

AGING & independence

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

SD-VISA: A Ticket to Help Veterans Live Independently

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

Thirty years ago, when Richard “Rich” Crow, 51, was serving in the Army, he started experiencing some peculiar physical phenomena, such as one of his toes pointing off to the side. He didn’t think too much of it at first, but over time he noticed more and more quirks. The turning point came when Rich was thirty years old. He was running across the road to make a bank deposit for his work. Suddenly his body seized up and he had to limp his way across the road. Rich’s unusual symptoms were no longer just a nuisance.

The diagnosis, multiple sclerosis (MS), was a tough pill to swallow. MS is a chronic and progressive disease that causes nerve damage and a variety of symptoms, such as loss of muscle control and fatigue. For many years, however, he was able to go about his business with relatively little trouble as his MS would remit for periods of time. As someone with a variety of interests and a desire to try new things, Rich tried his hand at several different professions, including work in the restaurant and retail industries. He did everything from cable TV line construction to managing a video game store. Work kept him busy and happy. When the video store he was working at in Maine started to fall on tough times in 2006, he jumped at the opportunity to relocate to San Diego when a family contact connected him to a new job.

Rich’s health continued to decline, but he didn’t give



RICHARD CRAW

up on career aspirations. He went to Grossmont College and earned a degree in forensic technology. Rich struggled, however, to gain practical experience and secure an internship after graduation. “I was walking around with a cane. I think I was discriminated against a little bit because of my health issues,” Rich explains. “Even if it is not on a conscious level, people wonder, ‘Is this guy going to be able to hack it?’ People were hiring. They just weren’t hiring me.” Instead, Rich went to work for a temp agency.

Rich’s world changed dramatically in 2009 when his leg became uncontrollably spastic while he was driving one day and got stuck on the gas pedal. He quickly shifted into neutral, steered off of the road, and physically lifted his leg off of the peddle. Fortunately, no one was hurt, but Rich knew his days of driving were over. “I miss driving, but in my case, it was an easy decision to stop,” Rich notes. “I can’t be the guy who has to look somebody in the eye and say, ‘sorry your kid isn’t alive because I didn’t stop driving.’”

In the following years, Rich experienced a series of challenges: being unable to work, needing to use a power wheelchair to get around, health complications from a blocked pancreatic duct, and transitioning to an

(Continued on page two)



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GET YOUR FLU SHOT

Influenza (“the flu”) is a contagious illness that can be severe and life-threatening, especially for older adults. The flu can make existing health problems worse and is particularly dangerous for people with chronic health conditions, like heart disease and diabetes. The best way to prevent catching the flu is to get the flu vaccine every year. The vaccine is now available at many retail pharmacies and physician offices. To find a site for a flu shot, **call 2-1-1** or visit **www.sdiz.org**.

(Continued from page one)

essentially home-bound life. “The loss of independence was hard,” Rich says. “I used to be a solider, a pretty active guy. Admitting to yourself that you need help and can’t do things on your own anymore is tough.”

He leaned on the Veterans Administration (VA) for assistance at home. However, the health aides weren’t working out for him. One day his contact at the VA told him about the SD-VISA program (San Diego Veterans Independence Services at any Age). Operated by Aging & Independence Services (AIS) and funded by the VA, SD-VISA allows Veterans to have more choice in the providers and types of services they receive to help them continue to live independently and avoid nursing home placement. An Options Counselor works with the Veterans to empower them to make choices and plan for their individual long-term care needs. There is a monthly budget that each Veteran can allocate as they see fit to ensure their needs are met. The program is entirely Veteran-directed with each Veteran selecting their own care providers and making all of the decisions regarding the services they receive.

SD-VISA has been a great fit for Rich. He now has a strong relationship with his current home health aide, Maria, who helps him bathe, dress, and take care of other personal care needs. “Maria has just been awesome. She’s been with me every step of the way,” Rich says. He has also been able to hire housekeepers and help for anything he can’t do on his own. Fortunately, Rich’s health has improved from some of his acute challenges and he is now able to transfer himself out of his wheelchair without assistance.

But even with the increased life satisfaction that participation in SD-VISA has brought, Rich still faces long hours at home alone. He tries to keep busy and find enjoyment by listening to music, playing video games with his responsive hand, and connecting with others on social media. He adopted a cat, “Moose,” from the

local animal shelter, and keeps in touch with his mother, stepdad, and sister.

Still, this isn’t the life he imagined for himself, and at times throughout his journey Rich has struggled to keep going. Counselors at the VA have helped, as have support groups. Over time, Rich has learned to shift his outlook and focus on the positive things in life, like enjoying time with his cat, rather than his limitations. He has also learned the value of living one day at a time. “When you get low, you have to get out of your own head,” Rich explains. “At times when I would be really depressed, I would make short-term goals to keep me going, such as keeping up the fight long enough to see how the last Game of Thrones episode would end.”

Rich has some brighter days ahead. Thanks to the help of local Veteran advocacy groups, he was able to secure a grant for a fully accessible vehicle. In addition to doctor appointments, Rich hopes to have the opportunity to go out to eat and maybe even take trips to the beach. In addition, he is about to move from an apartment into his own home in North County using a VA loan. It is fully accessible with flat entryways, wide walkways and doorways, and an ADA-compliant bathroom. “I’ll still need help from the home health aide, but the more independence I have, the happier I am,” Rich notes. He is looking forward to having a small garden and enjoying a bit of sunshine. He is considering having a friend move in, too.

And while the MS continues to take its toll, Rich isn’t going to give up the fight: “You play the hand that life deals you the best you can. Right now, I am hanging on by my fingernails... waiting for someone to come up with a cure, a miracle. I maintain hope and it keeps me going.”

To be eligible for SD-VISA, a Veteran needs to be seeing a primary care doctor through the San Diego VA Medical Center and be at risk of nursing home placement. To learn more about Aging & Independence Services’ role in the program, contact Stacy Bjerke at **Stacy.Bjerke@sdcounty.ca.gov**.

In the COMMUNITY

AIS LAUNCHES THE AGING ROADMAP

This fall, Aging & Independence Services (AIS) unveiled the Aging Roadmap, a blueprint to help the County and community partners meet the needs of older adults in our region now, and into the future. On September 24, the Board of Supervisors unanimously voted to adopt the Aging Roadmap.

The Roadmap was created to provide a comprehensive regional plan that incorporates Age Well San Diego, the County's age-friendly and dementia-friendly initiative, and broadens focus to include five new areas. The new focus areas are Caregiver Support, Safety, Preparedness & Response, Silver Economy, and Medical & Social Services System. For each area, there is an overarching vision and implementation strategies. To learn more about the Aging Roadmap, visit www.livewellsd.org/agingroadmap.

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 program sponsored by the County of San Diego that helps older adults and their families make informed decisions when selecting assisted living facilities. Visit www.choosewellsandiego.org to discover specially evaluated Choose Well facilities that have voluntarily agreed to be scored on 11 measures of quality.



HELP FOR THOSE WITH MEMORY PROBLEMS

Are you or someone you know living with dementia, memory problems, or other cognitive difficulties? Do you need help with care and making a plan for the future? If you live in the North County region, or within select North-Central San Diego ZIP codes, the FIRST program can help!

FIRST is a free, 4-month home-based program for people who are having difficulties with their memory. The program also helps caregivers of people living with dementia. A social worker will conduct an assessment of your needs and work with you to create a plan. You will get connected to resources and learn ways to handle your situation. Other services include life planning (finances, legal issues, future care) and caregiver support (education, respite).

This program serves most ZIP codes north of the 52 freeway and west of the 15, as well as the communities of Escondido, Rancho Bernardo, Poway, Scripps Ranch, Kearny Mesa, and Tierrasanta. For details, call (858) 495-5537.

FUN AND FRIENDSHIP AT THE INTERGENERATIONAL GAMES

At the recent South County Intergenerational Games, held at the Monteville Community Center, nearly 50 older adults were paired with students from Rohr Elementary School. The pairs enjoyed physical challenges such as field hockey, Frisbee, and dance, plus nutrition games and activities to learn more about one another.

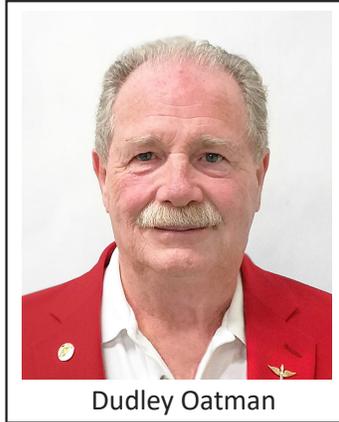
Big thanks to Gold Sponsors: **Community Health Group, County of San Diego HHSA, and Humana**

Thanks also to Silver Sponsors: American Medical Response, Kaiser Permanente, Sharp Chula Vista Auxiliary, San Ysidro Health, St. Paul's Senior Services, and South Bay Health Insurance Services (SBHIS).



VOLUNTEER OF THE MONTH

Dudley Oatman is a volunteer docent at the San Diego Air & Space Museum. He was nominated to be the November 2019 RSVP Volunteer of the Month by Bob Odelson and Katina Pescador. Dudley is an asset to the museum as both a tour guide and as an educator. He is well-liked and respected by museum visitors, staff, and his peers.



As Dudley was going through the docent training program at the museum, he developed a visual study tool using content from the museum's official guidebook and other materials to help him learn the required information. His visual study tool, which he shared with others, presents information in an easy-to-understand manner using story boards, exhibit displays, artifacts, and aircraft. This resource has been helpful to other docent trainees as they learn about the museum's extensive collections.

Dudley is the go-to guy for information about helicopters, fixed-wing aircraft, and the workings of the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). He was a Cobra helicopter pilot in Vietnam, flew commercial jets for years, and even worked for the FAA. Due to Dudley's dedication to the museum and command of the facts, he is often called upon to be a docent at evening events and special group activities.

Dudley is seen as an open and kind-hearted person. A staff member at the museum noted: "For a man who has seen the horrors of war, he has one of the most optimistic points of view I have ever encountered."

Dudley's favorite part of volunteering is sharing his vast array of knowledge with younger generations. The community is lucky to have Dudley as a volunteer. Thank you, Dudley, for your commitment to service!

VOLUNTEER WITH THE RED CROSS

Are you looking for a volunteer opportunity through which you could actually save lives? When you deliver blood to hospitals for the Red Cross, you are delivering hope to a person when they need it most. This volunteer role requires the ability to lift up to 50 pounds and drive in a safe and responsible manner. Volunteers also must know their way around San Diego County. Interested volunteers will need to complete the American Red Cross Defensive Driving Course and have their safe driving record verified. Different shifts are available on weekdays and weekends. To learn more, contact Mary Anne Briggs at **(858) 495-5039** or maryanne.briggs@sdcounty.ca.gov.

VOLUNTEER WITH THE FLEET SCIENCE CENTER

The Fleet Science Center in Balboa Park is looking for group ambassadors. These volunteers will be relied upon to provide an excellent first impression of The Fleet and to help field trip visitors get ready for a fun day! During the school year, The Fleet hosts school groups from diverse backgrounds. Group ambassadors are responsible for greeting school groups as they arrive, providing an informal orientation, and helping them into the theater. This is a fast paced, interactive position that is sure to keep you on your feet. An orientation and training is provided. Shifts available Monday-Friday from 9-11:30 a.m. To learn more, contact Mary Anne Briggs at **(858) 495-5039** or maryanne.briggs@sdcounty.ca.gov.



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**.



PARTNER SPOTLIGHT

GARY AND MARY WEST FOUNDATION

The Gary and Mary West Foundation, part of San Diego-based nonprofit West Health, has been instrumental in developing several important healthcare initiatives in the region that help older adults to live healthy, safe, and thriving lives. Recently, the Foundation celebrated the opening of the Gary and Mary West PACE healthcare center in North County (located at 1706 Descanso Ave., San Marcos 92078).

PACE, which stands for Program of All-inclusive Care for the Elderly, is a model of person-centered care that has been shown to reduce rates of emergency room visits, unnecessary hospital admissions, long-term nursing home placements, the cost of care, and strain on family caregivers. Over 90 percent of PACE participants are able to successfully remain in their homes and communities. Many live longer, are more socially engaged and have a better quality of life than those in nursing homes or other institutional settings.

Established with a grant from the Gary and Mary West Foundation, the nearly 20,000-square-foot center includes a team of physicians, social workers, nurses, nutritionists, and physical and occupational therapists. The Gary and Mary West PACE team offers high-quality, comprehensive, and coordinated healthcare, social services, and support for vulnerable seniors with chronic care needs who want to successfully age in place rather than in a nursing home. In addition to medical care, the center offers dentistry, social service assistance, and adult day care. Transportation to and from the center and outside medical appointments is provided. Gary and Mary West PACE also offers social activities, meals, a pharmacy, caregiver training and support groups, and other services. All services are managed by an interdisciplinary care team to ensure the coordination of care

and clear communication to participants and their families.



The Gary and Mary West PACE is among the first programs in the nation to have a co-located state-of-the-art dental facility, serving both PACE

participants and area seniors. The Gary and Mary West Senior Dental Center offers comprehensive oral healthcare services from specialists trained in geriatric dentistry, including oral exams, cleanings, fillings, treatment for gum disease, extractions and dentures.

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.



RIBBON CUTTING FOR THE GARY AND MARY WEST PACE. FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: RENA SMITH, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, AND TIM LASH, PRESIDENT, OF GARY AND MARY WEST PACE; REBECCA JONES, MAYOR OF THE CITY OF SAN MARCOS; GARY AND MARY WEST, FOUNDERS OF WEST HEALTH; SHELLEY LYFORD, PRESIDENT AND CEO OF THE GARY AND MARY WEST FOUNDATION.

Medicare and Medi-Cal reimburse PACE for care. If participants are enrolled in Medicare and Medi-Cal, they will pay nothing, or they will pay their Medi-Cal “share of cost.” The program also accepts people enrolled only in Medi-Cal and people who want to pay privately.

In addition to its support of the new PACE program, the Gary and Mary West Foundation and West Health have been drivers of other local health care initiatives, including developing the Gary and Mary West Senior Emergency Care Unit at UC San Diego Health, California’s first nationally-accredited, senior-specific emergency department. To learn more about the Gary and Mary West Foundation and West Health, visit www.westhealth.org. To apply or learn more about eligibility for Gary and Mary West PACE, call (760) 280-2230.



JOIN THE FEELING FIT CLUB

The Feeling Fit Club is a free functional fitness program for older adults, focusing on aerobic endurance, strength, flexibility, and balance. With more than 25 locations across San Diego County, there is sure to be one near you. The Feeling Fit Club episodes are also available on television and online. For class schedules, locations, and additional information, visit www.HealthierLivingSD.org or call (858) 495-5500.

NEW TAI CHI CLASSES!

Improve your balance and mobility with Tai Chi! Two new free classes are now offered:

Montgomery-Waller Rec. Center: 3020 Coronado Ave., San Diego 92154. Tuesdays and Thursdays from 2-3 p.m.

Norman Park Senior Center: 270 F St., Chula Vista 91910. Mondays and Wednesdays from 11:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m.

Classes are sponsored by Aging & Independence Services. For more information and the complete class schedule, visit www.HealthierLivingSD.org or call (858) 495-5500 to leave a message.

CAREGIVER WORKSHOPS

Wednesday, November 13 from 10-11:00 a.m.: *It takes a Village: Assembling Your Care Team*, will be held at Southern Caregiver Resource Center, 3675 Ruffin Rd., San Diego 92123. Learn how to build an effective care team and support network. To register, visit <http://bit.ly/VillageCare> or call (858) 268-4432.

Wednesday, November 20 from 3-4 p.m.: *Understanding and Responding to Dementia-Related Behaviors* will be held at the Del Mar Civic Center, 1050 Camino del Mar, Del Mar 92014. RSVP to the Alzheimer's Association by calling (800) 272-3900 or visiting www.alz.org/CRF.

Saturday, November 16 from 10 a.m.-12 p.m.: *Dementia 101* will be held at Alzheimer's San Diego, 6632 Convoy Ct., San Diego 92111. An overview of memory loss and dementia. Learn about risk factors, symptoms, and resources for help. To RSVP, visit www.alzsd.org or call (858) 492-4400.

SPOTLIGHT ON FALL PREVENTION

One in four older adults (65+) fall each year. The good news is that many falls are preventable and you can reduce your risk of falling:

- **Stay active** to improve your strength, flexibility, and balance. Walking, dancing, Tai Chi, and exercise classes are all good ways to improve your health.
- **Talk with your doctor** about health issues such as osteoporosis, your Vitamin D level, medications, difficulty with hearing or vision, or if you feel faint, off-balance, or dizzy. Your doctor or pharmacist can also look at your medications to check for side effects that can affect your coordination.
- **Have your vision checked** at least one time each year by a professional.
- **Make your home safer:** remove things you could trip or slip on, maintain good lighting and night-lights, and install strong grab bars and handrails. Our eyes often need more light as we age.

For more tips, visit: www.SanDiegoFallPrevention.org.

COMMUNITY CALENDAR

NOVEMBER 9, SATURDAY 8 A.M.-12 P.M.

Attend *La Mesa Park Appreciation Day* and help plant 200 trees at Harry Griffen Park, 9550 Mildren St., La Mesa 91942. Bring a shovel, gloves, and closed-toe shoes. Participants of all ages are welcome. Visit www.cityoflamesa.us/specialevents or call (619) 667-1300 for more information.

NOVEMBER 11, MONDAY 11 A.M.

The Art of Chocolate, an art exhibit and special event that explores the connection between Jewish history and chocolate, will be held at the Lawrence Family Jewish Community Center, 4126 Executive Dr., La Jolla 92037 (UTC area). Enjoy the exhibit, play chocolate games, and indulge in delicious treats! Price: \$10. RSVP to Melanie at (858) 362-1141.

NOVEMBER 13, WEDNESDAY 6-7:30 P.M.

A workshop, *Understanding How Medicare Works*, will be held at the Sharp Corporate Office, 8695 Spectrum Center Blvd., San Diego 92123. Learn the facts about Medicare in a free meeting for those who are turning 65 or retiring. To RSVP, visit www.sharp.com/events or call (800) 827-4277.

NOVEMBER 14, THURSDAY 10 A.M.-2 P.M.

A *Senior Scam Stopper Seminar* will be held at the Vista Gloria McClellan Adult Activity & Resource Center, 1400 Vale Terrace Dr., Park Terrace Room, Vista 92084. A panel of experts from different government agencies will provide tips on how to protect yourself from fraud, such as identity theft, telephone scams, and more. For details, call (760) 643-5288.

NOVEMBER 15, FRIDAY 12:45-2 P.M.

A *Senior Prom* will be held at the College Avenue Center, 6299 Capri Dr., San Diego 92120. Come dressed in formal wear or casual attire to dance and enjoy the music of Dean Ratzman with "The Swingin' With Dean Show." This intergenerational event includes students of the UCSD Skaggs School of Pharmacy, who will be available to answer questions. For details, call (858) 637-7320.

NOVEMBER 16, SATURDAY 10 A.M.-3:30 P.M.

A *Senior Craft Sale* will be held at Balboa Park, Casa del Prado, Patios A, B, and Room 101 (off of Park Blvd. on Village Place), San Diego 92101. Enjoy browsing the wares of artists age 55+ and get a head start on holiday shopping! This event will also take place on Sunday, Nov. 17 from 10-3:30. For details, call Age Well Services at (619) 525-8247.

NOVEMBER 22, FRIDAY 10-11 A.M.

A presentation, *Coping with Grief During the Holiday Season*, will be held at the Grossmont Healthcare District Conference Center, 9001 Wakarusa St., La Mesa 91942. Individuals who have lost a loved one will learn coping strategies. To RSVP, visit www.sharp.com/events or call (800) 827-4277.

NOVEMBER 25, MONDAY 12:30-2:30 P.M.

A *discussion group* focused on end-of-life issues, death, and dying, will be held at the Mission Valley Public Library, 2123 Fenton Parkway, San Diego 92108. Enjoy some tasty treats with others as you explore the topics together. Not a support group. To RSVP, call (619) 507-9915 or visit www.deathcafe.com/deathcafe/9759.

DECEMBER 3, TUESDAY 10-11:30 A.M.

A workshop, *How to Talk About Memory Loss*, will be held at Tri-City Wellness & Fitness Center, 6250 El Camino Real, Carlsbad 92009. The holidays can lead to tough conversations, especially when visiting a loved one with dementia. Plan for successful, lower-stress discussions about difficult topics like changes in memory, driving, and living alone. To RSVP, visit www.alzsd.org or call (858) 492-4400.

ADVISORY COUNCIL

The AIS Advisory Council will meet on Monday, November 4 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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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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