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Heritage Month events to empower Latinas against heart disease

(DALLAS, Sept. 15, 2010) — Too many Hispanic women die each year because they don't know heart disease is their No. 1 killer. To fight this killer, the American Heart Association and Macy's Inc. are joining forces to narrow the knowledge gap and help Latinas take care of their hearts and their families.

Go Red Por Tu Corazón, an American Heart Association movement that raises heart disease awareness among Hispanic women, will be a centerpiece of Macy's "*Celebrates El Encanto Latino*" special in-store events during Hispanic Heritage Month (Sept. 15-Oct. 15). The events, held across the nation to honor the Latino culture and empower Hispanic women, will include discussions about health, heritage and beauty.

American Heart Association guest speakers will discuss the importance of practicing a heart-healthy lifestyle for Latinas and their families. Go Red Por Tu Corazón encourages women to take small steps toward heart health by eating better. The Macy's events will show women ways to modify traditional Hispanic dishes with a healthy twist – a simple step that can help lower heart disease risk. Attendees also will have the opportunity to sample these healthier dishes during the event.

"It's not enough to look good on the outside," said Arilma St. Clair, a member of the National Association of Hispanic Nurses and the featured speaker at an Oct. 2 event in Wheaton, Md.

"Hispanic women also must do things to feel good on the inside and be healthy. This is an opportunity to raise awareness about heart health among Hispanic women and address the aspects of self-management. Women should not think they are doomed because of family history of heart disease or risk factors. There are things that can be done to prevent or delay the onset of the disease."

By 2050, 23 percent of the U.S. population will be of Hispanic origin, according to U.S. Census Bureau statistics. The sooner Hispanic women and their families make healthy changes, the less likely they will increase the overall cost to the healthcare system in the future. Especially considering Hispanic women are more likely to develop heart disease 10 years earlier than Caucasian women.

“Macy’s and the American Heart Association are right on track with this initiative,” St. Clair said. “They are investing in the health and image of Latinos in this country and raising the value of the community as a whole.”

Maria Vargas-Pion, who was inspired to change her family’s eating habits and activity level after her father-in-law died seven years ago from a heart attack, will tell her story at an Oct. 23 event in New York. Vargas-Pion, 33, of Roselle Park, N.J., hopes her story will help others change their lives.

“Like many Latina women, I put my family first and, in the process, forgot about myself,” said Vargas-Pion, a 2009 Go Red For Women spokeswoman.

The couple, who both have a family history of heart disease, and their 10-year-old son now exercise at least three times a week for about an hour a day and have incorporated arugula salads, fruits and vegetables into their daily eating. Vargas-Pion also bakes or grills their food, checks sugar and sodium contents on packages, and has cut out fried foods.

“If we wait for the perfect moment to make a change, we’ll never do it,” she said. “Change starts with simple things: taking the stairs instead of the elevator and grabbing a carrot stick instead of a potato chip. If you take these small steps one day at a time, think of what can be achieved over time.”

The Macy’s *Celebrates El Encanto Latino* events will be held at select stores across the nation, including Miami; Denver; Santa Ana, Calif.; Chicago; San Francisco; Wheaton, Md.; San Antonio; Houston; Montebello, Calif.; and New York.

In addition to discussions on family, tradition, heritage and healthy living, attendees will enjoy beauty demonstrations on fall trends, colors and makeup tips.

To learn more about how heart disease affects Hispanic women, visit www.goredportucorazon.org.

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The American Heart Association receives funding primarily from individuals; foundations and corporations (including pharmaceutical, device manufacturers and other companies) also make donations and fund specific association programs and events. The association has strict policies to prevent these relationships from influencing the science content. Revenues from pharmaceutical and device corporations are available at www.americanheart.org/corporatefunding.