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| Angela M. Presutti
Communications Director
Akron, Canton, Youngstown Metros
(330) 664-1930
angela.presutti@heart.org

Prepared by:
Mara Casey, GRA Akron Intern

The American Heart Association Recognizes Area Residents Enhancing Quality of Life and Health at the 2008 Start! Heart Walk



This year the American Heart Association recognized eight individuals who have made major lifestyle changes to enhance their quality of life and health at the Start! Heart Walk held on Saturday, September 20 at The University of Akron Stile Field House. Over 4,000 Summit and Portage county area residents participated in the festivities and the two mile walk that morning.

The AHA is pleased to announce this year's 2008 Lifestyle Change Award winner and nominees: Juanita Wilson; Renee L. Markovich, MD; Janet Thompson; John N. Childs; Kate Fischer; Becky Fix, RN; and Matt and Tricia Reed, all of the Greater Akron area.

The winner, Juanita Wilson, nominated herself for the Lifestyle Change Award after losing 70 lbs. and shrinking from a size 20 to a size 4. According to Juanita, she accomplished this by eating healthy and walking to work every day. She said, "I took it upon myself to add extra years on my

life and to take charge of my health."

Juanita works at the Akron Beacon Journal, and she walks to work from Garfield High School. Juanita said, "One day I was sitting on the couch like a potato...and it hit me. I needed to do something with myself and I started walking."

The Lifestyle Change Award was sponsored by Northeast Ohio Cardiovascular Specialists (NEOCS). Nancy Strausser, Director of Marketing for NEOCS said, "We congratulate everyone for making such important lifestyle changes that can have a significant impact on their lives." Every nominee is a winner.

Nominee Renee Markovich works at the Akron General Center for Family Medicine, and as a physician she always encourages her patients to lose weight and to reduce their risk factors. She didn't always take her own advice. With a strong family history of diabetes and heart disease, Dr. Markovich decided to get on a regular exercise regimen and to watch her diet. She lost 90 lbs. in 11 months and she improved her cholesterol, blood sugar and blood pressure levels.

Her colleague, Elliot Davidson, MD said, “Dr. Renee Markovich is an inspiration to all of us doctors, staff and patients. She is living proof that lifestyle change works, can be fun, and can be sustained. She is very deserving of this award.”

Janet Thompson decided to make lifestyle changes after both of her parents had heart related incidents. Attendance at an International Conference at the Institute for Health in Bethesda, MD sparked Janet to start her Get Healthy Program. The daily program consists of exercise, three meals and one snack, meditation/reflection and drinking green tea or filtered water. Janet has lost 50 lbs. since January and she has also improved her blood pressure. She works at the University of Akron, Summit College.

Her husband Gerald said, “We have been married about 25 years and hopefully with our Get Healthy Program we will have another 25 years together with our daughter.”

Similar to Janet, nominee John N. Childs also decided to change his lifestyle after his family members had heart problems. John was motivated after both of his brothers had open heart surgery. He now exercises five times a week and he cut red meat and processed wheat from his diet.

His co-worker Pat Lanser, from Brennan, Manna & Diamond LLC, said, “John is in his early sixties and he has more energy now than when he was in his thirties.”

In her own fashion, Kate Fischer created her healthy lifestyle by eliminating carbohydrates from her diet. Her co-worker from NEOCS, Bonnie Newell, said, “She loves carbs but has stopped eating potatoes and noodles. She turns down junk food when offered and while people around her are eating it. Kate walks at lunch time and does other exercises daily.”

Also working at NEOCS, Becky Fix is a nurse who decided to make a lifestyle change to stop her chronic back pain. She walks everyday and she eats a heart healthy diet. Becky has lost 40 lbs. Her friend Susan Witsaman called her, “a fantastic example of what you can do if you stick to it.”

Matt and Tricia Reed were nominated as a couple. Co-worker Leslie Taylor called them “role models.” The Reeds have made positive lifestyle changes by incorporating exercise and a healthy diet into their busy schedules. They walk daily and they regularly participate on walking teams. The Reeds also take advantage of wellness screenings at the Area Agency on Aging, where they both work. Tricia has lost 40 lbs. since March and both of the Reeds continue to motivate their peers.

“Their hard work and dedication has paid off and it shows in their appearance, attitude and spirit. They have proven that you can change your life style but it starts with believing yourself,” Taylor said.

The American Heart Association is still accepting donations. For more information about the Start! Heart Walk or to find out how you can donate call the American Heart Association at 330-664-1930.

About the American Heart Association

Since 1924, the American Heart Association has helped protect people of all ages and ethnicities from the ravages of heart disease and stroke. These diseases, the nation’s No. 1 and No. 3 killers, claim more than 910,000 American lives a year. The association invested more than \$543 million in fiscal year 2005-06 for research, professional and public education, and advocacy so people across America can live stronger, longer lives.

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