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## **City of Columbia Earns Third Consecutive Platinum Recognition Award**

For the third consecutive year, the City of Columbia has received the platinum-level award in the American Heart Association's Start! Fit-Friendly Companies program. The American Heart Association seeks companies who show progressive leadership and highlight their concern for their staff. This recognition acknowledges the City of Columbia for promoting physical activity and health in the work place.

Start! is the American Heart Association's national initiative to get Americans to walk more as a form of exercise. Most adult Americans spend a majority of their waking hours at work – many in sedentary careers – which increases their risk for medical problems such as obesity, high blood pressure and diabetes.

"We are honored and excited to be recognized as a Platinum-Level Fit-Friendly Company by the American Heart Association's Start! Program," commented Mayor Steve Benjamin. "We are committed to providing a safe, healthy, and active workplace for all of our employees. We recognize there are simple, effective, and creative ways to get employees to take walks and eat healthy while producing positive results for the City as a whole."

Columbia received its first platinum award and a community award, in part, due to the opening of the Charles R. Drew Wellness Center and two Citywide Wellness Challenges. City employees are eligible for payroll deductions for one-year memberships to the Drew Wellness Center. A wellness program was then added for City employees that include incentives for participating in weight and fitness challenges while qualifying for a partial reimbursement toward gym membership costs. Brown bag lunch seminars have been offered to include demonstrations of exercises that could be done in an office or break room. Free heart and stroke screenings are also offered in partnerships with local healthcare agencies.

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