

600km charity walk for specialised lung centre at children's hospital

By Alexia Saoulli

A 40-YEAR-old London Cypriot is already eight days into his 600-kilometre charity walk across the Troodos mountain range. John Michael Mouskos is today walking from Spilia to Kakopetria, where he will overnight before he sets off for his birth-place village of Lemithou tomorrow. His solitary hike is part of a charity campaign to raise awareness for the establishment of a state-of-the-art Lung Centre for children at Nicosia's Makarios Hospital. The Breathing Life Trust was formed in London last month by Mouskos to provide personal and financial support to help children with respiratory and breathing difficulties.

As part of its first campaign, it has undertaken to raise money for the local Lung Centre. The funding for such a project is estimated at £200,000, of which £56,000 has already been raised. The remaining amount will be raised by events both in London and in Cyprus.

The 600km walk, which started on May 1, is the focal point to the fund raising campaign. Mouskos began his walk in Limassol and it will take him through many remote mountain villages along the way. So far, he has overnights in Tochni, Pano Lefkara, Lythrodondas, Machairas Monastery, Askas, Agros and Spilia. He is expected to arrive in Lemithou at 2pm tomorrow, where an event, under the title 'The Asthmatic Child and Sports', will be held in the village square. The event is open to the public and the Makarios Hospital's paediatric pulmonologist Dr Panayiotis Yiallourous will talk about the beneficial effects of exercise and sports in relation to asthma, as well as the physical well being of asthmatic children and how this can be achieved with new phar-

maceutical measures.

"As part of its first campaign, the Trust aims to establish The Breathing Life Lung Centre for Children in Cyprus, as there is currently no medical centre for treating lung diseases in children on the island," Mouskos told the *Cyprus Mail*. After staying in Lemithou for three days, Mouskos will continue on to Milikouri on Wednesday. He is expected to complete his walk at 5pm on May 23 at Limassol Marina.

According to Dr Yiallourous, respiratory diseases are responsible for the largest part of sickness and mortality in childhood, equalling the severity of cardiovascular diseases in adults.

ASTHMA

In fact, he said asthma was the most frequent chronic disease in Cypriot children, to the extent that it appeared to be taking on epidemic proportions. Its frequency was recently found to affect eight to 11 per cent of the total number of school age children in the Nicosia district and six per cent in Limassol. In addition, it appears that one out of every five pre-school age children report at least one or more episodes of bronchospasm and wheezing before the age of six, said Yiallourous. Mouskos and Yiallourous believe the establishment of a lung centre at Makarios hospital will make a great difference to the quality of children's lives throughout the island as it would operate as a fully equipped state-of-the-art respiratory research and treatment centre. The Breathing Life Trust also intends to provide lung function equipment to all district hospitals on the island and fund several research projects into child respiratory illness.