has come a long way in this work. Let us not let up! We have so much research, so much practice in the field, so many more people who now understand, simply, that all men want to father well. Too many men lack the support, advocacy, education, healing and encouragement that they need to be a consistent positive force in their children’s lives. There are laws and policies that unintentionally work against some men’s efforts to be with and raise their children. There is still much work to do.

The past three years for me have been an absolute joyride of networking, relationship building, learning and

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## **Over 500 Dads and Adult Males Participate in the First Annual Summit County Fathers Walk** *by Pastor Eugene Norris and Vera Thomas, Summit County Fatherhood Initiative*

Summit County Fatherhood Initiative and Akron Public Schools are excited about the response to the first annual Fathers Walk. The Fathers Walk brought out over 500 dads/males to 17 schools in the Akron area. Pastor Eugene Norris, Executive Director of the Summit County Fatherhood Initiative, states, “the goal of the Fathers Walk was to show fathers’ support for the education of their children and moreover, the importance of dads being involved in the lives of their children. When we peel back the layers, we see that the father’s absence is a contributing factor to many challenges facing our young people today. Challenges such as children living in pov-

erty, high school dropout rates, gang activity and adolescent drug use are just a few.”



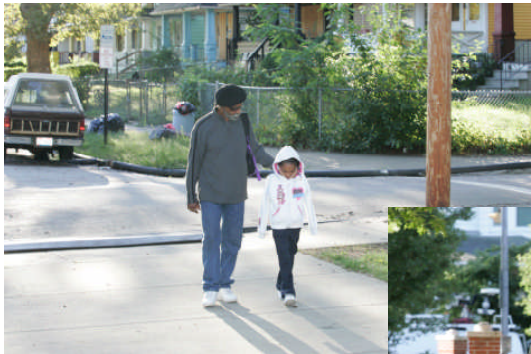
children participated in this event. Schools provided a hospitality room offering coffee, pastries, relevant materials related to education, voter regis-

tration, and a dad’s playbook, a tool encouraging fathers to engage in reading activities with their children. Vera Thomas, the event coordinator, noticed how dads and males stayed well into the morning discussing issues concerning their children and acknowledging the need for male involvement. Principals and school officials expressed how excited they were to see dads walking through the doors with their children. One young man at Perkins Middle School stated, “It was cool, having my dad at school”. There was a dad who stated, “I am here because I want to show my children how important they are to me.”

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## Over 4000 Make Cuyahoga County's Father's Walk 2008 With Their School Children

by Theresa Mejia Johnson of *I Am A Dream* and *Fathers Perspective Magazine*



the streets to make a statement through their presence at the schools of their children, someone should pay attention.



One September morning fathers had prepared ahead of time. They had asked for time off work, or had called to say they would be a little late, and had arranged with the mother of their child to take care of school responsibilities. Then these fathers from all different socioeconomic backgrounds, different ethnicities, and dif-



States and beyond involved in the same activities. Northeast Ohio was among the elite regions participating in this special event. Let's make this an annual event with a host of creative activities during the school year to keep dads involved in the education of their children.

*I Am A Dream* and *Fathers Perspective* magazine coordinated the walk with Passages, Inc., Community Endeavors, and others in both the Cleveland and Akron communities. For additional areas of engagement we invite you to visit [www.fathersperspective.com](http://www.fathersperspective.com) to subscribe to ***Fathers Perspective Magazine*** and explore father related issues.



The teachers were elated, the children were proud, and the dads stood as tall as giant redwood trees. Yes, there was pride everywhere and oozing from everyone on September 10, 2008. Even mothers were pleased and excited that hundreds and thousands of dads stepped forward to be present in the life of their child.

Two years ago on the same occasion nearly 2,500 proud dads and children participated in this special event. This year there were a series of

different cities and homes, did the same thing—took their children to school. They walked their children to school to show their support of their child, to show their endorsement of education, to show that fathers do care about their children.

**Fathers Walk 2008** took place on September 10, 2008 in the Northeast Ohio area and 4000+ dads from Cuyahoga County and 500+ in Summit County made the statement. What was the statement?

***"We care and will be there for the education and development of our children."***

When more than 4,500 fathers take to

breakfasts and welcoming engagements in many schools.

The numbers have grown as has the need to allow fathers opportunities to be involved in growth and development through a parent/teacher partnership to build character in their children through education.

There were more than 600 cities throughout the United



We know this is just the beginning so let's give dads a chance to be a "Father" forever.

*Photos of fathers and children in Cuyahoga and Coshocton Counties*



## Summit County Father's Walk, continued

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Organizers noted that there were many straight postured, well behaved children in school that day just knowing their dads were around.

Pastor Norris expressed, "In line with the National Fatherhood Initiative, our mission is to improve the well being of our children by increasing the proportion of children growing up with involved, responsible and committed fathers. We accomplish this through educating, equipping and engaging every sector of society through strategic alliances and partnerships. We look forward to father's forums, working with national and local speakers, activities involving fathers and their children such as daddy boot camps. Currently we provide custodial and non-custodial father training programs for mature and young dads. The desire is to expand our services throughout the county."

There were many elected officials on site greeting fathers: Judge Linda Teodosio, Judge Thomas Teodosio, Councilwoman Renee Greene, Councilwoman Paula Prentice, County Councilmen Nick Kostandaras and Cazzell

Smith. Prosecutor Sherri Bevan Walsh supported the event by sending staff to serve as greeters. Other greeters came from community organizations and the PTA Council.

This was an excellent opportunity for the PTA to recruit fathers and males for their 2008-2009 school year. They provided information and tips on ways dads can encourage their children.

Vera Thomas states, "Trying to pull this off in such short notice brought with it some challenges; however, it would not have been possible, without the support of Akron Public Schools, particularly the efforts of Judi Bevely-Hill, Director Community/Adult Partnership and Customer Service and the Council of PTA President, Glorya Porter.

Other Fathers Walk supporters include Charisma Community Connection, Summit County Fatherhood Initiative, Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance, Akron Public Schools, Summit County Community Action Agency, The National Fathers Walk committee, and a host of other political and community supporters. All helped to make this day a great success.

The Summit County Fatherhood Initiative hosted a Fathers Walk debriefing and discussion of next steps on September 30<sup>th</sup>. School principals, greeters, and others that had a hand in the Fathers Walk success, were in attendance.

As a result of the debriefing, Summit County Fatherhood Initiative will use the data base of males who participated in the Fathers Walk to further encourage participation in their children's education. An Education Forum is scheduled for December 9<sup>th</sup> at 6pm. Akron Public Schools Superintendent David James will meet and dialogue with participants. Akron Public School staff will discuss standardized testing and what fathers and significant males can do to encourage and support their children before and during the testing. Tutoring providers will have an opportunity to display their services during the forum. The Forum will be held at the Community Learning Center, 400 W. Market in Akron. For more information and to RSVP call 330.873.8793.

## Coshocton County Fatherhood Initiative Launches New School Year with Million Father March *by Terry Miller, OPNFF Board Member*

The Coshocton County Fatherhood Initiative participated in the nationwide Million Father March on the first day of school.

Coshocton County has three school districts and all three superintendents were responsive to the idea of encouraging fathers and father figures to take their children to school. The superintendents believe that this show of support for their children sends a message of the importance of school and also sets expectations for their children's attendance and for

doing their best academically.

Publicity for the event occurred through news releases in the local paper and local radio, a couple members attended the local radio talk show, flyers were distributed around town, and the different schools that had announcement boards promoted the event in that manner. There was no method of registration, so the participation level is by anecdote only. A conservative estimate is that there were at least 100 fathers participating that normally do not take their children to school.

The Coshocton Tribune published a story highlighting several fathers and children. Grant Fauver, principal of Central Elementary, was happy to see all the fathers taking part in bringing their children to school. "Anything we can do to involve the community and parents is a bonus", he said.

Members of the Fatherhood Initiative were enthused and encouraged by the event and believe it is a worthwhile project to do in the future.

**OPNFF provides high quality professional training and technical assistance for agencies, communities and regions on a wide variety of topics. Visit our website, [www.opnff.net](http://www.opnff.net) and click on "Technical Assistance and Training" to view our menu. Then contact us at [info@opnff.net](mailto:info@opnff.net) and we will help you begin planning!**



**OPNFF**

Ohio Practitioners' Network  
for Fathers and Families

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**JOIN US! And be part of a growing network of nearly 650 fatherhood advocates & practitioners.**

**Membership in OPNFF is FREE: Join Online Today  
www.opnff.net**

## ***A Time and Season for Change***

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just being a part of catalyzing change. The outcomes of those activities are numerous and meaningful. Here are just a few:

- The OPNFF Fatherhood Public Policy Agenda was developed in time to provide thought and direction to the fatherhood piece of Governor Strickland's Strengthening Families Initiative.
- An annual state-wide survey of father-serving programs was initiated.
- Provided \$17,000 for regional fatherhood trainings and Father's Day activities.
- Provided leadership to the Planning Committee for the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) Region V Fatherhood Public Policy Forum. The quality and outcomes of that event set the standard for Fatherhood Policy Forums in the other states that make up ACF Region V.
- Created and launched the Advance Fatherhood Ohio! Summits across Ohio.
- Increased membership in OPNFF by 79% from December 2005 to December 2008.

Looking ahead, there is a need to ride this momentum created through out Ohio for systemic change and making sure adequate resources are aimed at father- serving programs around the state. We must do both smartly, keeping always in mind the voice, the will and the needs of the people. Public systems command hundreds of millions of taxpayer dollars. They also reach and serve millions of Ohioans. We must demand

*Continued in the left column below...*

that those systems not miss opportunities to strengthen fathers and fatherhood as a part of their mission to serve or heal our families in need. There is now a functioning Ohio Commission of Fatherhood and a line item in the state budget to fund the Commission and fatherhood services around the state. Let's make sure that those dollars are wisely distributed for impact and outcomes, strengthening good work already being done while seeding good work that's to come. To accomplish both of these priorities, legislators, state government leaders and policy makers must continue to hear from you. They need constant education, information and encouragement from you to do what is smart and necessary for fathers and families. You can get started or stay connected simply by

going to the OPNFF web site, [www.opnff.net](http://www.opnff.net).

What happens when a flock of geese fly a great distance? When the lead bird tires, another rushes to take its place, while the former lead falls back to benefit from the draft created by those flying in front. I am honored to fall back as leader of OPNFF and ride in the draft of one James McDonald, our incoming President.

James is the Director of Six County Inc.'s Muskingum Counseling Center in Zanesville, Ohio. Personally, I admire James for who he is and how he lives his life. Professionally, I can think of no better person to facilitate the continued growth and effectiveness of OPNFF. James is a founding Board member who always brings conviction, clarity and thoughtfulness to our en-

deavors. I'm excited to be a part of what emerges under his leadership!

I thank all of the Board members of OPNFF, those with us now and those who have served in the past, for your service and for allowing me to lead. I thank all of you who chose to join and support the mission of OPNFF. Clearly without you we have no mandate.

That dark and stormy night in Philadelphia has led to bright and hopeful days here in Ohio for fathers and the sacred institution of fatherhood. We can see more clearly what gets in the way for men trying to be really good Dads. We have hope that our communities can one day be transformed into places that zestfully supports and celebrates fathers.

***The mission of the Ohio Practitioners' Network for Fathers and Families is to enhance the outcomes of children, families and communities by providing information, training and encouragement to father and family-serving practitioners.***

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