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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Orange County Health Department Staff Reaches Walking Challenge Goal
One Week Ahead of Schedule**

Orange County, NC (April 24, 2015) – Staff members from the [Orange County Health Department](#) reached their goal of walking the distance to Orange County, California one week ahead of schedule.

Beginning on March 1, 2015, staff members began tracking their steps as part of a walking challenge, the ultimate goal, walking the entire width of the United States, 2,505 miles. Initially they anticipated the challenge taking eight weeks, but today they reached their goal one week early and with 219 miles to spare.

The purpose of the walking challenge was to improve employee health, build new physical activity habits among staff, spread the message about the importance of physical activity, and to promote the work of public health by connecting with various health departments and their programs across the country. Staff participants tracked their daily steps using a variety of health monitoring tools such as Fitbits and pedometers.

“We have seen a significant increase in physical activity among our staff since we began the walking challenge” shared Dr. Colleen Bridger, Orange County Health Director. “Of course we had people that were walkers already, but I was especially excited to see dramatic jumps in activity levels in some of our staff who were more sedentary when we started,” she added.

The health department created an [interactive map](#) to document their journey and track their progress. The map included pins that linked to various public health departments and programs along the way. These health departments were tagged and shared via social media each week. Stops included:

- Hickory, NC – [Catawba County Health Department](#)
- Knoxville, TN – [Knox County Health Department](#)
- Paducah, KY – [Purchase District Health Department](#)
- Tulsa, OK – [Tulsa Health Department](#)
- Pueblo of Acoma, NM – [Acoma Health and Wellness Department](#)
- Avondale, AZ – [Maricopa County Public Health](#)
- Orange County, CA – [Orange County Health Care Agency](#)

“I really needed to start walking again and this gave me inspiration to do it” said Anna Kenion, Manager of the health department’s Care Coordination for Children program and walking challenge participant.

The health department will celebrate their achievement at a California themed party on Friday, May 8th where they will serve healthy southern California food and participate in beach themed activities. To keep the momentum going, a new walking challenge will be announced at the celebration.

An added benefit of the walking challenge was that it didn’t only motivate the Orange County Health Department staff, but other groups from across the country as well. The health department received calls from down the street to as far away as Denver, Colorado from groups who heard about the challenge and are hoping to replicate the health department’s efforts. Orange County, California’s health department said they may even take up the challenge and walk over to North Carolina.

Health Benefits of Walking

The American Heart Association lists the following as benefits of walking and/or moderate physical activity for at least 30 minutes per day:

- Reducing the risk of coronary heart disease
- Improving blood pressure and blood sugar levels
- Improving blood lipid profile
- Maintaining body weight and lowering the risk of obesity
- Enhancing mental well being
- Reducing the risk of osteoporosis
- Reducing the risk of breast and colon cancer
- Reducing the risk of non-insulin dependent (type 2) diabetes

Source: http://www.startwalkingnow.org/whystart_benefits_walking.jsp

Attached:

Link to walking challenge webpage – <http://www.orangecountync.gov/health/walkingthewalk.asp>

Walking Challenge Photos - Ann Zellmer walking her dog; Jim Northrup and Kathleen Goodhand on a walking trail; Meredith Stewart, Tiffany Mackey, and Dr. Colleen Bridger on a walking meeting; and Stacy Shelp getting steps in at the beach





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