

## FEBRUARY – BACKGROUND INFORMATION

### **1. Black History Month**

The importance of black history in America has been recognized during the month of February each year since 1926. First, it was celebrated as Negro History Week and later became Black History Month. Blacks have lived in America since colonial times, but they did not gain a respectable presence in American history books until the 20th century. The recognition of black history and the creation of Black History Month are attributed to Dr. Carter G. Woodson, who was the son of former slaves and spent his childhood working in Kentucky coal mines. He enrolled in high school at age twenty and eventually graduated from Harvard with a Ph.D. During his studies, it disturbed Dr. Woodson to discover that history books ignored the black-American population. He sought to correct this by establishing The Association for the Study of Negro Life and History (now called The Association for the Study of Afro-American Life and History) in 1915. A year later, Woodson founded the widely respected *Journal of Negro History*. In 1926, he launched Negro History Week as an initiative to bring national attention to the contributions of black people. Negro History Week later evolved into Black History Month, which is still observed annually.

### **2. American Heart Month**

Cardiovascular disease (including stroke) is a leading cause of death for men and women alike in America. One out of every three adults in the U.S. has some form of this deadly disease. Since 1963, the United States Congress has required the President to proclaim February as “American Heart Month” in an effort to increase heart health awareness. People need to understand the risk factors, such as high blood pressure, high cholesterol, diabetes, obesity, physical inactivity, tobacco use, and family history. Awareness can then lead to lifestyle changes and the development of healthier daily habits. The hope is that adults will pass these better habits onto our children and eventually break the heart disease cycle that currently grips this country.

### **3. Groundhog Day**

The legend of Groundhog Day stems from an ancient belief that hibernating creatures are able to predict the arrival of springtime by their emergence from their dens. German immigrants known as the Pennsylvania Dutch brought the tradition to America in the 18th century. Over time, it developed into an annual celebration held on February 2nd in the United States and Canada. According to folklore, if it is cloudy when the groundhog comes out of his burrow, winter will soon end. If it is sunny, and the groundhog sees his shadow, winter weather will continue for six more weeks. The largest Groundhog Day festival is held in Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania. Many people gather there every year on Gobbler's Knob, a wooded knoll just outside the town, to see what the groundhog named Punxsutawney Phil will do. Approximately 90% of the time, Phil sees his shadow. Phil started making his predictions in 1887 and has become an American institution. Area residents claim he has never been wrong.