AGING & independence

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

Living Well with "Buddy AL"

By Jennifer Bransford-Koons
Director, Aging & Independence Services

It's only 11 a.m., but Larry and Janna Wagner have already had quite a full day. The couple has enjoyed a healthy breakfast and some time on the tennis court. Now, music fills the house. Larry leads on piano and Janna joins on the flute. Together they practice songs they'll be performing the following week to dinner guests experiencing homelessness at the Tuesday evening dinner hosted by the non-profit We See You San Diego.

Larry and Janna Wagner

While on the surface their retirement may sound idyllic, Larry and Janna are working very hard. An uninvited guest, "Buddy AL," has entered their lives and requires constant accommodation. Buddy AL is the nickname Janna has given to her Alzheimer's diagnosis and the cognitive challenges she must navigate as a result. It's a journey that began over 10 years ago when she fell on the tennis court. She hit her head and was diagnosed with a traumatic brain injury. Despite undergoing extensive therapy, Janna permanently lost her ability to read. Unfortunately, she started to experience other cognitive challenges, including problems with thinking and memory, which led to a diagnosis of Alzheimer's in 2018.

Nobody relishes receiving a diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease or a related dementia. People often feel frightened or a sense of loss for the future they imagined. When she was first diagnosed, Janna was "so distraught" and suffered from crippling depression. But now, more than six years since her diagnosis, Janna is thriving more than she and Larry could have imagined.

For Janna, living well with Buddy AL takes careful effort and a commitment. She and Larry do all they can to learn about her condition and take steps to improve her health. For instance, the couple decided to follow a low carbohydrate keto diet to reduce inflammation. Janna found that this way of eating helped her cognition and allowed her to function better.

Janna also chooses to stay physically active throughout the day. She'll go on walks in her neighborhood at the edge of the canyon, practice tennis, or go for a swim. If she realizes she's been seated for awhile, she'll jump up and march in place. Janna explains, "research has shown you are keeping your brain going by keeping your circulation going. Jump up! You can't overrate it."

Exercising her brain is a key focus, too. Janna regularly tackles puzzles in her *Easy Crosswords* book with Larry. He lists a clue: "This word starts with 'C.' Instead of paying with credit, you pay with…" Janna thinks for a moment and then the answer comes to her: "cash!" Larry will also challenge her with word games, such as asking her to think of twenty words that start with the letter "B."

Janna has always been an active and involved member of her community and a loving mother to the couple's quadruplet sons. Known for her empathy and enthusiasm, Janna has positively touched many lives. For many years she and Larry co-owned Wagner's School of Music, only

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recently selling the business to one of their sons. She also worked as a schoolteacher, teaching high school math and working with students with disabilities. At one time, she taught students who were considered "severely emotionally disturbed." It was clear to Janna that school administrators only expected Janna to "babysit" these kids rather than attempt to teach them. Janna, however, had other plans. "I decided, they are going to learn to read… and they did! They were so proud."

Despite living with Alzheimer's, Janna is still contributing to the community and enriching others' lives. She finds that doing the weekly performances to guests experiencing homelessness is a deeply satisfying way to contribute to her community. She is also known as the "Battery Lady" for passing out batteries to the guests for the head lamps they use to navigate at night. Janna recommends that everyone look for ways to serve their community. She notes, "If you want to feel good, go out and help somebody. It gives me a feeling that I can make an impact."

And, as Janna has discovered, often the most meaningful interactions involve a complex interplay of helping and being helped, giving and receiving. Recently, Janna has been enjoying the company of a medical school student volunteer through Alzheimer's San Diego's ALZ Companions program. Janna and her new friend spend time together and learn from one another. The pair talk, go on long walks, and laugh a lot. Through the shared social connection, Janna helps to paint a picture of what it can be like to live well with dementia. Her friend better understands the nuances and humanity that lie behind the often-feared diagnosis. These lessons will help touch countless people that the student will serve in the future. Janna shares, "she thinks the world of me…and that means the world to me."

Continuing to nurture relationships is key to Janna's quality of life. She stays in touch with friends and family members. Most importantly, Janna and Larry enjoy a robust and loving marriage. They refer to themselves as "Team Wagner" and are united in their quest to keep Buddy AL under control for as long as possible. As with many couples, Larry finds himself as both a spouse and a caregiver—or perhaps more accurately, a "care partner," as they work together to meet Janna's needs. In some ways, Janna's diagnosis has brought them closer. Larry has had to learn to become more in tune with Janna's emotional needs and the impact of his words, actions, and tone of voice. For instance, when Janna first started struggling to find the word she intended to say, Larry would quickly jump in to help. This frustrated Janna, so he learned to hold back, giving her the time and space to retrieve the words she wished to express. "Now [he] lets me struggle for it, and that works better," Janna says.

Janna is a big believer in the power of perseverance and a positive attitude. Janna shares that she doesn't like being told that she is wrong when she is doing her best. "I don't ever want to hear 'no'…it has a really big effect on the psyche. I just want positive statements. They mean so much." Being surrounded by supportive people helps Janna to persevere to live her best life. One friend told her, "I've never seen anyone who is so undaunted." The label stuck, and now whenever Janna feels down or frustrated, she gets back on track by telling herself, "Stop it! You are UNDAUNTED!" Humor plays a big role too. Larry shares, "We watch a comedy every night. We will repeat some of the lines. That really keeps us going."

While the positive mindset has been helpful, at some points in her journey Janna has felt like giving up. She recalls, "I would lay down on the floor and I'd say, 'Jesus, would you just take me and let me go?'" Fortunately, by seeking treatment for depression and turning to her faith, she has been able to overcome dark times.

Being a caregiver can be challenging at times, too. Larry shares, "Sometimes I just have to be alone. I need to go to my office upstairs." During these moments, Janna may listen to a book using her Kindle e-reader's voice function or she might call her sister or a friend. Taking care of himself and his needs on a regular basis means Larry can be consistently patient, present, and grounded for Janna. In addition, Larry and Janna each attend a support group offered through UC San Diego's Shiley-Marcos Alzheimer's Disease Research Center, one tailored to the needs of people with dementia and the other for caregivers.

Often attributed to Bette Davis, the well-known quip "Old age isn't for sissies" sums up the unique journeys all people take as they get older, whether or not dementia is in the mix. And while some changes in life are inevitable and dementia brings certain limitations that must be accepted, Janna shares perhaps the most valuable lesson of all: "not accepting the thought that you don't matter."

While no one knows what the future holds, one thing is certain. "Team Wagner" is thriving one day at a time, keeping Buddy AL in check.

In the COMMUNITY

SUPPORT FOR PEOPLE LIVING WITH DEMENTIA AND CAREGIVERS

If you or a loved one are living with Alzheimer's or dementia, local support is available. The following organizations provide education, training, support groups, connection to clinical research opportunities, and more:

Alzheimer's San Diego: Visit www.alzsd.org or call **(858) 492-4400**.

Alzheimer's Association San Diego/Imperial Chapter: www.alz.org/sandiego or call the 24/7 helpline at **(800) 272-3900**.

UC San Diego Shiley-Marcos Alzheimer's Disease Research Center: Visit www.adrc.ucsd.edu or call **(858) 822-4800**.

Additional caregiver support, including respite care, is available to caregivers of people living with a variety of conditions through **Southern Caregiver Resource Center**. Visit www.caregivercenter.org or call **(858) 268-4432**.

SERVE AS A LONG-TERM CARE OMBUDSMAN

Long-Term Care Ombudsman program volunteers advocate to improve the quality of life for older adults and people with disabilities who are residents of nursing homes and residential care facilities. Volunteers engage in a variety of tasks, such as: visiting facilities to monitor and address issues, meeting with residents to offer support and assistance, advocating on behalf of residents in the resolution of complaints, and investigating issues of poor care or neglect.

In order to serve as an Ombudsman, prospective volunteers must attend a 36-hour certification training, make a one-year commitment of about five hour per week, have access to reliable transportation, and pass a physical and background check. For more information about volunteering, email **AIS_LTCOP@sdcounty.ca.gov** or call **(800) 640-4661**.

INTEREST LIST FOR NEW AFFORDABLE HOUSING COMMUNITY

New affordable housing will be available for older adults 62+ in San Diego's Little Italy neighborhood later in 2025. Kettner Crossing will offer 64 units (studio, one-bedroom, and two-bedroom apartment homes) affordable to older adults earning 30-50% of the Area Median Income (AMI). To join the interest list to receive updates on this project, visit www.t.ly/vyYJP. If you prefer to get updates by mail, send a postcard with your name, address, and phone number to: Kettner Crossing, PO Box 240, San Francisco, CA 94104.

IHSS RECIPIENT OR CAREGIVER? JOIN THE IHSS/PUBLIC AUTHORITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Current or past In-Home Supportive Services (IHSS) recipients and caregivers (individual providers) are needed to join the IHSS/Public Authority Advisory Committee. The Advisory Committee provides advice and recommendations to the San Diego County Board of Supervisors and other persons or entities related to the delivery of IHSS services. Meetings are currently held in person or via Zoom on the 2nd Friday of each month at 12:45 p.m. Members receive a $50 monthly stipend. For more information, please visit: https://sdihsspa.com/advisorycmte/ or contact Gilberto Contreras-Morales at **(619) 694-3412** or **Gilberto.Contreras-Morales@sdcounty.ca.gov**.

VOLUNTEER OF THE QUARTER

The Retired and Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) is proud to announce Richard Rafter as Volunteer of the Quarter. He was nominated by Marie Meese, Administrator of the Volunteer Senior Patrol from San Diego's Sheriff's Poway Station.

Richard Rafter

On November 20, 2024, Sheriff Martinez awarded Richard a Certificate of Recognition for his dedicated 30 years of service at the Bob Hope Auditorium situated at Marine Corps Air Station Miramar. Throughout his volunteer career, Richard has accumulated an impressive total of 5,283 hours. His commitment and passion for his station and community have made a significant impact, and his service is truly commendable.

Richard's role includes a wide range of essential responsibilities. He participates in regular patrols and sets a high standard for excellence as serving as training coordinator and assistant administrator.

As the training coordinator, Richard leads a team of 19 trainers and serves as a vital link for the county-mandated training directed by the staff at Ridgehaven Sheriff Headquarters. Richard prepares graduates of the San Diego Sheriff's Volunteer Academy to become proficient patrol members, and ensures that all volunteers are informed of new procedural changes discussed at monthly training meetings.. His responsibilities include organizing the training schedule, tracking progress, and maintaining up-to-date documentation, such as the *Patrol Guide* and the *Practical Factors* card. The *Patrol Guide*, which covers the communities of Poway and 4S Ranch, consists of 29 pages of essential information. It provides instructions on operating radios and using the point system to identify foot patrols during communications with dispatch. This guide is used during training and serves as a reference during patrols. Additionally, the *Practical Factors* card is a one-page document that trainers use to outline various activities covered during the first five ride-along. It includes instructions on logging in and out of a shift on the radio and operating traffic signal control equipment at intersections.

As the assistant administrator at the Poway station, Richard tracks volunteer hours and anniversary dates for recognition, prepares monthly meeting agendas, and represents Poway at county-wide administrative meetings. He is an integral member of the radio training staff for each of the quarterly San Diego Sheriff's Volunteer Academy sessions, fostering strong relationships with the Poway Patrol Sergeant and the station command staff.

Richard's unwavering dedication enhances our community and inspires others to engage in service. Thank you, Richard, for everything you do to serve your community.

JOIN THE RSVP/SVA ADVISORY COUNCIL

Are you dedicated to volunteerism? Are you looking for ways to make a difference in your community? Do you have experience working with volunteers in a non-profit setting? Do you have experience working with older adults? If you answered yes to one or more of these questions, consider applying to be part of the RSVP/SVA Advisory Council. The council meets once a month to provide support and direction to RSVP/SVA programs. Activities include co-sponsoring annual RSVP/SVA volunteer recognition events with staff, annually assessing RSVP program performance, helping to promote RSVP/SVA in the community, and providing ongoing advice to staff. You will meet other involved community members and become part of an amazing team of people. All applications will be reviewed and acceptance into the RSVP/SVA Advisory Council requires a majority vote by current council members. For more information, please contact Armida Martinez at **(858) 505-6448** or **armida.martinez@sdcounty.ca.gov**.

LOVE YOUR HEART

This February, the County of San Diego will celebrate its fourteenth year of **Love Your Heart**. During this annual event, organizations from across the U.S. and Mexico provide free blood pressure screenings to the public and share cardiovascular health information. Here are a few steps you can take to be heart-healthy.

KNOW YOUR NUMBERS: Know your heart health numbers to screen and control for high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and diabetes. These numbers include your blood pressure, cholesterol and triglyceride levels, and glucose and A1c levels. Talk to your doctor about getting checked. Visit www.heart.org/HBP to learn more about how to "know your numbers."

GET ACTIVE AND REDUCE STRESS: Perform moderate physical activity for at least 30 minutes five days a week (you can also conduct three 10-minute sessions daily)—and make it fun! Try organizing a walking club with your friends and family. Get outside and enjoy the many beautiful trails and parks we have in San Diego County. Visit www.sdparks.org or call **(858) 694-3030** for more information.

EAT HEART-HEALTHY FOODS: Eat fresh fruits and vegetables whenever possible – at least 5 servings each day, low-fat or non-fat dairy, and foods high in fiber. Avoid foods high in sodium, saturated and trans fats, and sugar. Visit www.heart.org/nutrition for healthy eating ideas.

AVOID TOBACCO: If you are a smoker, get support to help you quit! Call the California Smokers Helpline at **(800) NO BUTTS** (800-662-8887) or visit www.smokefreesandiego.org.

Additional information, resources, and tips can be found at www.LoveYourHeartSD.org.

Blood Pressure Categories

American Heart Association.

BLOOD PRESSURE CATEGORY	SYSTOLIC mm Hg (upper number)		DIASTOLIC mm Hg (lower number)
NORMAL	LESS THAN 120	and	LESS THAN 80
ELEVATED	120-129	and	LESS THAN 80
HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE (HYPERTENSION) STAGE 1	130-139	or	80-89
HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE (HYPERTENSION) STAGE 2	140 OR HIGHER	or	90 OR HIGHER
HYPERTENSIVE CRISIS (consult your doctor immediately)	HIGHER THAN 180	and/or	HIGHER THAN 120

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heart.org/bplevels

NEW TAI CHI CLASSES

Aging & Independence Services is now offering a free, in-person Tai Chi class in Lemon Grove. Tai Chi Moving for Better Balance has shown to improve movement, balance, strength, and flexibility; offer relaxation; and decrease pain and falls. This program is appropriate for adults with or without arthritis, rheumatic diseases, or related musculoskeletal conditions. Older adults at a higher risk of falling are strongly encouraged to attend.

Tai Chi: Moving for Better Balance: **Lemon Grove Library**, 3001 School Lane, Lemon Grove 91945 on Mondays and Fridays from 11 a.m.-12 p.m. To register:

For questions, email **HealthierLiving.HHSA@sdcounty.ca.gov** or call **(858) 495-5500**. To learn about additional Tai Chi classes held throughout the county, visit www.healthierlivingsd.org.

CARE MANAGEMENT: MULTIPURPOSE SENIOR SERVICE PROGRAM

Sometimes staying independent in one's home means getting help. That extra help with bill paying, shopping, laundry, and other tasks can keep someone from needing to live in a nursing home. If you or a loved one are age 65+, eligible for Medi-Cal, and need assistance to continue living safely at home, consider applying for the Multipurpose Senior Services Program (MSSP). MSSP care managers work with the client, family members, and medical team to find and coordinate services in the home. Through the timely use of services, MSSP protects frail older adults and helps them live at home for longer.

Care management services include: a comprehensive health and psychosocial assessment; care planning with the client and family; arrangement of services; coordination of care with other community agencies; some limited payment of in-home services; monthly phone contact; quarterly home visits; and ongoing monitoring/phone contacts as needed.

For more information on MSSP or to apply, contact the AIS Call Center at **(800) 339-4661** M-F from 8 a.m.-5 p.m.

APPLY FOR MONTHLY NUTRITION (CALFRESH) BENEFITS

Older adults, including those who receive income from SSI/SSP, may be eligible for monthly nutrition benefit assistance through CalFresh! CalFresh recipients receive extra money for nutritious food each month. There are also other benefits, such as reduced cost access to museums, discounted Amazon Prime membership, and more! To learn more about CalFresh, including eligibility, visit www.getcalfresh.org. You may also call **2-1-1** to apply.

Would you like some extra support with completing your application? AIS Outreach & Education staff are available to assist you! Please contact Matthew Parcasio at **Matthew.Parcasio@sdcounty.ca.gov** or **(858) 505-6435**.

TOOL TO LOCATE QUALITY ASSISTED LIVING

Accepting that a loved one can no longer be safely cared for at home can be difficult. For those who are looking to identify quality assisted living facilities, Choose Well may be able to help. Choose Well is a free, innovative, web-based tool sponsored by the County of San Diego that helps older adults and their families make informed decisions when selecting assisted living facilities. Visit https://ChooseWellSanDiego.org to discover specially evaluated assisted living facilities that have voluntarily agreed to be scored on 11 measures of quality.

COMMUNITY CALENDAR

Please note: To ensure a timely and relevant calendar, the online and printed versions of this calendar may vary.

FEBRUARY 7, FRIDAY
10 A.M.-12 P.M.

A free ***Art Therapy*** class, presented by Southwestern College, will be hosted at the Otay Mesa-Nestor Library, 3003 Coronado Ave. San Diego, CA 92154 weekly from Feb. 7-March 21 (no class Feb. 14). Designed for older adults, students will learn to use art for self expression, coping skills, mediating emotional and physical challenges, and to help enhance quality of life. Registration required. Sign up online at www.swccd.edu or in person at the library or at Southwestern College's Higher Ed Center San Ysidro, 460 W. San Ysidro Blvd, San Ysidro 92173.

FEBRUARY 10, MONDAY
12-2 P.M.

A free workshop on ***Advance Healthcare Planning*** will be held by Compassion & Choices at the Valencia Park/Malcolm X Public Library, 5148 Market St, San Diego 92114. An Advance Healthcare Directive allows you to designate a trusted person to speak on your behalf regarding your values and choices. No RSVP required. For details, email **advancecareplanning4us@gmail.com**. This program also will be offered at the Scripps Miramar Ranch Library (Feb 5 from 2:30–4:30 p.m. and Feb 18 from 1:30–3:30 p.m.).

FEBRUARY 18, TUESDAY
2-3 P.M.

A free ***Meal Resources in San Diego*** seminar will be offered by Sharp Grossmont Hospital at the Grossmont Healthcare District Conference Center, 9001 Wakarusa St, La Mesa 91942. Discover local resources for free or reduced-price food throughout San Diego County from congregate dining to food pick-up sites to meal delivery programs. To RSVP, visit www.sharp.com/classes or call **(800) 827-4277**.

FEBRUARY 20, THURSDAY
1-2:30 P.M.

Alzheimer's San Diego will offer a free class, ***Maintaining Your Brain Health***, at the Carlsbad Senior Center, 799 Pine Ave., Carlsbad 92008. Learn how to plan for successful, lower-stress family discussions about difficult topics like memory changes, driving, and living alone. To RSVP, visit www.alzsd.org/classes or call **(858) 492-4400**. For details, email **info@alzsd.org**.

FEBRUARY 22, SATURDAY
10-11 A.M.

Unraveling Stress: A Path to Balance and Well-Being will be hosted at the Logan Heights Library, 567 S. 28th Street, San Diego 92113. This presentation will explore the nature of stress and impact on physical and mental health. Through discussion, exercises, and actionable tips, participants will gain tools to navigate life's challenge. Cost: Free. For details, call the library at **(619) 533-3969** or email Kathryn Johnson at **johnsonka@sandiego.gov**.

FEBRUARY 22, SATURDAY
10 A.M.-12 P.M.

The Solana Center will offer ***Backyard Composting Basics***, at the Fallbrook Library, 124 S. Mission Road, Fallbrook 92028. This free workshop will cover the basics of backyard composting. Unincorporated San Diego County resident attendees can receive a free kitchen scraps container. Visit https://solanacenter.org/ to sign up. For more details, call the library at **(760) 731-4650**.

MARCH 3, MONDAY
2:30-3:30 P.M.

An ***Art Buffet for Adults*** will be held at the Carmel Valley Library, 3919 Townsgate Dr., San Diego 92130. Come enjoy arts and crafts with your neighbors! At art buffet, there will be a table with art supplies for different projects that the librarian can help you do. Examples may include creating greeting cards, painting glasses, and more! Contact Brita at **bdubova@sandiego.gov** or **(858) 552-1668**.

MARCH 14, FRIDAY
11 A.M.-12 P.M.

Drop-in ***Digital Literacy and Tech Support*** will be offered at the Rancho San Diego Library, 11555 Via Rancho San Diego, El Cajon 92019. Learn how to use your smart phone, tablet, laptop and other devices. Get help with internet searching, email, downloading apps, eBooks and more. Offered most Fridays. First come, first served. For more information, call **(619) 660-5370**.

SEND IN YOUR ITEMS

We welcome your contributions to this calendar. Email: **sarah.jackson@sdcounty.ca.gov**.

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