

# An Ounce of Prevention ... Taking Steps Toward Preventing Cancer

Personal tragedy and a need to make a difference were the impetus for Road of Life. Road of Life chairman-emeritus and founder Rob Emrich lost his younger sister Keren to cancer when he himself was very young. Those feelings of despair and helplessness were brought back to him in college, when cancer again struck his family, taking the life of his cousin, Seth, a young rabbi. Rob felt compelled to do something, to strike back at this disease in a tangible, meaningful way. It was out of this desire that Road of Life was born.

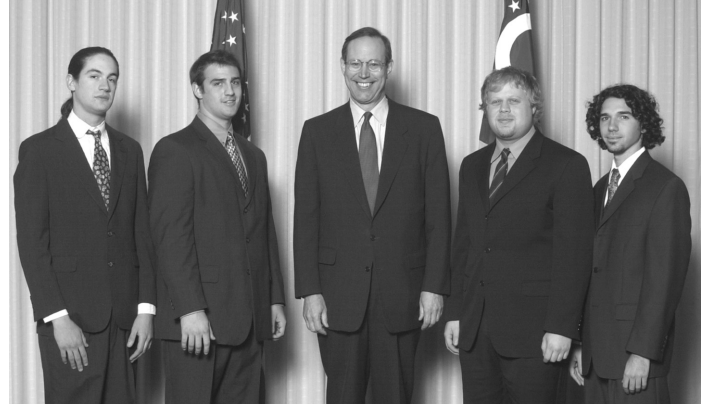
In 2002, the Keren Emrich Foundation, named in memory of Rob's sister, was incorporated and Road of Life was chosen as the public business name of the organization. Road of Life was originally envisioned as a fundraising entity for innovative cancer research. Shortly thereafter, it was realized that a great need could be met and a bigger difference could be made, by working on prevention, specifically cancer prevention for children.

The mission of Road of Life is to educate children about the smoking, fitness and nutrition decisions they can make to grow up healthy and greatly reduce their risks of developing cancer later in life. Road of Life accomplishes this goal by designing and implementing innovative curricula aimed at third and fourth graders. These curricula use existing Ohio academic content standards, but incorporate them in an engaging health framework. So, as students learn about proper nutrition and the dangers of smoking, required math and social studies material are simultaneously reinforced.

Walking is one of the cornerstones of this program.

In 2003 and 2004, Road of Life produced long-distance walks across the state of Ohio, from Cincinnati north to Cleveland. The first event, called the Bicentennial Walk, was a one-man trek completed by Emrich. The walk, presented in association with the Ohio Bicentennial Commission, raised public awareness about Road of Life and its mission. Every mile of the journey was dedicated in honor or memory of someone who suffered from cancer. These names were then commemorated in a virtual monument hosted on Road of Life's website, and the list was later commemorated by the Ohio Senate and House of Representatives. The Bicentennial Walk received a great deal of attention from the media and raised thousands of dollars for cancer prevention.

Road of Life was extremely satisfied with the results of The Bicentennial Walk, but wanted to create an event that would encourage others to get active and provide an outlet for that activity. With that goal in mind, in May 2004 the organization presented a second walk – Road of Life: Ohio 2004 – a relay which again stretched from Cincinnati to Cleveland. The relay format allowed members of the public to participate at any point along the route, as well as at special events in Columbus



**Above:** The Road of Life staff with Ohio Governor Bob Taft.  
**Below:** Columbus elementary school students prepare for Kids' Walk during Road of Life: Ohio 2004.



and Cleveland. The event also attracted the participation of several dignitaries, including the Mayor of Cincinnati, Charles Luken, and Ohio State Senator Ray Miller. Road of Life: Ohio 2004 was an opportunity to raise public awareness about cancer prevention, specifically using physical fitness and nutrition as an important and undervalued means of prevention. It also served as the backbone of Road of Life's prevention program for fourth graders.

Road of Life's programming works to change the fitness and nutrition habits of children by creating a program that encourages activity and healthier dietary decisions. In 2004, the program included:

1. A 10-unit curriculum based on the Bicentennial Walk and Ohio's fourth grade academic content standards,
2. A three-lesson prevention sequence concentrating on nutrition and exercise, administered by college mentors, and
3. Participation in a 2.5-mile walk along the route of Road of Life: Ohio 2004.

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