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NBA Legend Bill Walton Teams Up with Citizenship Counts to Support Arizona Couple, 69, Who Will Walk/Bike Across America in Support of Gerda Weissmann Klein's Citizenship Mission

A 3,500-mile Journey to Encourage Civic Participation and Raise Funds for Citizenship Counts

SAN DIEGO, CA (January 19, 2012) On January 27, 2012, Citizenship Counts Board Member Diane Eckstein and her husband, John, will begin a cross-country *Journey* with their dog, Kipp, walking and biking 3,500 miles, to promote engaged citizenship and awareness of the naturalization process and to raise funds to advance Citizenship Counts' efforts.

San Diego native and NBA legend Bill Walton will speak at the kickoff festivities and ride alongside Dr. John Eckstein for the first leg of his 3,500-mile *Journey*. The *Journey* will launch from San Diego High School, where students, who recently completed the Citizenship Counts civics curriculum, and other community members will cheer Dr. Eckstein on as he embarks on his cross-country adventure.

Citizenship Counts, a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization headquartered in Phoenix, Arizona, was founded by Gerda Weissmann Klein as her way of giving back to the country that saved her life. Klein is a celebrated author, Holocaust survivor, 2010 Presidential Medal of Freedom recipient, and proud naturalized citizen. "To perpetuate the miracle that is America," says Klein, "we must teach our children about its rich history as a nation of immigrants who chose this country and have given meaning to its ideals."

The Ecksteins' inspirations for their upcoming journey are Klein's life and the work of Citizenship Counts. "We are proud to be Americans," the Ecksteins say, "and hope that our *Journey* will inspire and educate young people to be good, participating citizens."

"As the teacher that helped students organize this celebration, I believe it is a valuable opportunity for students to welcome some of our newest American citizens as they complete this important and final step to citizenship," said Arlene Harris, government teacher at San Diego High School. "I believe it is important to instill patriotism and an appreciation for the value of citizenship in today's youth. San Diego High School is committed to citizenship education for its students, and we are proud to participate in this program, which teaches the ideals that are paramount for our community."

Throughout the *Journey* route, Citizenship Counts will provide middle and high school classrooms with the Citizenship Counts curriculum, free of charge. The multi-disciplinary lessons teach students about their rights and responsibilities as citizens of our country and how immigration has created a diverse and inclusive America.

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A Journey that Counts will travel from San Diego to New York City, where the Statue of Liberty stands as a beacon of hope for many Americans, with stops in the following cities:

- San Diego, CA;
- Tucson, AZ;
- Phoenix AZ;
- Las Cruces, NM;
- Austin, TX;
- College Station, TX;
- Dallas, TX;
- Little Rock, AR;
- Nashville, TN;
- Indianapolis, IN;
- Chicago, IL;
- Pittsburgh, PA;
- Washington, D.C.;
- Philadelphia, PA; and
- New York City, NY.

In each city, students and community members will participate in naturalization ceremonies or other celebrations of citizenship and civic engagement. The Ecksteins will maintain a blog where supporters can track their progress. Their dog, Kipp, will have his own blog, describing his experiences as he travels across America.

Dr. John Eckstein has been a primary care physician for 38 years. For the past 24 years, he has worked with Mayo Clinic Arizona. He and his wife, Diane, learned from their parents that American freedom is an extraordinary gift and that our country offers tremendous opportunities. They are dedicated to Citizenship Counts' mission to help young Americans understand the blessings of American citizenship and become active in their communities.

About Citizenship Counts

Citizenship Counts is a national, nonpartisan 501(c)(3) organization, whose mission is to **educate** today's youth on the tenets of citizenship, encourage them to **appreciate** their rights and responsibilities as Americans, and give them an opportunity to **celebrate** their citizenship by hosting a naturalization ceremony or participating in a service-learning project. <http://citizenshipcounts.org>

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