

Thousands Stride Around the National Mall to Fight Heart Disease

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Washington, DC (CapitalWirePR) November 3, 2008 — Almost 10,000 Washington, DC area residents took steps to improve their heart health November 1 when they participated in the American Heart Association's Greater Washington Start! Heart Walk at the National Mall.

The annual event, raised \$1,250,000 to fight heart disease and stroke, the No. 1 and No. 3 killers of people in the US today.

The non-competitive, three-mile walk included teams of employees from local companies, along with friends and family members of all ages. Companies such as Start! sponsor Aetna and Heart Walk event sponsor SunTrust Bank fielded large walking teams to raise money. Heart attack and stroke survivors, who donned red hats, walked as well but also served as a reminder of human strength and perseverance.

"My family and I have a lot of personal experience with heart disease, as many people in the United States do," said Scott Wilfong Chairman President and CEO of SunTrust Bank, Greater Washington/Maryland. "This event not only raises funds for life saving research but also highlights the importance of even moderate physical activity in all of our daily lives.

Each day, nearly 2,400 Americans die from a cardiovascular disease. That's an average of one death every 37 seconds. A leading risk factor for heart attack and stroke is lack of physical activity. Research has shown that the benefits of walking and moderate physical activity for at least 30 minutes on most days of the week or every day can help reduce the risk of coronary heart disease, improve blood pressure and blood sugar levels, reduce the risk of breast and colon cancer and reduce the risk of non insulin dependent (type 2) diabetes.

Before participants stepped off around for their walk, 15 year old stroke survivor, Erik Dornbush shared his life-changing experience with a hushed audience of thousands. Erik suffered from an arterial venous malformation that caused bleeding to his brain at the age of 12. Because of the quick action of his family, friends and various hospitals, he made a miraculous recovery.

Also honored onstage were fifteen area businesses recognized by the American Heart Association's Start! Fit-Friendly Companies Program for promoting physical activity and health in the workplace as well as twelve Lifestyle Change recipients – people who have made healthy changes to their lifestyle with measurable results. Also, the top fundraising company, university and health care system were honored.

The National Mall was divided into three villages – Create Hope, Inspire Change and Celebrate Success. Much like their names, the villages encapsulated what the Start! Heart Walk is meant to do – raise awareness of heart disease and stroke, encourage a healthy lifestyle and commemorate heart health. Participants were treated to cooking and fitness demos, chair massages, CPR demos, music and much more. Adults took the pledge to Start! walking and kids learned about nutrition and healthy activities in the Kids Corner.

The goal of the Start! Greater Washington Region Heart Walk was to raise \$2 million dollars to fund life saving research. To honor that goal, the American Heart Association is hosting a wireless donation program to help. People still wishing to donate can text WALKDC to 90999 to donate \$5 now to the American Heart Association through November**.

The 2009 Greater Washington Region Start! Heart Walk is scheduled for November 14 once again on the National Mall. Paul Cofoni, President and Chief Executive Officer, CACI International Inc has been named as next year's event chair.

“It is an honor to lead such a great and vital event,” commented Mr. Cofoni. “We know that heart disease and stroke can be prevented through diet and exercise and that many people in this country aren’t getting enough. I not only want to help raise awareness about this critical issue but I also want to lead by example to our employees – a healthy lifestyle can begin with adding a little walking to your day, so let’s Start!”

Start! Heart Walk is nationally sponsored by Subway Restaurants®, Healthy Choice® and Astra Zeneca. Start! is locally supported by Aetna and the Start! Greater Washington Heart Walk is supported by SunTrust Bank, Greater Washington/Maryland.

Last year, more than 1 million walkers raised more than \$106 million in 425 Start! Heart Walks across the country.

For information on participating in the Start! Heart Walk, call the American Heart Association at 703-248-1715 or 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.

**A one-time charge of \$5 will be added to your mobile phone bill. Standard messaging rates and additional fees may apply. All charges are billed by and payable to your mobile service provider. \$4.50 of your donation benefits American Heart Association. Service is available on most carriers. You can unsubscribe at any time by texting 'STOP' to 90999.

Photos courtesy: Tony Gioconda

Photo 1 “Start! Heart Walk Participants” - Crowd shot, 2008 Greater Washington Start! Heart Walk participants warm up on the National Mall

Photo 2: “Walkers_Castle” – Walkers stroll around the National Mall to fight heart disease

Photo 3: “Erik_Speech” - Erik Dornbush, who had a stroke at 12, shares his story with the crowd of thousands

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WHEN : 2008-11-03 16:34:51

WHERE :

CONTACT:

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