

## **Delaware March of Dimes Dancing For Babies**

**By Andréa Miller**

In 12 years as a photographer, Tim Dishong has captured the joy of weddings, the determination in the eyes of a powerful personality and the intimacy between mother and child through his lens. But no photo shoot has moved him like the time he focused his lens on the neonatal intensive care unit at Christiana Hospital for the March of Dimes.

There, Dishong saw blinking monitors, tubes and bright lights. He saw doctors, nurses and hospital staff working around the clock. He saw parents scrubbed, gowned and leaning over sterile isolettes. He saw newborn triplets – born early and weighing a scant pound each.

He also saw that these and many other fragile babies would have a chance to live and grow, thanks to advances in medical research, technology and education supported by the March of Dimes.

He was already a supporter of the nonprofit devoted to improving the health of pregnant women and their babies, but he wanted to do something to draw in new supporters. And last year, he saw an opportunity to capitalize on the reality show competition craze, so he paired off with ballroom dance instructors Bill Mitchell and Alex Hasiuk of “Ballroom by Bill” in the Shoppes of New Castle. They sashayed the relationship into a fund raiser modeled after the popular television show, “Dancing with the Stars.”

The inaugural Delaware March of Dimes Dancing For Babies event drew 150 of Dishong’s friends, co-workers and March of Dimes supporters and raised \$3,000 for the Delaware March of Dimes.

The experiment was such a success that Dishong decided to aim higher this year, and it didn’t take much fancy footwork to enlist the talent of nearly a dozen high profile Delawareans to help him double – or triple the 2010 goal.

“At first, I wanted to see if I could do it,” Dishong says. “Now, I want to do it with class.”

The dancers will put their skills on display Monday April 11 at the Christiana Hilton at 7 PM. This wallet-friendly \$10 general admission evening features a dance party with “Club Phred”, special performance by “The Kiska A Cappella Quartet” and a friendly competition between County Councilman Bob Weiner (who also sings in the quartet), longtime broadcast media personality Carl Kanefsky, business coach Darnyelle Jervy, New Castle County Board of Realtors president Gina Crowder, business leaders like Sam Collins, Michelle Goad, Craig Hodges, Pamela Mayse, Johnna Darby and more.

None of the performers have professional dance experience, but many do have a personal connection with birth defects and/or premature birth – one couple’s grandson was born with super ventricular tachycardia, another dancer can’t have children, and another was herself born prematurely.

They are all passionate about the cause.

It's not hard to see why once the facts are known: in the United States, 1 in every 8 babies is born prematurely in the United States, and in Delaware the rate is even higher with 1 in every 7 babies being born too soon and too small. Over the course of a year half a million babies are born too soon.

Dancers Carl and Cathy Kanefsky know firsthand how important funding research for pregnant women and their babies is. Two of their three boys – 19-year-old twins Sam and Adam – were born 16 weeks early and weighed less than two pounds. The boys lived in the hospital for four months enduring spinal taps, chest tubes, surgeries, collapsed lungs and infections before finally coming home. Both have developmental delays as a result of their prematurity and at age five, both were diagnosed with autism.

The Middletown couple says knew they could never repay the doctors, nurses and volunteers who contributed directly and indirectly to their sons' health and well being, so they took the March of Dimes mission into their hearts and became devoted to advancing it.

Carl has been a board member on the Delaware March of Dimes for more than two decades, and Cathy worked for the nonprofit for 14 years, first as the Delaware Chapter Director, then in a national position.

In their roles, the couple has attended countless meetings, events and fund raisers. They've made calls, written letters and spoken in public and in board rooms. But this is the first time they will put on dancing shoes to advance the cause.

Dance instructors and studio co-owners Bill Mitchell and Alexandra [aka "Alex"] Hasiuk are keeping the performers' song selections, outfits and specific dance routines hidden in the wings until April 11, but Mitchell and Hasiuk are both proud to say that the dancers are ready to put on a show featuring everything from tango to swing, rumba to the fox trot, mambo salsa to the hustle and cha-cha. They even hinted at a tango with a comedic twist.

"While life at home is always a roller coaster, one thing is clear," says Carl Kanefsky, "we never would have had the opportunity to get on the ride had it not been for the March of Dimes research that led to medical advances that saved our sons' lives. That's why we're happy to be involved: it's an easy step to take. The dance steps, now, I don't know if they'll be as easy."

Delaware March of Dimes Dancing For Babies will be held at the Christiana Hilton, doors open at 6pm and dancing starts at 7 pm. General admission costs \$10. Attendees will be able to purchase tickets to vote for their favorite dance couples. Food by Ole' Tapas Lounge & Restaurant. Musical appearance by Kiska A Cappella Quartet and dance party with Club Phred. The evening will be emceed by WDEL's Rick Jensen and Fred Dawson. Register online at [www.marchofdimes/Delaware.com](http://www.marchofdimes/Delaware.com) .