

AGING & independence

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

Finding Strength in Stillness

By **Kim Gallo**
Director, Aging & Independence Services

When Cassandra Wang, 57, first learned about Tai Chi in the 1990s she was fascinated: how could something so soft, gentle, and beautiful actually be used for self-protection? Not only that, but the founders of this martial art had the nerve to name it “supreme ultimate fist” (Tai Chi Chuan). She quickly learned that Tai Chi is unlike anything she had ever experienced before. It wasn’t about mastering all of the movements, called “forms,” but rather about learning to embody a philosophy that emphasizes stillness over movement, simplicity over complexity, and that which is soft over that which is hard.

Cassandra’s professional background was anything but soft, simple, and still. After graduating high school in her native state of North Carolina, Cassandra began a career in the U.S. Navy. She was stationed in southern Europe and worked as the nuclear communications manager for the region. As the first woman to serve in a non-clerical role in her division, plus being a person of color, Cassandra realized from day one that “this was going to be a long two years!” She rose to the occasion and went on to have a successful Navy career working in electronics and satellite communications, eventually landing in San Diego. Prior to exiting the military and getting married, Cassandra worked as a fitness coordinator and was responsible for ensuring that hundreds of service members were fit.



CASSANDRA WANG

But as Cassandra began Tai Chi classes at White Dragon Martial Arts, the fitness activities she had worked to perfect for so many years suddenly seemed irrelevant. Her instructors would urge her to relax and she would bark back, “I am relaxed!” Cassandra admits, “What I thought was relaxation wasn’t even close. Trying to figure out how to do the movements, without force, just blew my mind.”

Gradually though, she learned a different way of moving and being in the world. Cassandra continued her own studies and introduced her son to Tai Chi. She also began a new career as a massage therapist, developing an expertise in helping people recover from injuries.

Five years ago, Cassandra learned through friends that Aging & Independence Services (AIS) was hiring instructors to teach Tai Chi to older adults. She nervously

applied for the opportunity and completed the necessary training. Today she is teaching four days a week.

The Tai Chi curriculum offered by AIS is aimed at helping seniors to improve balance and reduce the risk of falls. Students learn to get in touch with their core muscles and to plant their feet appropriately before engaging in movement. Rather than relying on tightening up muscles before moving, Cassandra teaches students to lengthen them and open their joints. She explains, “Most falls

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happen when people are in transition. Our culture is so movement oriented that we don't take the time to make sure we have good footing before we actually move."

Cassandra views Tai Chi as a lifestyle class. Students take the principles they learn in class and apply them to their everyday lives. Many are excited to share their successes with Cassandra. Some report being able to return to activities they previously had given up, such as swimming, tennis, or golf, as they learn to re-engage movement in new ways. Others notice that activities of daily living, such as getting dressed, become easier. One man was pleased to share that he can now put on his pants the way he used to, balancing on one foot at a time. Or, like one seventy-five-year-old student who "couldn't believe she had never paid attention to her own body," some students reap the benefits of movement and body awareness for the first time, realizing it is never too late to prioritize wellness.

One of the biggest rewards of practicing Tai Chi is the cultivation of a perspective that embraces the process of change, including changes that occur due to aging. Cassandra explains, "Older adults get to know their bodies, they become kinder to themselves." She adds, "Sometimes a student will come and say, 'I'm just old and falling apart,' and I'll say, 'look what you can still do. You can come to this class, find new activities, and have community.'" Cassandra also encourages her students to adopt a "self-first" approach to life. So often she sees students rushing around, attending to the needs of everyone else in their lives but not addressing their own. "Sometimes it takes external permission to not work just as hard in retirement as they did when they were employed," she notes.

And while mastering both the physical and philosophical principles of Tai Chi may be hard work, Cassandra makes sure students enjoy the journey. Her classes are fun and playful. She warns, "I will make faces at them if they get too serious so they laugh!"



CASSANDRA LEADS A TAI CHI CLASS IN TIERRASANTA.

Cassandra continues her own practice of Tai Chi and recently earned her first-degree black belt. She notes that becoming a teacher has strengthened her own practice and knowledge of Tai Chi. Most of all, however, she simply enjoys connecting with older adults and sharing the benefits of her favorite martial art: "I love teaching extreme beginners," she says. "These are my people. This is where I started off...with the frustrations...just being lost in your own body."

For those who may be reluctant to try Tai Chi, Cassandra invites potential students to just come and observe. The class can be done completely seated and there are students who come and just do what they can. "This is a community environment," Cassandra explains. "Folks are supportive of whatever level of mobility others have. It is not a competition between you and everybody else."

Free Tai Chi classes taught by qualified instructors are offered by AIS in various communities, such as central San Diego, Linda Vista, Tierrasanta, Imperial Beach, Chula Vista, and Spring Valley. To learn more, visit HealthierLivingSD.org or call **(858) 495-5500**.

MAKE A WORLD OF DIFFERENCE: HELP KIDS LEARN TO READ

Become an AARP Foundation Experience Corps volunteer and help children in kindergarten through third grade learn to read. Volunteers are needed to tutor children in the communities of Southeast San Diego, City Heights/Mid-City, and Lemon Grove. Serve as a role model and be the person who will listen, care, and offer encouragement. Training and support is provided. For details, contact An Das at **(858) 581-5887** or pdas@theci.org.

In the COMMUNITY

VITAL AGING 2019 A SUCCESS

Over 2,300 older adults and professionals participated in Vital Aging 2019: Live Well to Age Well on June 19 at the San Diego Convention Center and California Center for the Arts, Escondido.

Attendees enjoyed the keynote presentation featuring Marilu Henner, the *New York Times* best-selling author, actress, and advocate for healthier living. Workshops, featuring topics such as fitness, brain health, caregiving, and transportation, were also offered.



THANK YOU TO VITAL AGING SPONSORS

The Vital Aging conference would not have been possible without support from generous sponsors. Special thanks to Platinum Sponsor **Sharp Healthcare**. Thanks also to our Gold Sponsors: AARP®, ABC 10News, HHSA-Behavioral Health Services, and MTS, and also to Silver Sponsor NorCAN. Bronze sponsors and exhibitors also made the day a success.

AGE WELL AT VITAL AGING

It has been a year since Age Well San Diego theme teams began meeting to make progress on a variety of goals to help improve the quality of life for older adults in San Diego County. At this year's Vital Aging conference, attendees had the opportunity to learn about what the teams have been working on.

At the main event site, attendees were able to visit an Age Well resource table and hear updates on each of the five theme teams (Dementia-Friendly, Health & Community Support, Housing, Social Participation, and Transportation). They were invited to comment on the Transportation Team's draft *Ride Well* guide, could pick up a copy of the Social Participation Team's *Ways to Engage* handout, and had the opportunity to peruse dementia-friendly materials. Presentations covering brain health, dementia, and transportation options were also offered.

At the Escondido site, attendees heard updates on Age Well teams' activities from event dignitaries. They also had the opportunity to attend a Housing Team presentation on Accessory Dwelling Units (ADU's), commonly known as "granny flats," and a Health & Community Support Team presentation on Villages, which are membership-based social and community support systems. For information on Age Well, email Christina.Patch@sdcounty.ca.gov.

GRANDPARENTS' SYMPOSIUM

Grandparents raising grandchildren and other kinship caregivers are invited to attend a free conference on **Saturday, August 24 from 8 a.m.-1:30 p.m.** at the North Inland Live Well Center, 649 W. Mission Ave., Escondido 92025. The theme of the symposium is "Growing Wings: Embracing the Beauty and Power of Change." Learn about helpful resources and connect with other families experiencing similar circumstances. Lunch and childcare are provided with advance registration. To RSVP, call 2-1-1 or visit www.211sandiego.org/grandparents.

NUTRITION ASSISTANCE EXPANDED

CalFresh, the program formerly known as "food stamps," provides extra money for food each month to households living on a low or fixed monthly income. The program has recently expanded eligibility criteria to allow those on SSI/SSP to receive benefits. Receiving CalFresh will not change SSI/SSP benefit amounts.

You could qualify for CalFresh if your gross monthly income is less than \$2,024 for one person or less than \$2,744 for two people. Apply for CalFresh benefits from home today! Call 2-1-1 or visit GetCalFresh.org.

SENIOR VOLUNTEERS

VOLUNTEERS HONORED FOR MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Retired and Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) and Senior Volunteers in Action (SVA) participants were honored at three regional recognition events during the month of May. Over 200 volunteers were celebrated for the valuable service they contribute to communities within San Diego County. Attendees enjoyed lunch, entertainment, and an inspiring presentation. Awards were given to volunteers serving the highest number of lifetime hours in their region, as well as to those volunteers with over 20 years of service.



SENIOR VOLUNTEERS
IN ACTION



This year's sponsors helped to make the recognition events possible: Accredited Home Care, At Your Home Family Care, Kaiser Permanente, La Vida Real, and San Diego County Credit Union.

UPPER RIGHT: Volunteers from the Lemon Grove Sheriff's Station sharing lunch together.



BELOW LEFT: A Metro Region volunteer shows off her opportunity drawing prize of Padres tickets!



LOWER RIGHT: Volunteers from the San Marcos Sheriff's Station enjoying the festivities at the North Recognition event.



VOLUNTEER WITH ALZHEIMER'S SAN DIEGO

Alzheimer's San Diego is looking for compassionate volunteers to be companions for individuals living with dementia. Volunteers spend time with the person diagnosed with dementia to engage in conversations, play games/puzzles, take a walk, or even just enjoy silence together.

Make a direct impact on a family living with a dementia diagnosis by becoming part of the passionate Alzheimer's San Diego volunteer team! The commitment is four hours per week for six months. Volunteers do not help with any physical or personal care. For details, contact Adrianna at amcollum@alzsd.org.



PARTNER SPOTLIGHT

RESOUNDING JOY

While the emotional benefits of music in general are well-known, the field of music therapy uses scientifically proven approaches to help individuals, families, and small groups to address physical, social, and emotional needs. Founded in 2005, Resounding Joy is San Diego's primary music therapy non-profit, having served over 3,500 clients



already this year. Clients include older adults in long-term care facilities, children, and parents of hospitalized or medically fragile children. Active duty service members and veterans who are struggling with mental health concerns, or who are in rehabilitation, also receive services. The organization's work with veterans has been recognized as a national model.

Resounding Joy enhances the human experience through the therapeutic use of music. Participants indicate improved quality of life, familial bonding, reduced depression, improved mood, and stabilized vital signs, among other benefits. Recently at the Vital Aging 2019 conference, attendees had the opportunity to attend a workshop session with Resounding Joy staff and experience the joy and sense of connection that music-making can provide.

Most of Resounding Joy's clients do not anticipate full recovery from their diagnosis, whether it is dementia, a heart defect, a chromosomal disorder, traumatic brain injury, or



Each month, Aging & Independence Services acknowledges a Live Well San Diego partner—an organization in our community that is committed to the vision of a region that is building better health, living safely, and thriving. To learn more about Live Well San Diego or to become a partner, visit www.livewellsd.org.

post-traumatic stress. Music therapy can break through the fear, pain, and stress caused by these experiences and help improve clients' quality of life. However, for most of these clients, the burden of medical treatment or unemployment strains financial resources. The greater the need, the more Resounding Joy focuses on providing free services.



In addition to goal-specific music therapy services, which account for nearly two-thirds of Resounding Joy's services, the nonprofit also provides social/emotional support programs and recreational music programs, such as concerts.

Volunteers with both musical and non-musical skills are welcome to join Resounding Joy's efforts:

- Joy Givers provide meaningful musical visits with older adults in long-term care facilities or in their homes to help address isolation and loneliness.
- Joy Makers provide vital in-office and remote support to Resounding Joy's limited administrative staff. These "behind the scenes" volunteers help at every level and make every donation count.



To learn more about Resounding Joy, visit www.resoundingjoyinc.org. Want to get involved? Email the team at volunteers@resoundingjoyinc.org.

LIVE WELL SAN DIEGO 5K

Join the County of San Diego and 2-1-1 San Diego for the *Live Well San Diego 5K* on **Sunday, July 28 at 7:30 a.m.** at the County Administration Center, Waterfront Park, 1600 Pacific Highway, San Diego 92101. Thousands will come together in support of a healthy, safe, and thriving San Diego County. Visit the free expo for interactive activities, vendors, snacks, and a kids' fun zone. Registration for the 5K is \$20 for adults, \$15 for ages 8-17, and free for children 7 and under. Optional chip timing is available for an additional \$5. All registered participants will receive a medal and event T-shirt. For details or to register, visit LiveWellSD5K.com.

CAREGIVER CLASSES

Thursday, July 25 from 10 a.m.-12 p.m.-*After the Move to Memory Care* will be held at Alzheimer's San Diego, 6632 Convoy Court, San Diego 92111. Learn how to make the transition to memory care a positive one: ensure quality of life, build relationships, and manage emotions. RSVP to **(800) 272-3900** or www.alz.org/sandiego.

Wednesday, August 14 from 9 a.m.-2 p.m.-*Ageing, Dementia, and Beyond: Navigating the Caregiving Journey* will be held at Solana Beach Presbyterian Church, 120 Stevens Ave., Solana Beach 92075. This free conference will cover health care documents, difficult caregiving conversations, self-care, and healthy living. To RSVP, call Southern Caregiver Resource Center at **(858) 268-4432** or visit bit.ly/CaregiverSD.

ALZHEIMER'S RESEARCH UPDATES

Thursday, August 15 from 5:30-9 p.m.-*2019 Annual Alzheimer's Research Update: Sharing the Latest Discoveries*, sponsored by the Alzheimer's Association, will be held at the San Diego Marriott La Jolla, 4240 La Jolla Village Dr., La Jolla 92037. The event is free, but parking is \$8. RSVP online at bit.ly/2UPx6ba or by calling **(800) 272-3900**.

Saturday, August 24 from 9 a.m.-12 p.m.-*Date with a Cure*, sponsored by Alzheimer's San Diego, will be held at the Irwin M. Jacobs Qualcomm Hall, 5775 Morehouse Dr., San Diego 92121. Hear research updates, participate in a moderated Q&A session, and learn about opportunities to become involved in local Alzheimer's research. To learn more and register, visit www.alzsd.org/events or call **(858) 492-4400**.

COOL ZONES FOR HOT DAYS

Each summer, older adults are encouraged to beat the heat by visiting Cool Zones throughout the county. These air-conditioned sites welcome older adults and persons with disabilities free of charge. Some offer social opportunities, meals, or other resources. Visit CoolZones.org or call **(800) 339-4661** and press "6" to locate a Cool Zone near you.



HEALTHIER LIVING CLASSES

Sponsored by Aging & Independence Services, these free, interactive, and goal-oriented workshops help people manage their health conditions.

Healthier Living with Diabetes: July 18-August 22 (Thursdays), 9:30 a.m.-12 p.m. at the San Marcos Senior Activity Center, 111 Richmar Ave., San Marcos 92069. Okay to begin on July 25.

Healthier Living with Chronic Conditions: July 23-August 27 (Tuesdays), 2-4:30 p.m. at Brookview Village, 13150 Pomerado Rd., Poway 92064. Okay to begin on July 30.

For details, visit HealthierLivingSD.org, or call **(858) 495-5500** to leave a message.

COMMUNITY CALENDAR

JULY 25, THURSDAY
9 A.M.-2 P.M.

An *Interactive Technology & Health Fair for Older Adults and Adults with Disabilities* will be held at the Jackie Robinson YMCA, 151 YMCA Way, San Diego 92102. This free event will include presentations, technology, health screenings, resource tables, and opportunity drawings. Breakfast and lunch will be provided. To register, call (619) 236-6905.

JULY 28, SUNDAY
1-4 P.M.

A *Watercolor Painting Class* will be held at the Encinitas Library, 540 Cornish Dr., Encinitas 92024. Bring your creativity to this fascinating and hands-on painting class. All supplies will be provided. For details, call (760) 753-7376.

JULY 29, MONDAY
1 P.M.

A film, *On the Basis of Sex*, will be shown at the College Avenue Center/Temple Emanu-El, 6299 Capri Dr., San Diego 92120. This film chronicles the true story of Ruth Bader Ginsburg (played by Felicity Jones), her struggles for equal rights, and the early cases that lead to her nomination and confirmation as U.S. Supreme Court Associate Justice. Free for College Ave. members. \$2 for non-members. Call (858) 637-3270 for details.

AUGUST 16, MONDAY
1-2:30 P.M.

Healthy Living for Your Brain & Body: Tips from the Latest Research will be held at Heritage Park Community Center, 1381 E. Palomar St., Chula Vista 91913. Hear from the Alzheimer's Association about research covering diet and nutrition, exercise, cognitive activity, and social engagement. Register online at bit.ly/2XrKral or call (800) 272-3900.

AUGUST 17, SATURDAY
9 A.M.-12 P.M.

A workshop on *Physical and Mental Health* will be held at St. Paul's Villa, 2340 Fourth Ave., San Diego 92101. Topics that will be covered include: common symptoms of aging and how to stay safe at home, memory concerns, addressing the behavioral challenges of aging, and support for caregivers in San Diego. For details or to RSVP, call Linda Spence at (619) 239-2097 or email lsponce@stpaulseniors.org.

AUGUST 22, THURSDAY
1-2 P.M.

Maintaining a Healthy Heart: Know Your Risk Factors and How to Improve Your Heart Health will be held at the Peninsula Family YMCA, 4390 Valeta St., San Diego 92107. A Sharp Healthcare exercise specialist will go over the steps you need to take to maintain a healthy heart and happy life. To register, visit www.sharp.com/classes or call (800) 827-4277.

AUGUST 23, FRIDAY
2-3 P.M.

A presentation on *Transportation Options for Seniors* will be held at the Sharp Grossmont Senior Resource Center, 9001 Wakarusa St., La Mesa 91942. Learn about low-cost, donation-based, and reduced fare transportation possibilities offered in San Diego and East County. To register, visit www.sharp.com/classes or call (800) 827-4277.

AUGUST 28, WEDNESDAY
11 A.M.

A presentation, *Eyewitness to History: A Personal Account*, will be held at the Lawrence Family JCC, 4126 Executive Dr., La Jolla (UTC area) 92037. Lou de Beer, a recipient of the Coronado Avenue of Heroes Award, will relay his personal account of WWII and Korean War experiences. Lou was born in Amsterdam and as a boy, he witnessed the arrival of the German troops in 1940. He lived through 18 months of occupation. Price: \$6. RSVP by August 21 to Melanie at (858) 362-1141.

AUGUST 29, THURSDAY
1-2 P.M.

Tech Drop-in Help will be available at the Vista Library, 700 Eucalyptus Ave., Vista 92084. Get help with using a computer, tablet, or phone. Topics include: basic operation, internet searching, Microsoft Office, Facebook, and more. For information, call (760) 643-5100.

ADVISORY COUNCIL

The AIS Advisory Council will not meet in August. The next meeting will be at noon on Monday, Sept. 10 at AIS: 5560 Overland Ave., 3rd Floor, San Diego 92123.

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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- 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.

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Chief Administrative Officer
Helen Robbins-Meyer

Director, Health & Human Services Agency
Nick Macchione

Director, Aging and Adult Services
Aging & Independence Services
Kimberly Gallo

Editor, Sarah "Sally" Jackson
sarah.jackson@sdcounty.ca.gov

Calendar information is welcome and must be submitted before the 1st of the month preceding the issue date. Submit to: Editor *Aging & Independence*, P.O. Box 23217, San Diego, CA 92193. Or, submit by email to: sarah.jackson@sdcounty.ca.gov

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