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American Heart Association Announces 2019 “Real People. Real Change.” Award Finalists

- *Award recipients made significant lifestyle changes to improve their heart health*
- *One finalist to win \$2,500 in online voting Aug. 26-Sept. 1*

INDIANAPOLIS (Aug. 21, 2019) – Four central Indiana residents have won \$500 as finalists of the American Heart Association’s sixth annual “Real People. Real Change.” program presented by UnitedHealthcare. One finalist will win \$2,500 after an online voting contest Aug. 26 – Sept. 1.

“Real People. Real Change.” recognizes individuals who have made lifestyle changes to live healthier lives and inspire others. Nominations for this year’s program were accepted through June 30, and a committee of past winners selected this year’s four finalists.

The public can read about this year’s finalists and vote for an overall winner at www.heart.org/indyrealchange.

“UnitedHealthcare is grateful for the opportunity to recognize these inspiring people who are taking action to improve their heart health and the health of their families, friends and co-workers,” said Kim Sonerholm, CEO, UnitedHealthcare of Indiana. “These ‘Real People. Real Change.’ winners are shining examples that making even small changes to our lifestyles can lead to dramatic improvements in our health.”

Heart disease is the leading cause of death for men and women in the United States, causing one in three deaths each year. Some heart disease risk factors include family history and aging; however, up to 80 percent of heart disease is preventable by making small changes to lead a heart-healthy lifestyle.

The finalists were nominated and evaluated based on the seven factors for ideal heart health that make up the American Heart Association’s “Life’s Simple 7”:

- Manage Blood Pressure
- Control Cholesterol
- Reduce Blood Sugar
- Get Active
- Eat Better
- Lose Weight
- Stop Smoking

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The “Real People. Real Change.” finalists are:

Jeff Owens - Fairland

Jeff was a firefighter/paramedic for 30 years and created a program 25 years ago to use dogs to teach fire safety to children. When he retired from the fire department a couple of years ago, Jeff knew he needed to get in better shape in order to continue teaching kids. He had gained weight, needed medication for high blood pressure and a CPAP machine when he slept. Jeff made changes to his diet and exercise habits, focusing on portion control and regular brisk walking. Over the last 18 months, Jeff has lost 90 lbs., no longer has high blood pressure and does not need the CPAP machine.

Allyson Morrison - Indianapolis

In 2017, Allyson realized she needed help. She had reached her heaviest weight, had elevated blood pressure and cholesterol, was at risk for developing diabetes, and had doctors suggesting a knee replacement. Allyson reached out to a wellness coach at her job and began to take back her life one step at a time. She started riding a stationary bike 5 minutes per day, slowly increasing the time. When she found she didn't like biking she switched to monitoring her daily steps, starting with a goal of 3,000 per day. She's continued to increase her activity, regularly walking 8,000 or more steps per day. Allyson's co-workers, inspired by her faithful dedication to being active, often join her for walking breaks. She also took control of her diet. She cut out stops at fast food restaurants and stopped drinking 60 oz. of soda per day. Allyson began carefully planning each meal, cooking and preparing meals on Sunday that would last for the entire week. By July 2018, Allyson had lost more than 30 lbs., and doctors said she no longer needed knee replacement surgery. By June 2019, Allyson had lost more than 85 lbs., brought her blood pressure and cholesterol into the normal range and reduced her risk of diabetes.

Brian Staup - Brownsburg

Brian Staup has always seen his weight fluctuate, but in 2018 he realized that he had fallen into a rut - leading a sedentary lifestyle and not eating healthy. When his doctor told him that his blood pressure was dangerously high and that he was in danger of having a stroke, Brian knew it was time to make some changes. Brian got active. While he started going to the gym several times a week, Brian says that it's important to move every day. He climbed the 10 flights of stairs in his office building several times a day. At the same time, Brian made changes to his diet. He focused on decreasing the amount of sugar, carbohydrates and fried foods that he ate, and increased the number of fruits, vegetables and high-fiber snacks that he ate. He also began drinking more water - around one gallon per day. Over the course of a year, Brian lost 60 lbs., got off of blood pressure medication, and fit into a new suit for his son's wedding.

Jim Weigle - Fishers

When Jim Weigle weighed 275 lbs., he would have never guessed that a few years later he would be competing in Ultra Marathons. Jim's journey began with a trip to the YMCA where he was starting to walk on the treadmill to get in better shape. When Jim saw a sign for a 5K run that would help send a child to camp, he remembered that someone had once paid his way to camp, so he signed up and began to train. Running in that initial 5K led to a mini-marathon and then to an indoor triathlon. Since then, he's completed two half Ironmans (1.2 miles of swimming, 56 miles of biking, 13.2 miles of running) and he's run in three Ultra Marathon events (40 miles, 50 miles, 100 kilometers). Jim loves to share his passion for running with others. In 2017, he became an inaugural member of the Fishers Running Club, a group with more than 100 members that gathers to run on most Saturdays.

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Additional information about each winner and the “Real People. Real Change.” program is available at www.heart.org/indyrealchange.

About the American Heart Association

The American Heart Association is a relentless force for a world of longer, healthier lives. We are dedicated to ensuring equitable health in all communities. Through collaboration with numerous organizations, and powered by millions of volunteers, we fund innovative research, advocate for the public’s health and share lifesaving resources. The Dallas-based organization has been a leading source of health information for nearly a century. Connect with us on heart.org, [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) or by calling 1-800-AHA-USA1.

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