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AARP South Dakota Announces 2021 State Walking College Fellowships

(Sioux Falls, SD) - AARP South Dakota today announced the names of 15 local advocates, who have received Fellowships to participate in the inaugural South Dakota State Walking College.

The program is presented in partnership with AARP Livable Communities and America Walks, a national education and advocacy organization which works to advance safe, equitable, accessible, and enjoyable places to walk and move by giving people and communities the resources to effectively advocate for change.

"We are delighted to welcome this group of passionate community leaders, who are working to improve walkability and livability in Sioux Falls and other communities throughout the state," said Erik Gaikowski, AARP South Dakota State Director, "The Fellows represent a range of backgrounds and experiences, including health and wellness, traffic engineering, economic development, and education."

The South Dakota State Walking College Fellows are:

- Whitney Brown, Maintenance Manager at Augustana University and accessibility advocate from Sioux Falls
- James Burzynski, pharmacist, student, and walkable community advocate from Sioux Falls
- Ron Christensen, retired agricultural research engineer from Sioux Falls
- Thomas Gullede, Fitness and Wellness Director with the City of Mitchell
- Heath Hoftiezer, Traffic Operations Engineer with the City of Sioux Falls
- Lindsey Holmquest, Associate State Director with AARP South Dakota in Sioux Falls
- Lindsey Kimber, Executive Director with Glacial Lakes Area Development and City Council member in Britton
- Elicia Kortus, historic preservation specialist and leader of a non-profit in Jasper, MN, who lives in Sioux Falls

- Chrissy Meyer, Regional Communications Director with the American Heart Association, based in Sioux Falls
- Andrea Powers, Executive Director with Southern Hills Economic Development in Hot Springs
- Rhonda Preller, retired teacher and President of the Milbank Area Retired Teachers/Personnel Association (MARTA) in Millbank
- Danaca Schettler, Traffic Engineer with the City of Sioux Falls
- Prairey Walkling, Family & Community Health Field Specialist with SDSU Extension who works with the Pine Ridge and Rosebud Reservations and lives in Rapid City

The following Walking College Mentors have been appointed to provide coaching and facilitate discussion groups:

- Beth Davis, Healthy Community Consultant who currently serves as the Physical Activity Coordinator with the South Dakota Department of Health in Pierre
- Zach DeBoer, community-based artist working in the field of creative placemaking and neighborhood advocate in Sioux Falls
- Mary Michaels, Public Health Prevention Coordinator with the Sioux Falls Health Department

The Walking College curriculum has been designed to expand the capacity of local advocates to be effective community change agents. Fellows will complete a six-module distance-education program this summer, covering the science behind the benefits of walking, evaluation of built environments, as well as communication skills and building relationships with decision makers. At the end of the course, each Fellow will develop an individual Walking Action Plan for their community.

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About The Walking College: *The Walking College was developed in 2014 by America Walks, with funding support from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. pedestrian safety advocates to improve their communities. In 2020, AARP Livable Communities partnered with America Walks to develop and implement State Walking The goal of the national program is to build the capacity of local walkability and Colleges in California, Georgia, and South Dakota. More info. at www.americawalks.org/walkingcollege.*

About America Walks: *America Walks is a national education and advocacy organization devoted to increasing walking and expanding walkable communities throughout the US. Consisting of a network of more than 43,000 individuals and 700 partner and allied organizations, America Walks' programs include webinar broadcasts, federal advocacy initiatives, on-line technical assistance, community-based workshops, the National Walking Summit, and the Walking College. More info. at www.americawalks.org.*

About AARP South Dakota

AARP is a nonprofit, nonpartisan membership organization that empowers all people to choose how they live as they age. In South Dakota, we create real value for our 105,000+ members through advocacy, education and engagement opportunities that remove barriers and promote possibilities. Learn more at www.aarp.org/sd.

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