

# A united front

The EPDA is holding the first ever European Unity Walk in Amsterdam in September. **EPDA Plus** reveals how, with your support, it can develop into a legacy for people with Parkinson's

**T**he EPDA has confirmed that its inaugural European Unity Walk will take place on 28 September in the heart of the city of Amsterdam in the Netherlands. The event will kick-off the EPDA's one-day conference – which will celebrate its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary – and it is fair to say that the umbrella patient organisation's latest awareness-raising project is gathering exciting momentum.

“The 2012 European Unity Walk is going to be a wonderful event for so many reasons,” says EPDA president Knut-Johan Onarheim. “Not only will it fall in our 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary year, which is a source of immense pride to all involved with the EPDA, but more importantly the walk is going to be our way of supporting the European Commission's European Innovation Partnership on Active and Healthy Ageing, which will inspire a host of similarly proactive activities to take place throughout the year. We really believe our Unity Walk could be the start of something special with regards to raising awareness of Parkinson's across the continent.”

It is intended that the 2012 Unity Walk will be the first of many, following in the footsteps of the US Unity Walk, which will see its 18<sup>th</sup> annual walk in April. Carol Walton, the CEO of the Parkinson Alliance (which organises the US Unity Walk), and her team are working closely with the EPDA to share their wealth of experience so that “our communities can benefit the worldwide Parkinson's community”.



“It's great to be involved with the EPDA at this early stage,” she says. “Since 1994, the US Unity Walk has exploded with interest. We have raised more than \$15m for research into finding a cure for Parkinson's, and there's no reason why the European version cannot raise the equivalent levels of awareness. We are delighted to be so closely involved and urge all the relevant stakeholders to promote the occasion as much as they can straight away. There is no time to lose.”

Indeed, the European Unity Walk's pre-event planning and publicity is vital to the event's short- and long-term success, says Onarheim. “We are taking this walk very seriously,” he explains. “The EPDA has extremely high standards and, as such, this is going to be a supremely organised event.

“We've hired an experienced event organiser [Touch Associates] and a communications agency [Speak Media] to develop the walk's branding and awareness campaign.”

In addition, a micro-website is currently being developed to support the event's pre- and post-publicity. The site will provide important news and information as well as (translated) press releases, e-flyers and posters that will be available for interested parties to download and distribute in their own regions. These resources, which will be available from February, will all feature the specially designed European Unity Walk branding. Social media will also play a big part in generating interest, with Facebook and Twitter campaigns due to go live early in the new year.

Regardless of the planning of the event,



## UNITY WALK DETAILS SO FAR

Firm details of the first European Unity Walk are still being finalised, but here is what we can reveal...

- The confirmed date is Friday 28 September 2012.
- The walk goes through the heart of the city of Amsterdam in the Netherlands.
- The length of the walk is likely to be between one and two miles.
- EPDA president Knut-Johan Onarheim has confirmed the event is to be “a very pleasurable day” before the one-day conference begins on the Saturday. “We know people with Parkinson’s get very tired so we want them to enjoy the morning and early afternoon, and then have some free time before embarking on the other weekend EPDA activities,” he says.
- To help the walkers learn from and enjoy the Unity Walk, there will be a range of musical performances, exercise activities and therapeutic sessions following the walk.
- There will also be information booths at the event for those people interested in Parkinson’s and other related topics.
- It is hoped that James Parkinson’s tulip bulbs will be given away to walkers to plant at home as a reminder of the Unity Walk and of Parkinson’s in general.
- Screenings of the EPDA’s 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary film will be shown at the event for walkers to understand more about the EPDA’s mission, which involves raising the profile of Parkinson’s and enabling people living with the disease to be treated effectively and equally throughout Europe.
- The event will cover all logistical issues, including insurance, security, food and accessibility to the walk’s facilities.

*“If the EPDA’s Unity Walk is to be a success the support of its key stakeholders – its 45 member organisations, European policymakers, the treatment industry, healthcare professionals and the media – is needed before the event”*

however, the Unity Walk can only ever be the sum of its parts. In other words, if it doesn’t win the support of its key stakeholders – European Parkinson’s organisations, European policymakers, the treatment industry, healthcare professionals and the media – before the event, then it will never be able to raise the awareness it craves, says Onarheim.

“We at the EPDA call on all our collaborators – especially our 45 members – to get behind the walk and start promoting it among themselves and to their national members and partners straight away, starting today. If, in 20 years’ time, it has grown to be just half the size of the US Unity Walk in terms of awareness then it would still be a huge success – but that can only happen if people get behind the idea.”

“The next few years are going to be incredibly important for brain disorders,” says Dr Mary Baker, president of the European Brain Council. “This year is the Year of Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations and we are making huge strides towards making 2014 the European Year of the Brain. We need to raise public awareness of all brain disorders and about the best ways to nurture, protect and preserve our most vital asset – our brains. The EPDA’s Unity Walk will help reach out to the public and demonstrate that together we can take very positive steps to help ourselves and others.” ■

For more information about supporting the inaugural European Unity Walk, please contact the EPDA at [info@epda.eu.com](mailto:info@epda.eu.com).