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## NEWS RELEASE

Contact: Amy Hock  
Phone: 515-376-4819  
Email: [hocka@wellmark.com](mailto:hocka@wellmark.com)

### 2021 virtual Grand Blue Mile presented by Wellmark raises \$5,000 for Iowa Kidstrong

**DES MOINES, IA** (April 29, 2021) — Officials from Wellmark® Blue Cross® and Blue Shield® and Grand Blue Mile are pleased to present Iowa Kidstrong with a \$5,000 donation to help support their school-based youth fitness programs as the multiweek 2021 virtual Grand Blue Mile presented by Wellmark concludes April 30. This donation was made possible through the proceeds from the thousands of registrants, from more than 30 states, including 157 Iowa communities, who took part in what became America's largest one-mile virtual run.

"We are so grateful for the transformative partnership with Wellmark and the Grand Blue Mile," said Cindy Elsbernd, founder and executive director of Iowa Kidstrong. "Now more than ever, it's important that we continue to support Iowa's youth, whether they are in a classroom or learning remotely, with programming aimed at keeping them active throughout their day."

[Iowa Kidstrong](#) was founded in 2005 to address the childhood obesity epidemic and works to create a positive and encouraging fitness environment for central Iowa youth. In 2006, Iowa Kidstrong created KidStriders, an incentive program that encourages students to run or walk laps before class, after class or at recess. Each student-participant strives toward a goal of reaching 26.2 cumulative miles — the distance of a marathon — by the end of the school year.

This year, as part of the Iowa Kidstrong Celebration of Champions, students from Clay Elementary in the Southeast Polk Community School District were invited to Drake Stadium on Wednesday, April 21, to compete in a fun run against a virtual Karissa Schweizer — the reigning American 5K record holder and former Drake Relays Champion and Dowling Catholic alum. The students had 14:23.92, Schweizer's American 5K record, to complete as many laps on the Blue Oval as they could. They were able to complete an impressive four laps.

"For over a decade, Wellmark and the Grand Blue Mile have been proud supporters of Iowa Kidstrong, awarding more than \$90,000 to support our collective goal of keeping kids active," said Chris Verlengia, Wellmark's senior brand marketing manager. "We know Iowa Kidstrong has inspired thousands of students to make healthier choices, and KidStriders teaches them the importance of goal setting and perseverance — building blocks of strong character they'll carry through life."

The 13<sup>th</sup> annual Grand Blue Mile presented by Wellmark is scheduled for April 26, 2022. For more information, visit [GrandBlueMile.com](http://GrandBlueMile.com).

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**About Wellmark Blue Cross and Blue Shield**

Wellmark, Inc. ([Wellmark.com](http://www.wellmark.com)) does business as Wellmark Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Iowa. Wellmark and its subsidiaries and affiliated companies, including Wellmark Blue Cross and Blue Shield of South Dakota, Wellmark Health Plan of Iowa, Inc., and Wellmark Value Health Plan, Inc., insure or pay health benefit claims for more than 2 million members in Iowa and South Dakota. Wellmark Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Iowa, Wellmark Blue Cross and Blue Shield of South Dakota, Wellmark Health Plan of Iowa, Inc., and Wellmark Value Health Plan, Inc. are independent licensees of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association.

**About Iowa Kidstrong**

Iowa Kidstrong is a nonprofit organization that promotes healthy and active lifestyles among central Iowa youth. Seeking to interrupt the controllable patterns that lead to poor health, youth is provided with accessible and encouraging fitness environments to create a wellness culture that recycles itself for generations to come. For more information, visit <http://www.iowakidstrong.com/about.html>

**About the Grand Blue Mile**

Grand Blue Mile, a Drake Relays event, is an annual one-mile fitness run/walk presented by Wellmark Blue Cross and Blue Shield to engage individuals at all stages of fitness, encourage healthy habits and celebrate personal achievement. The annual wellness event, established in 2010, includes recreational, competitive and invitational events featuring a field of elite male and female track and field athletes from around the world. Proceeds from the event benefit Iowa Kidstrong, Inc., an organization dedicated to promoting healthy, active lifestyles among youth. For more information, visit [grandbluemile.com](http://grandbluemile.com).