

**PRESS RELEASE
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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**A FREE PUBLIC WALKING PROGRAM IMPROVES PUBLIC HEALTH
AND INTRODUCES MORE PEOPLE TO SANTA FE'S TRAIL SYSTEM**

WHAT: VAMONOS: SANTA FE WALKS, 30 FREE WALKS

WHO: OFFERED BY THE SANTA FE WALKING COLLABORATIVE, A GROUP CONVENED BY THE SANTA FE CONSERVATION TRUST

WHERE: ON THE ADA ACCESSIBLE TRAILS AROUND SANTA FE'S PARKS; PLUS SATURDAY WALKS ON THE SOFT SURFACE (DIRT) TRAILS

WHEN: FIVE WALKS A MONTH FROM MAY THROUGH OCTOBER

WHY: TO GET PEOPLE MOVING, IMPROVE PUBLIC HEALTH, AND TO EDUCATE MORE PEOPLE ABOUT OUR AMAZING TRAIL SYSTEM, BOTH IN TOWN AND IN THE FOOTHILLS

Once again, the Santa Fe Conservation Trust has convened the Santa Fe Walking Collaborative to put together a series of free walks from May through October to help people get outside, enjoy nature and get the body moving. VAMONOS: Santa Fe Walks started in 2018, and since then nearly 1,700 people have joined the walks.

Santa Fe is blessed with more than 50 miles of dirt trails and ADA accessible, paved trails around almost every City park and along the Santa Fe River, providing Santa Feans with safe and accessible walking routes to improve their health in a natural environment.

Vámonos offers 30 free walks scheduled between May and October 2023. The weekly walks are after work, last a little more than an hour, and are a great way to explore Santa Fe's trails, get some fresh air and meet people. Elder walks are slower meanders so that those in wheelchairs or on walkers can participate. Plus there are Saturday hikes to introduce Santa Fe's dirt trails to the community. Dogs are welcome if on a leash. Kids and families are welcome. Vámonos volunteers ensure that everyone can walk at their own pace, so no one gets left behind or walks alone.

"When Vámonos first started in 2018, it quickly generated a lot of enthusiasm," said Sarah Noss, SFCT Executive Director. "We found that many people just aren't comfortable walking alone, so they enjoyed the chance to get outside with like-minded people. Plus, our elders and those in our community who need wheelchairs or walkers have a harder time enjoying the

outdoors, and Vámonos gives them the chance to enjoy a stroll, too.” Vámonos has had families, people as young as 3-years-old and as old as 98-years old participate. “When the pandemic hit,” Noss added, “it became very clear that being in nature and walking with others was really healing. People show up as strangers and leave as friends.”

The group convened by SFCT informally calls itself the **Santa Fe Walking Collaborative**. Members include SFCT, the City of Santa Fe (thanks to a 2018 resolution sponsored by City Councilors Sig Lindell and Renee Villarreal); La Familia Medical Center, New Vistas, The Randall Davey Audubon Center and Sanctuary, MorningStar Senior Living, RSVP Santa Fe, the NM Department of Health, NM Aging and Long term Services Department, and Hike the Good Hike. The group helps organize the walks and urges their own constituencies to participate.

For a complete schedule of the VAMONOS walks, go to www.sfct.org/vamonos

Here’s why a walking program is beneficial to the community:

- Heart disease is the number one killer in NM and in Santa Fe County. In 2020, 6.6% of adults in Santa Fe County had been diagnosed with diabetes. The primary risk factors for heart disease are obesity, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, unhealthy diet, alcohol consumption, smoking and inactivity. Risk factors for Type 2 diabetes include obesity, high levels of cholesterol, high blood pressure, and depression. Poor nutrition and lack of exercise may also contribute to Type 2 diabetes.
- Now into year 4 of the pandemic, 54% of U.S. adults said they have been less physically active than they wanted to be since the pandemic started.
- Of New Mexicans 65 years and older, 91% are at risk for social isolation. Causes are poverty, have a disability, live alone, are divorced, separated, or widowed, are never married and have difficulty living independently. Research has linked social isolation and loneliness to higher risks for a variety of mental and physical conditions, including high blood pressure, heart disease, obesity, a weakened immune system, anxiety, depression, cognitive decline, Alzheimer’s disease and even death.
- But the good news is that regular walking has been shown to have many health benefits, including: lowering risk of heart disease, lowering risk of diabetes, lowering risk of different types of cancers, lowering high blood pressure, lowering cholesterol, improving mood and depression, and providing help with weight loss. What’s more, studies show that being outdoors in nature has been tied to a range of beneficial health outcomes, and that access to nature may constitute a powerful, inexpensive public health intervention.

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