

Spring 2017



# The Pulse

*of the Cor Vitae Society*

**COR  
VITAE**  
*Society*

**THE HEART OF LIFE**

Love Healing Community Initiative Discovery Seek Learning  
Community Encourage Encourage Strength Grow  
Support Knowledge Life Impact Research Technology Life  
Impact Advocate Educate Practice Knowledge  
Healing Compassion Impact

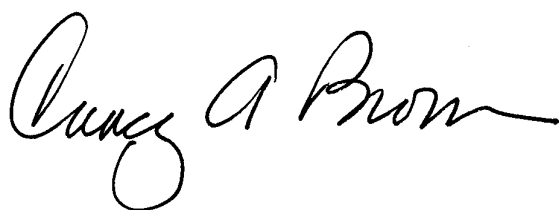
# LETTER FROM THE CEO

The generosity and dedication of supporters like you has allowed the American Heart Association/American Stroke Association to get off to a strong start in 2017, and build on the powerful momentum of 2016. The passion that you bring to our mission inspires us to work harder every day, and to continue striving to develop breakthrough solutions on behalf of all who face cardiovascular diseases and stroke.

In this spring issue, we're pleased to share key highlights from early 2017, including our Go Red Dress Collection Fashion Show in New York City, the International Stroke Conference in Houston and several additional events in communities across the country that play a fundamental role in driving our success!

Most important of all, as with all issues of *The Pulse*, you'll find profiles of several Cor Vitae Society members who are making an extraordinary difference on our behalf and in their communities. For us, it is a privilege to place the spotlight on the incredible leadership and vision that our Cor Vitae Society members so selflessly provide.

Thank you again for your commitment to the American Heart Association, and for caring so deeply about saving lives and improving health outcomes.



Nancy Brown  
Chief Executive Officer



## American Heart Association's® Go Red For Women® **Red Dress Collection™ 2017**

Presented by  macy's



*Celebrities and heart disease survivors turned the runway red when they showed off fiery fashions created by designers for the Go Red For Women Red Dress Collection. See page 4 for story.*

## Our Mission

*To build healthier lives, free of  
cardiovascular diseases and stroke.*

# SURVIVOR SPOTLIGHT

## Super Bowl champion secretly played with an enlarged heart

by American Heart Association News

Long before Jesse Sapolu played on four Super Bowl championship teams as an offensive lineman for the San Francisco 49ers, he was told he couldn't play sports. Born in Samoa, Jesse had contracted rheumatic fever as a child.

"It was so painful, my dad had to carry me to the bus stop," he said.

The condition went undiagnosed for years and left Jesse with a tear in his aortic valve. In fifth grade, he was told sports were off limits. He'd even have to sit on the sidelines during physical education classes.

By ninth grade, Jesse was 6-foot-2 and 240 pounds, and desperately wanted to play football. So he went to a local clinic, confident his condition wouldn't be detected, and got the paperwork needed to join the team. He convinced his parents that the doctor said it was fine for him to play.

He quickly gained acclaim for his skills in high school and for the University of Hawaii.

In 1983, the 49ers drafted Jesse. Though a physical exam uncovered his condition, the team cleared him to join his teammates at training camp.

Jesse had tests done every year as doctors watched for any changes to his condition, which had caused his heart to enlarge. While the condition could be repaired with an artificial or pig's heart valve, such surgeries would require taking blood thinners and would rule out a football career.

During preseason conditioning and other intense physical exertion, Jesse recalls getting short of breath and occasionally feeling tightness in his chest.

"I was a 21-year-old kid thinking, 'I'm too close to my dream, I'm not going to blow it now,'" he said.

"Death didn't scare me. All I could remember was how painful it was to sit next to the teacher in the fifth and sixth grade and not being able to participate [during P.E. classes]."



*Jesse Sapolu at San Francisco's Candlestick Park, former home of the 49ers, with (from left) his wife Lisa, son London, daughter Lila Sapolu-Toloumu, granddaughter Noeanna Jeda Aolani Toloumu, and son Roman.*

In 1996, Jesse's annual echocardiogram revealed that his condition was deteriorating and he'd need surgery to replace the faulty valve. A year later, he had the Ross procedure and immediately noticed a change.

"It was like I was finally breathing fresh air after breathing through smog," he said.

The Ross procedure meant Jesse wouldn't require blood thinners and could return to the football field. Five months after the surgery, he played his 15th and final season in the NFL.

Jesse went on to various coaching jobs and wrote a book, *I Gave My Heart to San Francisco*, in which he revealed his heart struggles. He now works with the 49ers and runs a lineman camp called Men in the Trenches.

In 2012, nearly 15 years after his first valve replacement, Jesse got a new valve. And in 2016, he rode the American Heart Association's float in the Tournament of Roses Parade.

"It is my hope that doing my part can make a difference," he said. ■



# GO RED FOR WOMEN

## Red dress puts women's heart disease in national spotlight

By American Heart Association News

Actresses, musicians, talent show hosts, reality stars and survivors of cardiovascular disease walked in red dresses — and one pantsuit — created by designers specifically for the Go Red For Women Red Dress Collection.

The show kicked off New York Fashion Week in February, hosted by actress Katie Holmes and featured a performance by singer Rachel Platten, whose hit “Fight Song” is the anthem of the AHA.

Wearing a wine-colored fringed gown embellished with crystals, Holmes spoke of the importance of awareness in preventing cardiovascular disease and told the audience that it kills a woman every 80 seconds. She reminded guests of why they attended the show.

“Memories are why,” she said. “Fun is why. And a great red dress is why.”

The celebrity models were a diverse group mirroring the randomness of how cardiovascular disease strikes.

Created at first as The Heart Truth show, the red dress was launched as the national symbol for women and heart disease awareness at New York's Fashion Week in February 2003 in partnership with America's top fashion designers. The show during Fashion Week put the issue of women and heart disease in the national spotlight during Heart Month, reminding the public that heart disease and stroke cause one in three women's deaths each year, killing one woman every 80 seconds.

Since 2014, the event has been hosted by the American Heart Association as the Go Red For Women Red Dress Collection with Macy's as the presenting sponsor. ■



*Actress Maureen McCormick in a satin pantsuit by Emilio Sosa, walked in honor of the late Florence Henderson, who played her mother on the iconic television show *The Brady Bunch*. “I go red for Florence Henderson (who died from heart failure) and to raise awareness in preventing congestive heart failure.”*



*Host Katie Holmes, wearing Marchesa. “I go red to empower women.”*



*Heart disease survivors Nicole Hardy (left) and Odilia Flores in EVE*

# INTERNATIONAL STROKE CONFERENCE

## 2017 International Stroke Conference Houston, Texas

The 42nd annual International Stroke Conference (ISC) was held in Houston, TX, and attracted more than 5,000 attendees, one of the highest totals ever. The ISC is the world's premier meeting dedicated to the science and treatment of cerebrovascular disease.

On February 22 during the 2 ½ day conference, the SouthWest Affiliate hosted an honored guest luncheon for Cor Vitae Society members, volunteer leaders and friends. The luncheon was moderated by local radio host personality, Laurence 'Larry' Payne. Larry, a stroke survivor and former Power to End Stroke ambassador, engaged the expert panelists in a lively conversation about the advances in stroke care. The panel included:

- Nancy Brown, CEO, American Heart Association
- Dr. Mary Cushman, associate professor of medicine; hematology/oncology at University of Vermont, Fletcher Allen Health Care
- Dr. Lee Schwamm, professor of neurology at Harvard Medical School, and vice chairman of neurology at Massachusetts General Hospital
- Dr. Mitch Elkind, professor of neurology at Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons in New York City and an attending neurologist on the Stroke Service at NewYork-Presbyterian Hospital

Following the luncheon, guests heard from two science investigators, and took a tour of the Science and Technology Hall led by volunteer Ambassadors. Guests had the opportunity to touch-and-see areas where stroke initiatives continue to improve the lives of those impacted by stroke. ■



*Moderator Larry Payne with panelists Nancy Brown, Dr. Mary Cushman, Dr. Lee Schwamm, and Dr. Mitch Elkind*



*Dr. James Grotta and President's Circle member Skip Allen, both of Houston, Texas*



*Ambassador Dr. Pierre Fayad with Champion's Circle members Sherri and Michael Belsley of Friendswood, Texas*



# LOCAL EVENTS

## Cor Vitae Society members participate in local events

---

### ANN ARBOR, MICHIGAN:

---

Heart Ball co-chairs Drs. Sonal and Gabe Owens pose at the 2016 event, held at the University of Michigan Stadium. Sonal and Gabe are first-time Cor Vitae Society members at the Patron's Circle level, and are pediatric cardiologists at the University of Michigan's Mott Children's Hospital.



---

### CASTLE PINES, COLORADO:

---

Fourteen Cor Vitae Society members were treated to a Progressive Dinner Party hosted by Pulse Circle members Dara and Randy Owen and Patron's Circle members Cheryl and Scott Hefner. Society members learned how they're making a difference in the association's mission while enjoying a terrific meal and each other's company.

# LOCAL EVENTS

---

## NEW YORK, NEW YORK:

---

Advocates, survivors and Cor Vitae Society members gathered in New York at the Museum of Arts and Design for a VIP event that recognized and thanked attendees for their continued support and dedication to the mission.



*AHA major gift advisor Lynn Sellers, Pulse Circle members Ellen and David Wasserman, and Founder's Affiliate national team lead Sharon Bean*



*Champion's Circle members Janice and John Hall*



*Champion's Circle member David Lefkowitz poses with AHA supporter and New York City AHA board member Steve Mendelsohn*

---

## CLEVELAND, OHIO:

---

Champion's Circle members Michael and Patricia T. Horvath pose at the Cleveland Heart and Stroke Ball. Patricia is the current chair of the Cleveland Board of Directors and served as the 2016 chair of Go Red For Women Luncheon.



*Champion's Circle members Michael and Patricia T. Horvath*

# SOCIETY MEMBER PROFILE

Sue and Gary Ellis | Minneapolis, MN

HEART & TORCH CIRCLE

Gary Ellis and Dave Ness are not only friends and former colleagues of medical device company Medtronic, they also share a passion for curing heart disease and stroke.

“Gary had been a great friend for well over 30 years, much of that through Medtronic,” said David, former AHA chairman of the board (1996-97) and current volunteer. “He was on a fast track and was asked to take an assignment in Europe. On his return, I strongly suggested he join me at the AHA. The rest is history.”

“History” isn’t an exaggeration. Gary’s volunteer tenure with the AHA has included chair of the Greater Midwest Affiliate Board, serving on numerous task forces and committees, national treasurer, national board chair, and currently as Cor Vitae Society co-chair for Minnesota.

---

*“The AHA is in a lot of ways part of my family.”*

---

However, Gary’s connection to the AHA wasn’t simply due to David’s urging.

“My father had open heart surgery to repair a heart valve in the late 60’s/early 70’s, the early days of open heart surgery,” Gary said. “He survived the surgery, but had some complications as a result, and passed away when I was 14.”

“Heart disease affected me at early age as result. Since then, Medtronic had me engaged with the AHA from a business perspective from the beginning. Heart disease has also had an impact on other family members such as my father-in-law and mother-in-law as well as my 4-year-old granddaughter.”

One of his proudest achievements as an AHA volunteer was being a part of the creation of the 2020 Impact Goal to improve the cardiovascular health of all Americans by 20 percent and reduce deaths from cardiovascular diseases and stroke by 20 percent by the year 2020. Gary was national board chair when the board approved it in 2009.



*Gary Ellis and his wife Sue are members of the Heart & Torch Circle, which recognizes lifetime giving of more than \$1 million.*

“At the time, there was a bit of resistance to change,” Gary said. “What we were doing as an organization had been working well, and we had been somewhat successful at reducing mortality from heart disease and stroke.”

“The ultimate goal is to minimize the amount of heart disease that’s out there. It was time to move away from curing someone of heart disease or helping them live with their symptoms to not having heart disease in the first place. This broader vision of thinking about people before they are afflicted with heart disease is what our volunteers and medical professionals had been wanting, and the AHA is in better shape as a result.”

Devoting more than three decades of his professional and personal thought leadership to fighting heart disease is more than a life calling for Gary.

“The AHA is in a lot of ways part of my family,” he said. “To share my real family with this organization is something that I find impactful, and hopefully over the years they’ll be engaged and help support it as well.”

Gary has introduced his family to the AHA through the Twin Cities Heart Ball, which he and his wife Sue have attended every year except the year of his mother’s 85th birthday in Iowa. They often attend with their adult children.

“It’s been a fun time for me,” he said. “I often kid David Ness. He built a passion in me, and hopefully I’ve done that with other people. The AHA has been a key part of my time maturing as an adult, and I do believe that we’re having some impact on heart disease and stroke, not only in the United States, but around the world.” ■



# SOCIETY MEMBER SPOTLIGHTS



*Pamela and Ajay Raju*

## Pamela and Ajay Raju | Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

### PRESIDENT'S CIRCLE

When Ajay and his wife Pamela launched their family's charitable foundation, The Pamela & Ajay Raju Foundation, they did so with a mission to re-establish Philadelphia as a global force in policy, commerce and culture through civic and education-based philanthropic initiatives. It soon became clear to Ajay that such an ambitious goal would never be achieved without first addressing the public health issues plaguing the region.

"When I learned the odds of surviving a cardiac event in Philadelphia vary dramatically based not only on an individual's health and age, but on his/her income and educational attainment, and even, his/her zip code, I was stunned," Ajay said. "There is this stark divide along socioeconomic lines in our city, and it impacts virtually every aspect of every Philadelphian's life."

Determined to bridge that divide, Ajay made cardiac health awareness a central priority of their family's charitable foundation. By engaging the student fellows of the Foundation's youth leadership incubator, the Germination Project, Ajay has set a goal of training no fewer than 10,000 Philadelphians in CPR and basic healthy living practices.

"As someone who has been blessed by Philadelphia many times over, I consider it a personal duty to help empower our underserved neighbors to live long, successful and healthy lives," Ajay said. "Of course, there is no greater champion of efforts like these than the American Heart Association, so it's a source of great pride and reassurance to have found common cause with the AHA in waging this battle."

---

## Michele and Ed Balcerzak | Aurora, Colorado

### CHAMPION'S CIRCLE

Michele and Ed have been married for 29 years, and consider themselves blessed with six children and five grandchildren. But when Ed was only 35, just two months shy of the birth of his youngest child, he needed open heart surgery.

He later had other irregularities that required two ablations, a radiofrequency treatment for abnormal heart rhythms and five cardio versions, a procedure to convert his irregular heartbeat to a normal rhythm.

Michele and Ed understand that they have been given the gift of time. Ed also realizes that he has been a direct benefactor of research and methods the American Heart Association has pioneered and helped develop. It's this gratitude that fuels his desire to give back.

Since 2015, Ed has served as an AHA Denver board member, and was selected to chair the Denver Board (2016-18). He's also proud to have served as DIRECTV's executive lead for the Heart Walk in Denver since 2013, which established a new team fundraising record — one that's been broken each year by the teams that followed.

Michele and Ed's involvement with the AHA not only allows Ed to live longer and spend more time with his family, but also leads to future discoveries and breakthroughs that will benefit generations to come.



*Michele and Ed Balcerzak*

# SOCIETY MEMBER SPOTLIGHTS



## Dr. Patrick and Johanna de Groot Thomas | Cortlandt Manor, New York

### PACESETTER'S CIRCLE

Cardiologist Patrick Thomas, M.D., M.B.A., FACC, is passionate about inspiring people to eat healthier and exercise more to help prevent heart disease. His own family history helps confirm that when people are healthy, it helps them live longer.

“My paternal grandfather developed severe heart disease in his 50’s, and my dad developed his first heart problems in his early 40’s,” he said.

His father was treated with multiple angioplasties, stents and two heart bypass surgeries. Afterwards, he started to exercise regularly.

“It’s the only reason he enjoys any quality of life at all,” he said. “It’s a shining example of what you’re supposed to do to prevent heart disease.”

*Dr. Patrick and Johanna de Groot Thomas*

Dr. Thomas sets his own example for his two children by running up to 25 miles a week. Despite that, he has been on cholesterol-lowering drugs and high blood pressure medicine for a decade and expects to be on them the rest of his life.

“I’m scared to think where I would be if I weren’t so attentive to diet and exercise,” he said.

Dr. Thomas serves as AHA Putnam County board president, motivating others to adopt a healthy lifestyle. He and his wife’s Johanna’s recent gift supports Healthy For Good (see back page), an AHA program that inspires people to make a lasting change in their health and life.

“One day, I’d like to be put out of business, because heart disease has been eradicated,” he said.

---

## Nellie Axelroad | Atlanta, Georgia

### PULSE CIRCLE

Nellie Axelroad and her husband Saul made their initial gift to the AHA in 2003, and have supported the association through their wills and by establishing charitable gift annuities ever since.

Nellie’s commitment to the association was partly inspired by her grandfather, who suffered from heart disease and would later succumb to a heart attack.

Her husband Saul also suffered from heart disease, and passed away in 2010 due to a weakened heart and complications from medical treatments.

Nellie and Saul decided to include the association in their will because they felt it was a worthwhile cause. They are members of the Paul Dudley White Legacy Society, which honors individuals who have made gifts through their will, trust or alternate estate plan.

Nellie also became a Cor Vitae Society member in 2015. After learning of an opportunity to impact future generations, she donated to help fund CPR Anytime kits for local schools. Her generous support was then matched by others in the community.

The Axelroads were married for 37 years. “I’ve had a fantastic life,” Nellie said. “God has blessed me more than I ever could have asked.”



*Nellie Axelroad*

# SOCIETY MEMBER SPOTLIGHTS



*Andrea Hill*

## Andrea Hill | Richmond, Virginia

### PATRON'S CIRCLE

Andrea Hill sets an example for her children by giving back to many causes in her community. But her involvement with the American Heart Association as a member of the Executive Leadership Team for the Richmond Heart Ball is especially meaningful to her.

"I have witnessed too many people that I love leave this life too soon," Andrea said. "A healthy lifestyle, including regular exercise and good eating habits, is critical to the prevention of heart disease. It is important to me that my children internalize the idea that their choices today, and every day, can positively impact their long-term health and vitality."

"I give my energy to causes that I value, and the work the AHA does is amazing.

The pervasiveness of their message in the community reaches so many women and their families through their signature events including Go Red, the Heart Walk, and the Heart Ball."

---

## Tricia Estey | Las Vegas, Nevada

### PRESIDENT'S CIRCLE

Like many AHA donors and volunteers, Tricia has been personally affected by heart disease.

"I come from a long line of family who have suffered and died from coronary artery disease," Tricia said. "My mother passed at 36 after a major coronary, and my sisters, brother and I have personally been affected."

On Feb. 8, 2016, Tricia had four bypasses, only to learn that two grafts had failed the next day. She successfully had five stents inserted that May.

"The AHA, with its volunteers and partners, are working very hard to find a cure," she said. "We want to make sure our children do not have to continue dying from and suffering with this disease."

As chair of the Las Vegas Heart Ball, Tricia is passionate about educating her community about prevention and increasing awareness of heart diseases.

"This is a personal passion," she said. "I want to learn as much as I can about heart disease and stroke, and help others do the same through education and research."



*Tricia and Craig Estey*



*Valda Miller*

## Valda Miller | Jackson, Mississippi

### CHAMPION'S CIRCLE

Valda and her late husband Dick became involved with the AHA nearly 40 years ago as one of the first contributors to the Jackson Heart Ball. They were connected to the association because of their family history of heart disease. However, the Heart Ball always fell on their wedding anniversary, giving them extra reason to celebrate.

"I am confident that my annual investment to the AHA allows for advancements to be made in cardiovascular disease," Valda said. "I have great faith in the association and the progress that has been made."

Valda now makes the Heart Ball a family tradition, attending with her children and grandchildren each year.





American Heart Association | American Stroke Association®

life is why™

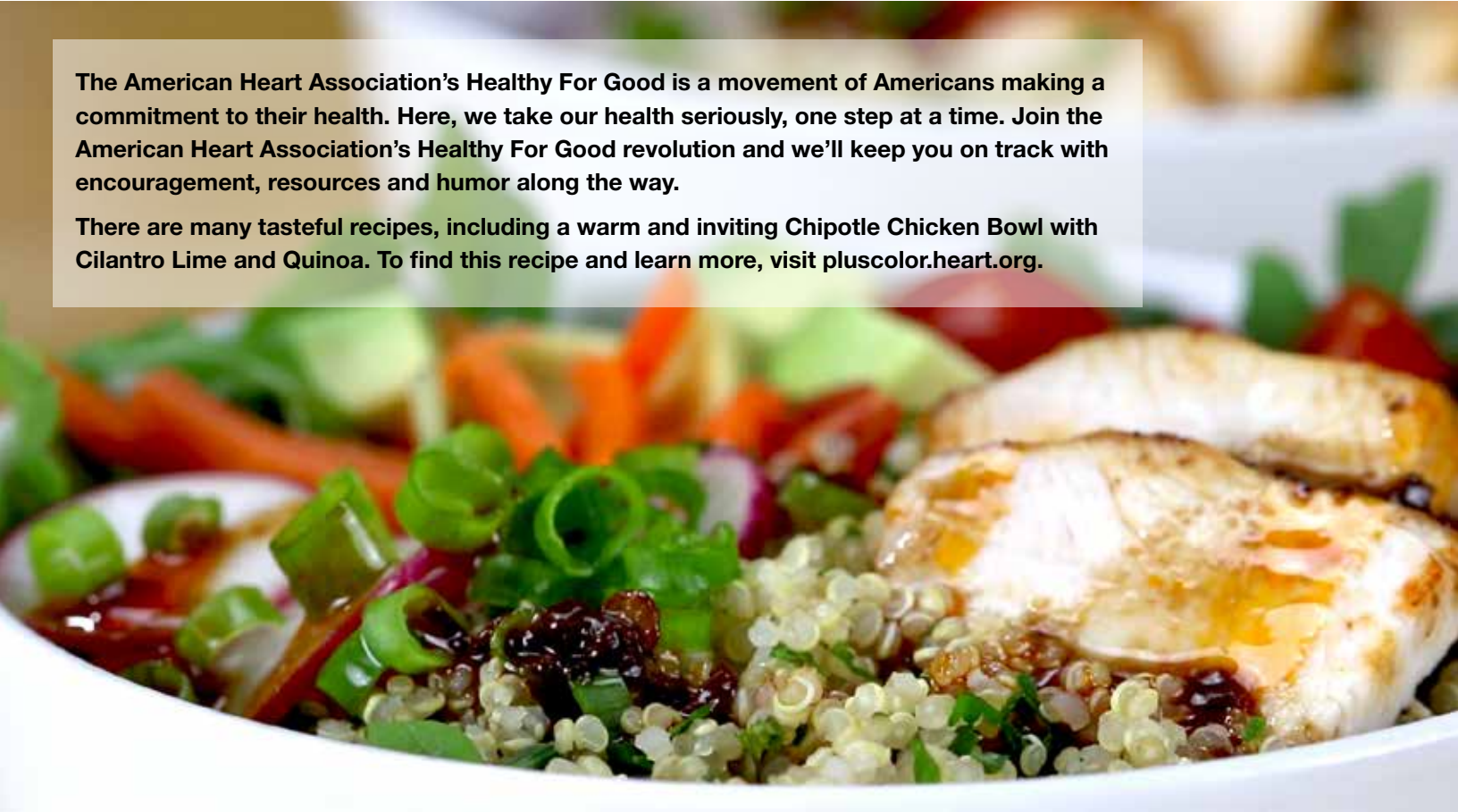
# COR VITAE *Society*

## THE HEART OF LIFE

**National Center**  
7272 Greenville Avenue  
Dallas, TX 75231  
[heart.org/corvitaesociety](http://heart.org/corvitaesociety)  
[corvitae@heart.org](mailto:corvitae@heart.org)

The American Heart Association's Healthy For Good is a movement of Americans making a commitment to their health. Here, we take our health seriously, one step at a time. Join the American Heart Association's Healthy For Good revolution and we'll keep you on track with encouragement, resources and humor along the way.

There are many tasteful recipes, including a warm and inviting Chipotle Chicken Bowl with Cilantro Lime and Quinoa. To find this recipe and learn more, visit [pluscolor.heart.org](http://pluscolor.heart.org).



Join The Conversation



@American\_Heart



Facebook.com/AmericanHeart



Instagram.com/American\_Heart