

DC Area Companies Recognized for Employee Wellness Programs

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Washington, DC (**CapitalWirePR**) October 28, 2008— Fifteen area businesses have been recognized by the American Heart Association's Start! Fit-Friendly Companies Program for promoting physical activity and health in the workplace.

"All companies should be applauded when they help their employees improve their health," said Jacques Leger, managing consultant of Watson Wyatt's Washington, DC, office. "At Watson Wyatt, we're delighted by the strong employee participation in our wellness activities and health management programs. It's a win-win for both the company and our associates." Watson Wyatt, a leading consulting firm on human capital and employee benefit issues, was awarded Platinum Level Fit Friendly status and a Worksite Innovation award due to the extensive nature of their wellness and health management programs. These programs include financial incentives for participating in wellness activities, free preventive care, annual health risk assessment and free biometric screenings, behavior modification programs, online seminars, and more.

Adult Americans spend the majority of their waking hours at work, many in sedentary careers — amplifying the risk for medical problems such as obesity, high blood pressure and diabetes. Obesity alone costs American businesses \$12.7 billion in medical expenses and \$225.8 billion in health-related productivity losses per year.

"Time constraints and job responsibilities are employees' biggest obstacles to exercising. That's why the Start! Fit-Friendly Companies program encourages employers to allow employees to walk while at work," said Aetna's Tom Grote, Senior Vice President, of Sales and Service, D.C., Maryland and Virginia. "Walking has the lowest dropout rate of any physical activity. Aetna was honored with Fit Friendly Company status in 2008 and has successful on site wellness programs and walking clubs.

"Furthermore, studies suggest that implementing a worksite physical activity program and promoting a culture of physical activity will help companies increase productivity, reduce absenteeism, lower turnover and reduce hard costs." Research shows that employers can save \$16 for every \$1 they spend on health and wellness.

Start! Fit-Friendly Companies Program participants implement various options to encourage physical activity, nutrition and culture enhancements such as on-site walking routes, healthy food options in cafeterias and vending machines, annual employee health risk assessments and online tracking tools.

Companies honored with Gold Level Fit Friendly status include:

- Boland, Gaithersburg, MD
- DC Department of Health
- Deloitte LLP, Washington, DC, McLean, VA, Reston, VA
- Frederick County Public Schools, Maryland
- Honest Tea, Bethesda, MD
- Howrey LLP, Washington, DC
- Montgomery General Hospital, Maryland
- National Trust for Historic Preservation, Washington, DC
- PhRMA, Washington, DC
- Tyson's Corner Mall, Mclean, VA
- United Healthcare of the MidAtlantic, Rockville, MD
- U.S. Chamber of Commerce, Washington, DC
- WUSA 9 News, Washington, DC
- Wyle Information Systems, McLean, VA

All fifteen companies will be presented with an award during the opening ceremonies of the Start! Greater Washington Region Heart Walk on November 1. The November 1 event to be held on the National Mall is expected to draw over 10,000 walkers to raise awareness of the No. 1 killer of people in the US today, cardiovascular disease and to raise funds for lifesaving research. The Start! Greater Washington Region Heart Walk is sponsored by SunTrust, also recognized as a Fit Friendly Company.

Companies interested in joining the Start! Fit-Friendly Companies Program should contact the Greater Washington Region American Heart Association office or visit www.StartGreaterWashington.org <<http://www.americanheart.org/start>> to download an application. Applications are due in January for review by a volunteer expert panel. The panel consists of seven physicians, all of whom are American Heart Association volunteers.

Start!, named 2008 Nonprofit Campaign of the Year by PR Week, is sponsored nationally by SUBWAY® restaurants, Healthy Choice® and AstraZeneca, and locally supported by Aetna. For more information about the Start! Fit-Friendly Companies Program, visit StartGreaterWashington.org.

About the American Heart Association

Founded in 1924, the American Heart Association today is the nation's oldest and largest voluntary health organization dedicated to building healthier lives, free of heart disease and stroke. These diseases, America's No. 1 and No. 3 killers, and all other cardiovascular diseases claim nearly 870,000 lives a year. In fiscal year 2006–07 the association invested more than \$554 million in research, professional and public education, advocacy and community service programs to help all Americans live longer, healthier lives. To learn more, call 1-800-AHA-USA1 or visit americanheart.org.

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WHERE :

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