AGING & independence

COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES AGENCY
AGING & INDEPENDENCE SERVICES

STAYING SAFE AND ENGAGED DURING COVID-19

By Kim Gallo
Director, Aging & Independence Services

In the matter of a few weeks, COVID-19 has turned our world upside down. In California, as in many places across the nation and around the world, residents are adjusting to life under a stay-at-home order. People can only leave home to handle essential needs, such as going to the grocery store or working at a job that is deemed essential. These "social distancing" measures are helping to keep our region safe. With fewer opportunities for the virus to spread, more San Diegans will stay healthy. If fewer people become ill with serious complications, our healthcare systems will not become overwhelmed and will be able to give each patient appropriate treatment. Fewer people will die from the disease in our region due to everyone working together.

But staying at home all day for weeks on end is hard for many. Humans are social creatures and we miss opportunities to visit with friends and family. We miss outings too, such as the ritual of going to coffee once a week with friends or attending group exercise class. Together, we must look for new ways to connect and support one another.

San Diego Oasis, a lifelong learning non-profit for adults 50 and over, works to ensure that older adults have opportunities to connect, grow, and give back. During "normal" times, the Oasis La Mesa Lifelong Learning and Wellness Center is bustling with activity. Students can look forward to challenging their minds and bodies, making new friends, and enjoying interaction and a sense of community. Hundreds of other Oasis classes take place throughout the community at libraries, community centers, and the North County Lifelong Learning Center in Escondido.

Lorelei Taylor, Oasis instructor and Chair of the AIS Advisory Council, conducts an online class on downsizing.

But, these aren't normal times. All non-essential businesses are closed. Gatherings are strictly off-limits. Even before public health orders came out, on March 13, Oasis suspended in-person classes to protect the physical health of older adult members and staff.

Yet, the Oasis staff knew that thousands of local older adults would still be counting on them. Simona Valanciute, President and CEO of San Diego Oasis, notes, "Even on

(Continued on page two)

STAY HEALTHY, STAY HOME!

To view the up-to-date orders, guidelines, and recommendations from the County's Public Health Officer, visit **www.coronavirus-sd.com**.

P.6 Recommendations for those at high risk of COVID-19

(Continued from page one)

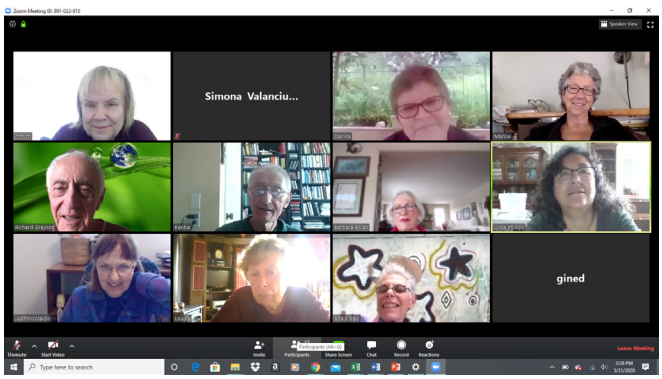
a good day, social isolation is a very important healthcare issue that affects both the cognitive and physical health of older adults. We really are working with a population that is now extremely in danger."

Simona and her staff jumped at the opportunity to shift Oasis programming to an online platform and conduct classes via videoconferencing. Over the course of a weekend, they got themselves up to speed on remote learning and trained instructors who were willing to shift their classes online. They created a tutorial video for older adults to learn how to use the online platform and posted it on their website. By Monday, March 16, Oasis was offering live, online classes. Although most classes do use the online platform, a conference call or call-in option is available for some classes.

Hundreds of older adults are now turning to their computers to take classes. To honor the financial hardship that some may be experiencing, a handful of classes are accessible to the public for free, covering topics such as meditation, music, and caregiving during COVID-19. Other courses are offered at prices that are affordable for many—between $5 and $15 per class session. Simona notes, "We've created this entire menu of free and low-cost classes…geography no longer matters…technology learning continues, philosophy continues, language learning continues."

The shift has been well-received. While most students wish they could continue to attend classes in person at their beloved center or in the community, the need to shift to remote learning has also been an opportunity for growth. Jolyn Parker, Vice President of External Relations, explains, "We believe that we will be able to reach a new audience, an audience that we lost because some people can no longer physically come to Oasis." She notes that one person who had been signed up to receive communication from Oasis since 2011, only recently signed up to take her first ever class, offered online.

Still, the shift to online learning can be difficult for those with limited experience with computers. Oasis staff are doing their best to provide support for those needing assistance to access course content. In addition, some participants are nervous to log on because of security. While online platforms are wonderful tools, recently there have been some widely publicized concerns about security. To address these concerns, Oasis is now requiring a password for all participants to access each class. They also have staff members monitoring each class to ensure there are no disturbances from unauthorized users.



Oasis classes now take place online to enable older adults to learn and connect from home.

One month in, the Oasis team is adjusting to a new normal. Simona credits her staff and nearly 100 office volunteers for ensuring a smooth transition. She says, "I'm incredibly proud of our team. These people have not skipped a beat!" Members are voicing their appreciation too, sharing comments such as "This is so awesome! Being able to take classes is so enriching."

Oasis is providing an essential outlet for learning, connection, and perhaps a hint of normalcy during these challenging times. Yet, Simona worries about how non-profits will sustain themselves over the long-haul. "Grants are gone," she explains, "If we can't open the doors, we exhaust our reserves." She urges everyone who is able to continue supporting their favorite charities to help them weather the storm.

Even in uncertain times, the Oasis team remains committed to serving older adults. "We love the community. We believe in this." Simona says. To recognize the tremendous value San Diego Oasis brings to the older adult community, the organization was recently honored with the ***Aging & Independence Services Live Well San Diego Public Health Champion 2020 Award***. Recipients have made outstanding contributions to the prevention of disease and/or the promotion of health. To learn more about Oasis or sign up for a class, visit **www.sandiegooasis.org** or call **(619) 881-6262**.

In the COMMUNITY

RESOURCES TO SUPPORT OLDER ADULTS DURING COVID-19

AIS is working to support older adults who are staying safe at home. Visit **www.aging.sandiegocounty.gov** and click on the link at the top of the page titled "Community Resources for Older Adults During COVID-19." You will find resources to assist with food, transportation to essential services, mental health support, pet food, physical fitness, social engagement, and more. For assistance accessing resources, call **2-1-1** or the AIS Call Center at **(800) 339-4661**.

Another online resource to help people stay healthy and engaged from home is **www.livewellsd.org/livewellathome**. The LiveWell@Home site includes resources for people of all ages, including adults and older adults. Categories include fitness, mindfulness, and social engagement opportunities.

STAY FIT FROM HOME

Physical fitness remains important for everyone while we stay home. The Feeling Fit Club can help! Designed for older adults, the Feeling Fit Club is a functional fitness program. While in-person classes are not currently available, older adults can follow along to episodes on TV: Monday – Friday at 8:00 a.m., 1:00 p.m., and 4:00 p.m. on Cox channels 19 or 24, Time Warner channel 85, and U-verse channel 99. The classes can also be accessed online or by DVD. Visit **www.aging.sandiegocounty.gov** or call **(858) 495-5500** for details.

LEGAL SERVICES

Elder Law & Advocacy, a nonprofit organization, provides free legal and Medicare counseling services to older adults residing in San Diego County. Calls for legal assistance usually cover many subjects, but many recent calls now are related to COVID-19. For example, many calls are about rental issues. As a result, staff attorneys have focused on emergency eviction moratorium legislation by cities, the County, and the state, as well as local court updates.

Medicare clients continue to have questions about coverage since the COVID-19 pandemic began affecting California. For example, Medicare has made Telehealth services more accessible and waived some of the rules for skilled nursing care due to the Coronavirus. Medicare Part B (outpatient services) covers a test to see if you have coronavirus (officially called 2019-novel coronavirus or COVID-19). This test is covered when your doctor or health care provider orders it.

Elder Law & Advocacy remains ready to assist clients with their legal and Medicare issues by phone and email. To make an appointment, call **(858) 565-1392**.

STILL TIME TO COMPLETE THE 2020 CENSUS!

Every 10 years the federal government is mandated by the U.S. Constitution to count all persons living in the United States through the decennial Census. A Census undercount for a region could result in the loss of precious dollars for public services for a decade. From schools, to transportation, to representation in Congress, our participation can shape the future of the San Diego region for the next 10 years. Over the past month, each household should have received a letter with a unique ID to use when filling out the questionnaire.

If you misplaced the ID in your invitation letter, you can wait for a new letter to arrive in the mail in the coming weeks. Or, you can respond online now without an ID. Go to **my2020census.gov**. Click "Start Questionnaire." Select the link that says, "If you do not have a Census ID, click here." It is located below the Census ID login field.

Be counted in 2020. Help ensure our community receives crucial funding by participating in the U.S. Census.

VOLUNTEERS OF THE MONTH

Mary Thornton

Mary Thornton, a volunteer with the Scripps Mesa Retired Senior Volunteer Patrol (RSVP), is the April 2020 Volunteer of the month. She was nominated by Jim Schulte, the site administrator. Scripps Mesa RSVP is part of the San Diego Police Department. Senior volunteers assist area police stations by engaging in crime prevention activities and supplying additional resources to the departments. They also perform vacation house checks and You Are Not Alone (YANA) checks on homebound, isolated seniors.

Unfortunately, because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the volunteer program is currently on hold (staff are taking on critical volunteer functions, such as checking in on seniors through the YANA program). Mary is eager to return to her volunteer duties when it is safe to do so. During "normal" times, Mary wears several different hats within the RSVP program. She patrols the Scripps Ranch and Mira Mesa communities approximately once a week, conducting crime prevention activities and ensuring the safety and welfare of the communities' residents. She also acts as the patrol manager once a week, and coordinates two daily patrols in Scripps Ranch and Mira Mesa. In addition, Mary patrols Balboa Park once a month and serves as police department ambassador to all who visit the park.

Over the years, Mary has graciously accepted more responsibility and was promoted up through the ranks to become the assistant administrator of the Scripps Mesa RSVP office. In this role, Mary provides expert support to the administrator, as well as to the entire team. She maintains records and coordinates the patrol schedule. She also organizes several events throughout the year. Mary has become a key contributor to the success of the unit.

In addition to volunteering with RSVP, Mary volunteers at The San Diego Food Bank, helping to distribute food to low-income seniors. She also volunteers at the Scripps Ranch Community Association, assisting with their newsletter.

Mary is known for her dedication to volunteerism and for her cheerful demeanor. She represents the Retired Senior Volunteer Patrol in a professional and caring way, and is a positive reflection of the RSVP program, and in turn, the San Diego Police Department.

Mary says her favorite part of volunteering is the feeling that she is making a difference in the lives of other individuals in the community. While volunteering in the traditional sense is not an option during COVID-19, Mary continues to look out for others, such as by checking in with older neighbors to ensure that they have everything they need. San Diego is lucky to have residents like Mary Thornton. Thank you so very much, Mary, for all that you do!

VOLUNTEER FROM HOME

During the COVID-19 pandemic, older adults and other high risk individuals who want to volunteer have opportunities to do so from home. Although the RSVP/SVA program does not coordinate these opportunities, interested volunteers are encouraged to explore the following volunteer websites:

- **www.JustServe.org**
- **www.VolunteerMatch.org**
- **https://createthegood.aarp.org**

For details on the RSVP/SVA program, call **(858) 505-6399** or email **MaryAnne.Briggs@sdcounty.ca.gov**.

SVA SENIOR VOLUNTEERS IN ACTION

Give. Grow. Volunteer.

Are you looking for a flexible volunteer opportunity to feed your mind, body, and spirit while serving the community? Aging & Independence Services can help! Through Senior Volunteers in Action (SVA) and the Retired and Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP), you can make an impact in rewarding fields such as law enforcement, senior services, youth mentorship, museums and the arts, and more. Contact the senior volunteer programs office today at **(858) 505-6399**.

BE AWARE: SCAMS

PROTECT YOURSELF FROM COVID-19 SCAMS

Economic Impact Payment Scams

The IRS will deposit your economic impact payment (stimulus check), if you are eligible, into the direct deposit account you previously provided on your tax return. Otherwise, they will send you a paper check. The IRS will **not** call and ask you to verify your payment details. Do not give out your bank account, debit account, or PayPal account information—even if someone claims it is necessary to get your economic impact payment. Beware of this scam.

If you receive a call, do not engage with the scammers or thieves. Just hang up. If you receive texts or email claiming that you can get your money faster by sending personal information or clicking on links, delete them. Do not click on any links in those emails.

Reports are also swirling about bogus checks. If you receive a "check" for an odd amount (especially one with cents), or a check that requires that you verify the check online or by calling a number, it's a fraud.

IRS-Impersonation Telephone Scams

An aggressive and sophisticated phone scam targeting taxpayers, including recent immigrants, has been making the rounds throughout the country. Callers claim to be employees of the IRS, but are not. Victims are told they owe money to the IRS and it must be paid promptly through a pre-loaded debit card or wire transfer. If the victim refuses to cooperate, they are then threatened with arrest, deportation or suspension of a business or driver's license. Or, victims may be told they have a refund due, to try to trick them into sharing private information.

With COVID-19 scams, they may urge you to pay this fake "debt" with your economic impact check. For those who receive an actual check, they may ask you to endorse it and forward to them for "payment of past debts."

Remember: Scammers Change Tactics—Variations of the IRS impersonation scam continue year-round and they tend to peak when scammers find prime opportunities to strike—like a new economic impact check being sent.

Surge in Email, Phishing, and Malware Schemes

Scam emails are designed to trick taxpayers into thinking these are official communications from the IRS, tax industry professionals, or tax software companies. These phishing emails ask taxpayers about a wide range of topics—related to refunds, filing status, ordering transcripts and verifying PIN information—in order to steal your personal information or file false tax returns.

When people click on links from these phishing emails, they are taken to sites designed to imitate an official-looking website, such as IRS.gov. The sites may also carry malware, which can infect people's computers to steal their files or record their keystrokes.

Also be aware of email phishing scams that appear to be from the IRS and include a link to a bogus web site intended to mirror the official IRS web site. These emails contain the direction "you are to update your IRS e-file immediately." The emails mention USA.gov and IRSgov (without a dot between "IRS" and "gov"). Don't get scammed. These emails are not from the IRS.

Don't be a victim! Visit **www.irs.gov/coronavirus** for the latest information on scams related to economic impact statements. For details on additional scams to look out for, as well as ways to protect yourself, visit the San Diego District Attorney's website at **www.SanDiegoDA.com**.

MEASURES FOR HIGH-RISK INDIVIDUALS

Individuals and caregivers can take steps now to slow the spread of respiratory infectious diseases, including COVID-19. California Department of Public Health (CDPH) recommends implementing the following steps:

- **Stay home as much as possible**. For the latest orders, guidelines, and recommendations, visit **www.coronavirus-sd.com**.
- **Avoid non-essential gatherings.** If you must be around others to access essential services (e.g., grocery shopping), keep a distance of at least 6 feet and wear a cloth face covering.
- **Stay home when sick.** Doing so is of critical importance to halt the possible spread of illness.
  - If you have an elevated temperature, remain at home until fever has been gone for at least 3 days without the use of fever-reducing medicines.
  - Seek immediate medical care if symptoms become more severe, (e.g., high fever or difficulty breathing).
- Clean and disinfect your home to remove germs: practice routine cleaning of frequently touched surfaces (for example: tables, doorknobs, light switches, handles, desks, toilets, faucets, and sinks).
  - Prepare a bleach solution by mixing 5 tablespoons (1/3rd cup) bleach per gallon of water
  - Or, use a household cleaner that is registered with the EPA as approved for killing emerging viral pathogens (e.g., Clorox Disinfectant Wipes, Lysol, etc.). Consult **www.cdc.gov** for information on preventing COVID-19 spread in communities.
- Use "respiratory etiquette."
  - Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, throw the tissue away, and then wash your hands. Have adequate supplies within easy reach, including tissues and no-touch trash cans.
- Wash hands frequently for at least 20 seconds.
  - Encourage hand washing by caregivers, family, and friends.
  - Use alcohol-based hand sanitizers (at least 60% alcohol) to supplement hand washing. Alcohol-based cleaners, versus bleach, are also better to use on electronics such as cell phones.
  - Routinely clean frequently touched surfaces.
  - Avoid touching eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands.
- Have supplies on hand (e.g., enough groceries and household goods to last several weeks).
- Contact your healthcare provider to ask about obtaining extra necessary medications to have on hand in case you need to stay home for a prolonged period of time.
- If you cannot get extra medications, consider using mail-order for medications.
- Be sure you have over-the-counter medicines and medical supplies (tissues, etc.) to treat fever and other symptoms. Most people will be able to recover from COVID-19 at home.
- Have a plan for if you get sick:
  - Consult with your health care provider for more information about monitoring your health for symptoms suggestive of COVID-19.
  - Stay in touch with others by phone or email. You may need to ask for help from friends, family, neighbors, community health workers, etc. if you become sick.
  - Determine who can provide you with care if your caregiver gets sick.
- More information for people at higher risk and special populations can be found at: **www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/specific-groups**

COMMUNITY CALENDAR

Please note: Due to coronavirus, all of the classes and events listed below are being offered online.

APRIL 29, WEDNESDAY
10-11:30 A.M.

An online course, ***Android 101*** (course #122), will be offered by San Diego Oasis. Learn how to get more out of your Android phone. Install apps, increase the text size, browse the internet, use email, text, and more. Cost: $5. Visit **www.SanDiegoOasis.org** for information and to register. Instructions on how to use Zoom, the online platform used to conduct courses, is also on the website. For questions, call **(619) 881-6262**.

APRIL 30, THURSDAY
10 A.M.

The YMCA of San Diego County is offering free online courses for the community. ***"Coffee Talks"*** are being hosted throughout the coming weeks by the YMCA Active Adults program to keep seniors connected. One upcoming offering includes ***Keep the party going! Tips on how to celebrate birthdays, milestones, and holidays during COVID-19***. To register, visit **www.ymcasd.org/virtual-ymca** and scroll down to "Digital Event Calendar."

FRIDAYS IN MAY
10-10:20 A.M.

Reflections with Peter Bolland, Professor of Philosophy and Humanities at Southwestern College, will be held weekly on Fridays free of charge through San Diego Oasis. To attend this course (#43), visit **www.SanDiegoOasis.org** to register. For additional information, call **(619) 881-6262**.

MAY 5, TUESDAY
12-1 P.M.

A webinar, ***Healthy Living for Your Brain and Body***, is being hosted by the Alzheimer's Association. To register, visit **https://bit.ly/2RnYAB5**. For information or assistance, call the 24/7 helpline at **(800) 272-3900**.

MAY 6, WEDNESDAY
10-11:30 A.M.

Don't Get Hooked: Preventing Financial Abuse, Scams, and Fraud (course #151) will be hosted by San Diego Oasis. A representative from the AIS Outreach & Education team will share an interactive PowerPoint presentation on topics such as grandparent scams, IRS/government scams, and more! Free. Visit **www.SanDiegoOasis.org** for information and to register. For questions, call **(619) 881-6262**.

MAY 7, THURSDAY
8 A.M.-12 P.M.

The San Diego Suicide Prevention Council is hosting the ***9th Annual Faith Breakfast*** over Livestream video/webcast. This is an interfaith event and includes panelists representing Christian, Jewish, Islamic, and Buddhist traditions. Anyone interested in the topics of faith, suicide prevention, and mental health is welcome to attend. RSVP by May 4 at **https://9spcfaithbreakfast.eventbrite.com**. For information, contact Vanessa at **vkies@sdchip.org** or **(858) 609-7976**.

MAY 19, TUESDAY
10-11 A.M.

The Alzheimer's Association is hosting a webinar, ***Understanding Alzheimer's and Dementia***. To register, visit **https://bit.ly/3aYxKqN**. For information or assistance, call the 24/7 helpline at **(800) 272-3900**.

MAY 22, FRIDAY
10:30-11:30 A.M.

An online class, ***Current Events*** (course #137), will be hosted by San Diego Oasis. Facilitator Rick LeVine will cover topics based on what's in the news (elections, court cases, law reform, tax cuts, foreign affairs, etc.). Each meeting includes lecture, dialogue, and Q&A. LeVine is an attorney and a former newscaster. Cost: $10. Visit **www.SanDiegoOasis.org** for information and to register. For questions, call **(619) 881-6262**.

ADVISORY COUNCIL

The AIS Advisory Council is not meeting at this time. Meetings will resume when it is safe to do so. For details, email **Renee.Sherrill@sdcounty.ca.gov**.

SEND IN YOUR ITEMS

We welcome your contributions to this monthly calendar. Just send items by the 1st of each month preceding the issue date to: **sarah.jackson@sdcounty.ca.gov**.

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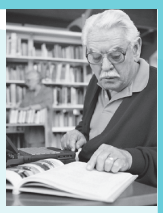
When You Don't Know Where To Turn Turn To Us!



Whether the need is for assessment, service referrals, or follow-up, with just one phone call, you or a loved one can receive help for:

- Seniors
- Disabled adults
- Abused adults
- Those requiring home-based care to prevent institutionalization

As a public agency, we provide comprehensive information and impartial assistance free of charge to county residents. Since 1974, people have been turning to us at Aging & Independence Services. You can too.

Call Toll Free: **(800) 339-4661**
www.aging.sandiegocounty.gov

▪ INFORMATION AND ASSISTANCE ▪ PROTECTION AND ADVOCACY ▪

Aging & Independence ™ is published monthly by the County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency, Aging & Independence Services. The purpose is to inform and recognize older adults, volunteers, and community partners.

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