

# News

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## **Walkers step out in Omaha to raise money for energy assistance programs**

By Richard Egan, Omaha World-Herald

There were no stragglers on the Heartland Walk for Warmth on Friday evening.

As the temperature dipped below 30 degrees, more than 700 people took part in the one-mile walk around Heartland of America Park to increase awareness of energy assistance programs and to raise money for the cause.

Organizers were almost finished packing up less than an hour after the 6 p.m. start.

“We knew we had to be quick,” said Judi Martin, a community support organizer for the Omaha Public Power District and one of the event coordinators. “We made sure to keep the opening remarks short.”

Martin estimated that registration fees and pledges Friday night raised approximately \$10,000. Previous registrations, corporate sponsorships and in-kind donations pushed the total to more than \$125,000, she said.

“We plan to take this event statewide next year,” she said.

Local energy assistance programs operated by the Metropolitan Utilities District, Aquila and OPPD help about 3,500 people a year. Their assistance programs are administered by the Heartland Chapter of the American Red Cross, the Salvation Army and the United Way’s 211 call center.

The good cause and a respite from single-digit temperatures left participants smiling.

“It was a lot warmer than I expected it to be,” said Denise Bierma of Omaha, who walked with her husband, Fred.

There were heated tents, cookies, water and gift bags to bolster the hardy attendees.

“I can’t feel my feet,” said Susan Eustice of the Salvation Army, “but it could have been a lot worse.”

Donations may be sent to Heartland Walk for Warmth c/o Pinnacle Bank, 1016 Douglas St., Omaha, NE 68102.

For more information, call 221-2298.