

EMBARGOED until 4pm ET, Wednesday, Sept. 30



CONTACT:

Don Weisman
808-457-4954
don.weisman@heart.org

American Heart Association names Start! Fit-Friendly Companies in Hawaii
Worksite wellness programs help lower healthcare costs, improve employees' health

HONOLULU, HI SEPT. 30, 2009 — The American Heart Association (AHA) today recognized two Hawaii companies as Start! Fit-Friendly Companies for promoting physical activity and health in the workplace.

The association also released a policy statement in *Circulation: Journal of the American Heart Association* that shows worksite wellness programs are proven to prevent the major modifiable risk factors for cardiovascular disease (see separate news release). These include smoking, overweight, obesity, high blood pressure, high cholesterol and diabetes.

Nationally, the association recognized more than 1,200 companies in 2009 — an all-time high. More than 2 million employees participated in the programs.

Start! Fit-Friendly companies reach Gold level status by implementing various activities and programs to encourage physical activity, nutrition and culture enhancements such as on-site walking routes, healthy food choices in cafeterias and vending machines, annual employee health risk assessments and online tracking tools. Those that achieve Platinum recognition — the highest tier — take the program a step further by measuring the outcomes of their wellness efforts.

Local companies designated as Start! Fit-Friendly include: Outrigger Enterprises Group and UHA, both of which achieved Gold level status. UHA established an award program for employees who incorporate healthy lifestyle changes to their workday. Employees accumulate points for healthy habits which can lead to monetary awards. Outrigger Enterprises Group established a walking program that ran from May and culminated in August through a celebration held during the company's participation in the AHA's Oahu Start! Heart Walk event. Each participating employee received a walking kit which included a company-branded water bottle, towel and pedometer. Employees were asked to track their steps at work each day and encouraged to achieve a minimum of 10,000 steps per day. Those who met that goal earned awards.

"Outrigger is committed to promoting health and wellness throughout our organization. In line with our Mission statement where we strive to provide 'our employees an opportunity to be their best,'" said Chuck Kelley, M.D., vice president of Outrigger Enterprises. "Outrigger has a number of ongoing initiatives and programs such as yearly health fairs, free cancer screenings, walking programs, and free flu shots just to name a few. Here at Outrigger we believe that happy and healthy employees are a company's most valuable asset."

"Our employees are our strength; helping them stay healthy is our obligation and good business," said Max Botticelli, M.D., chairman, president and CEO of [UHA](#).

In the *Circulation* policy paper, the association said that companies can save up to \$15 for every \$1 spent on health and wellness within 12 to 18 months of implementing a worksite wellness program. Each employee who works to lower their risk status saves their company an estimated \$53 per year; these savings remain each year that employee maintains the low-risk level.

“This paper demonstrates that companies that promote worksite wellness are achieving higher levels of productivity, reducing turnover, and some are even reducing healthcare costs,” said Ralph Shohet, M.D., president of the American Heart Association’s Oahu Metro Board of Directors

The American Heart Association also champions worksite wellness programs in its healthcare reform efforts, supporting an amendment that will be offered in a U.S. House Energy and Commerce bill to provide grants for qualified workplace wellness programs.

To view the complete list of the 2009 Start! Fit-Friendly Companies, or to apply for recognition, visit startwalkingnow.org. Applications are available to download and should be completed before the Jan. 31, 2010 deadline.

Start! is sponsored nationally by SUBWAY® restaurants, Healthy Choice® and AstraZeneca®.

###

About the American Heart Association

Founded in 1924, we’re the nation’s oldest and largest voluntary health organization dedicated to building healthier lives, free of heart disease and stroke. To help prevent, treat and defeat these diseases — America’s No. 1 and No. 3 killers — we fund cutting-edge research, conduct lifesaving public and professional educational programs, and advocate to protect public health. To learn more or join us in helping all Americans, call 1-800-AHA-USA1 or visit americanheart.org.