

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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VDH 06-56

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**VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH PROMOTES THE
ABILITY AND HEALTH OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES**

(RICHMOND, Va.)—Ordinary people are capable of extraordinary things. To celebrate outstanding citizens who happen to have disabilities, the Virginia Department of Health's (VDH) Health Promotion for People with Disabilities (HPPD) Project and Task Force is launching its first public service announcement.

The HPPD Project and Task Force aims to change perceptions and raise awareness among the general public that people with disabilities are just like everyone else. To deliver this message, the HPPD Project and Task Force developed an "Ordinary Heroes" public service announcement (PSA). VDH distributed the PSA to television stations throughout the state for airing beginning in October, which is Disability Awareness Month.

The PSA features Hurricane Katrina survivors Richard Webb and Kathleen Anderson, who are ham radio operators who have disabilities. During the disaster, Richard and Kathleen drove to New Orleans from their home 30 miles away and stayed to help others in need rather than evacuating to save themselves. They used their ham radios to contact emergency services personnel when the city's phone system was interrupted. The PSA depicts two productive members of their community who demonstrated courage and integrity in a time when heroes were hard to find.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that more than 1 million Virginians, or 18.1 percent of the state's population, have some form of disability. According to the HPPD Project's Census 2000 Disability Data report, disability rates for Virginia localities range from 12.1 percent to 35.9 percent. According to the CDC, approximately 37 percent of those with disabilities report having fair to poor health compared with only 8 percent of people without disabilities.

"People with disabilities face a host of barriers to good health. They should have full access to the services and facilities that prevent disease and promote healthy lifestyles," said State Health Commissioner Robert B. Stroube.

Statistics show that people with disabilities are not as physically active as those without disabilities, nor do they have easy access to preventive health screenings and healthy foods. These factors can lead to secondary health conditions such as excess weight, high blood pressure and cholesterol, diabetes and cancer.

Promoting healthy lifestyles and improving access to health care, physical activity and nutrition services are among the priorities of the HPPD Project and Task Force. For example, task force members plan to reach out to health clubs and recreation centers and encourage them to install universally designed exercise equipment that people with disabilities can use. They are also assessing other barriers to health care, such as transportation, communication with health care providers and resources caregivers can use to provide adequate care to people with disabilities.

For more information on VDH's HPPD Project and to see the Ordinary Heroes PSA, visit www.vdh.virginia.gov and click on "Ordinary Heroes."

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EDITOR'S NOTE

Listed below are upcoming events that relate to people with disabilities.

Chesterfield County – Oct. 26. Chesterfield County Disability Awareness Fair, Chesterfield Town Center Mall, 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. For more information call the Chesterfield Disability Service Board at (804) 748-1307.

Warsaw – Oct. 28. Disability Awareness Day Wellness Fair, Banquet Hall next to old Ames Building, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Sponsored by the Brain Injury Association of Virginia. For more information contact Lorraine Justice at (804) 986-8073.

Montross – Nov. 14. Community Health Fair, A.T. Johnson Human Services Building, Rt. 3, 18849 Kings Highway, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. For more information call (804) 462-5780 or (804) 493-8924.

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