

AGING & independence

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

Helping Older Adults...It's a Movement!

By Kim Gallo
Director, Aging & Independence Services

LaRue Fields, 68, has led an extraordinary life—extraordinary in terms of its richness, as well as her commitment to others. The fourth of five children, LaRue was born in Pennsylvania and spent most of her childhood in Newark, New Jersey. Life was sometimes rough in “the projects” (public housing) where she lived, but her loving and hard working family helped shield her from the worst aspects of poverty. She knew she wanted to get an education and leveraged her impressive talent in basketball to land a scholarship at Francis Marion University (FMU). There she earned a bachelor’s degree in sociology while building an inspiring college basketball career that landed her a spot in the FMU Athletic Hall of Fame. She still holds the school’s single-game record of 32 rebounds, the most of any female or male player. The first in her family to get a college education, LaRue recalls her family being “so proud...shocked, but so proud” at the success she was having.

After graduating in 1976, at a time in our nation’s history when Black women typically did not have many opportunities, LaRue went on to attend Salisbury State College, from which she earned a Master’s in Education. From there, the opportunities multiplied. LaRue became the head women’s basketball coach at Morgan State University in Baltimore, earning a national “Coach of the Year” award after the 1980-81 season. Later, she became the University of Minnesota’s first black female head coach.

While some may view sports as solely a recreational pursuit, LaRue could see the transformative role athletics can have in young women’s lives and how sports can be a route to social change. She shares, “My focus and my heart were in the community. I helped women get a college education through athletics, teaching Black girls that they could achieve.”



LaRue Fields

LaRue credits much of her success to the guidance she received from female mentors when she was in college. “They saw potential and supported me, lifted me, and prepared me for life,” she explains. Grateful for their counsel, LaRue has always looked for ways to pay this support forward.

In the 1990s, LaRue transitioned from coaching to the non-profit sector. She worked at the Minneapolis YWCA, followed by the Minneapolis Urban League, and later the Minneapolis National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). While in Minnesota, LaRue met her soul mate, Billie McCoy, whom she spent 29 happy years with, helping to raise her grandkids and taking care of her before she succumbed to brain cancer.

LaRue eventually relocated to San Diego and worked in the Senior Services department at the San Diego LGBT Center. As a lesbian woman of color, LaRue felt right at home. She notes, “I got to see the true me and allow others to see the true me.” She found the role meaningful as she

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(Continued from page one)

supported some of the region's most vulnerable older adults. "Some LGBT seniors feel forgotten," she shares. "While conditions have improved over the years, some seniors are still too afraid to tell their doctors or their families about their lives."

LaRue is especially proud of bringing a community food bank to the LGBT Center. A lot of seniors from the surrounding community who did not identify as LGBT began attending the food distribution events. LaRue went out of her way to make the visitors feel welcome. She and her volunteers would offer water and give them a place to sit inside in the air conditioning. "Some folks were fearful," she explains. "But opening up our doors to the community gave visitors a different take on us. They came to see us in a different light after being treated with such respect." While kindness was often met with kindness, LaRue did face situations where she had to stand up for her clients and volunteers—in particular those who were transgender. There were occasions when a transgender woman volunteer would be repeatedly and intentionally "mis-gendered" by another person (i.e., referred to as "he" even though she identifies as female). In these situations, LaRue had to step in to set the tone about being respectful and to provide education to the person who was not willing to use the volunteer's accurate pronouns.

As LaRue reflects back on her career, she realizes that pretty much every job she's ever had "wasn't just a job... it was a movement." She says, "Being a Black woman coach at a time when they didn't have them...that was a movement. Working at non-profits to help LGBT older adults...that's a movement."

LaRue transitioned to retirement in 2019, but she is not planning to stop helping others, particularly those who "have no voice", anytime soon. Even in retirement, LaRue has continued to serve on the Aging & Independence Services (AIS) Advisory Council, something she has done for over five years. The AIS Advisory Council looks at ways to strengthen the aging support network and operations. It serves as the voice of consumers and community experts to maximize the delivery of AIS services. She continues to feel a sense of purpose and believes the Council is "getting recognition as a group that is doing good things." According to LaRue, serving older adults and working to increase their quality of life

and visibility in the community is also an important movement.

But LaRue sees an opportunity for more older adults to come to the table and join in this critical work—especially those who currently receive aging-related services or who are members of traditionally under-represented communities. "I need help with that part of the movement," she admits. LaRue hopes that others—perhaps those who have never taken on this type of activity before—will challenge themselves to take on an advisory role with the Council. She notes, "You don't have to be 'educated'...you don't have to fit any criteria. You are welcome."

As for her own participation on the Council, LaRue is seen as a tireless advocate for those who are among the most vulnerable in our communities. She has helped the AIS Advisory Council deepen its focus on equity and work to ensure those who are receiving services are represented and have a voice at the table. LaRue notes, "I keep it real...I don't have to use big words."

Big words or not, LaRue has helped fill some impressive roles. She has held positions of First Vice Chair and Second Vice Chair on the Executive and Membership Subcommittee. She also is a member of the Healthy Aging and Nutrition Subcommittees, as well as the Ad Hoc Budget Committee. In addition, LaRue represents the AIS Advisory Council on the IHSS Advisory Committee. Her current areas of interest include the County of San Diego's Alzheimer's Project, addressing food insecurity, and working on the issue of affordable housing for seniors.

For LaRue, being involved in her community is a no-brainer. "I want to continue to be involved. If you aren't at the table, you are under the table!" LaRue jokes. "My responsibility to me is to be at the table." Her commitment to serve others has also brought its own reward: deep satisfaction for a life well lived. She reflects back at her life and career with pride: "Everywhere I've been, I've made a difference. That's all I want to do. That's all I've ever wanted to do. I am living long enough to hear people say it—and I'm humble enough to take it in." She laughs, "You did a good job, girl!"

Join LaRue in making a difference in the lives of older adults by exploring opportunities on the AIS Advisory Council. For more details, contact Jana Jordan at **Jana.Jordan@sdcountry.ca.gov** or call **(858) 495-5566**.

In the COMMUNITY

TECHNOLOGY FAIR FOR 50+

Join San Diego Oasis and the County of San Diego for the 9th annual Technology Fair for 50+ on **Thursday, November 4** and **Friday, November 5 from 8:30 a.m.-2:30 p.m.** daily. This year, the fair is entirely virtual, but there is still plenty to learn. The free tech talks will feature a variety of topics, such as health-related technology, online security, smart home and smart wallet tech, and more. For more information and to register, visit www.sandiegoasis.org and register for class 700.



IHSS RECIPIENT OR CAREGIVER? JOIN THE IHSS ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Current or past In-Home Supportive Services (IHSS) recipients and caregivers (individual providers) are needed to join the IHSS 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 the IHSS services. Meetings are currently held over Zoom or phone on the 2nd Friday of each month at 12:45 p.m. Members receive a \$50 monthly stipend. For more information, please contact Julie Lara at Julie.Lara@sdcounty.ca.gov or (858) 495-5047.

AGE-FRIENDLY FILM FESTIVAL: NOVEMBER 13

Media Arts Center San Diego, in partnership with AARP, The San Diego Foundation and the County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency, Aging & Independence Services, is celebrating the completion of the Emerging Filmmaker Fellowship by hosting the Age-Friendly Film Festival. This four-month fellowship provided youth participants with a cash stipend, filmmaker training, and mentorship to produce short films highlighting local efforts to build age-friendly communities where people of all ages can be healthy and thrive.

The Age-Friendly Film Festival will be held on **Saturday, November 13 at 4 p.m.** at the Reading Cinemas Town Square, 4665 Clairemont Dr., San Diego 92117. This free event will include Q&A with participating filmmakers. To learn more or reserve tickets, visit www.mediaartscenter.org. For questions, contact Jana Schwartz at Jana.Schwartz@sdcounty.ca.gov or (858) 495-5712.

CHECK YOUR MOOD...VIRTUALLY

Good mental health starts with you! How are you feeling? Getting screened for depression is an important part of healthcare checkups, much like getting your blood pressure checked or being screened for heart disease or diabetes. Check Your Mood is an annual awareness campaign that takes place throughout the month of October and typically includes community screening events and resource information about depression and mental illness. This year, Check Your Mood resources are all available online. Virtually join other community members across San Diego County to get free mental health resources, information, and self-administered screenings to check your mood and help raise awareness for mental health. Visit www.checkyourmoodsd.org to take a quick, anonymous self-assessment and learn about available resources.



VOLUNTEER OF THE MONTH

Nancy Chen of Senior Gleaners is the Retired and Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) Volunteer of the Month for October 2021. She was nominated by Margaret Burton, the organization’s vice president. Senior Gleaners works to harvest and collect food that would otherwise be wasted and distribute it to those most in need.

Nancy has served as crew leader for the North County Senior Gleaners group for four years. Her team primarily picks citrus fruit from backyards, but also from orchards. The fruit then gets distributed to food banks, churches, temples, and community non-profits. Nancy is also a member of the weekly grocery crew, collecting and donating unsold groceries which otherwise would be thrown away. She is responsible for crew support and coordination and has trained more than 13 people this year to be new volunteer pickers or to help with administrative duties. Nancy has also assisted with finding new distribution sites for delivery in her area.



Nancy Chen

So far during 2021, Nancy has volunteered 165 hours of her time to Senior Gleaners and her group has collected 67,131 pounds of fruit, as well as thousands of pounds of groceries for donation. Nancy has been a pillar in her group welcoming new volunteers and inspiring others to step up to help. She is a friend to everyone in the organization and is often called upon for special projects. Her enthusiasm for the Gleaners mission spreads to other volunteers and to the resident donors she serves. Nancy is a positive role model for her group and a joy to be around. She is dependable, punctual, organized, and always gives 100% to any project or assignment.

Debbie Wismar, a member of Nancy’s team says: “Nancy is extraordinary...she is warm and welcoming, kind and intelligent. She shows her love of life both with her sense of humor and in her care of her wide community. She is the first to volunteer when she hears about a need, and she is a decisive, responsible and hardworking leader of our group.” Another team member, Marian Winandy, shares: “Nancy has been a welcoming beacon for new members and a dependable and cheerful leader for all. Our VIP Nancy makes our donation of time and gleaning efforts rewarding and fun!”

Nancy’s favorite part of volunteering is getting “great satisfaction for doing something good. It makes living worthwhile!”

Congratulations, Nancy, and thank you for your service to the community!

YOU ARE NOT ALONE (YANA): ENROLL IN THE PROGRAM OR BECOME A VOLUNTEER

The YANA program exists to help connect otherwise isolated seniors with their community and let them know they have not been forgotten. YANA is a free service provided in most areas of San Diego County and administered by law enforcement agencies including the San Diego County Sheriff’s Department, San Diego Police Department, Chula Vista Police Department, and Carlsbad Police Department. Retired & Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) senior volunteers are the everyday heroes who are the heart of this program.

Before the pandemic, RSVP volunteers would make home visits to isolated seniors to check on their welfare, as well as to have a friendly chat. Home visits are a chance to make a social connection, offer support, and notice any decline in the individual. YANA volunteers have been able to intervene and call 911 when there has been a medical crisis that would have otherwise been left unchecked. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the program had to transition away from home visits to phone calls, but volunteers were still able to check in on residents and continue the primary functions of the YANA program. Now that San Diego County has started to safely open back up, some RSVP volunteers are providing doorstep visits to their YANA clients, rather than in-home visits, while some are continuing to call YANA clients.

To enroll in this free service, or to become a YANA volunteer, please contact Myles Jonathan Field at (619) 650-2498 or email myles.field@sdcounty.ca.gov.



ELDERHELP OF SAN DIEGO: HOMESHARE PROGRAM

When Rent is More than a Transaction

It is easy to consider rent just another bill at the end of the month. Send the check off to your landlord. Take up occupancy in your space for another month. The cycle continues. But what if rent was more than a payment? What if rent allowed older adults to age in place without isolation? What if rent allowed someone on the brink of homelessness to have stable housing for years?

What would happen if rent was more than a transaction and actually became a transformation? This question has been at the heart of ElderHelp's HomeShare program for nearly 30 years.

HomeShare is a roommate matching service that requires each match to include one person who is over the age of 60. ElderHelp enrolls seekers (those looking for housing), and providers (those with a room to share). Both parties are fully vetted through reference checks, a health questionnaire, and a background check. Candidates are interviewed so that potential matches can be made based on preferences.

The match agreement can be a rental or service exchange agreement. A rental agreement is purely rent based whereas a service exchange means that a seeker provides services to the provider in exchange for either a reduced rent or no rent. Services can include companionship, transportation, yard work, or meal preparation. The services cannot be hands-on care. The program is a win-win for both providers and seekers.

Contract guidelines require that providers live in specific areas. Currently, ElderHelp is proudly connecting residents in the cities of San Diego, Poway, and most recently, Vista. Seekers can live anywhere in San Diego County when applying for HomeShare.

The process is straightforward, but the results are often transformational. Far beyond fiscal benefits and financial security is the improvement in people's lives. HomeShare creates affordable, stable housing arrangements that promote aging in place, social connection, and a sense of safety and community. ElderHelp's longest match has been together for 16 years and the current average match length is 6 years. HomeShare's clients report a variety of benefits due to the program:

- 89% feel their quality of life is better.
- 74% feel safer at home.
- 94% believe they are more likely to remain independent.

A client shares, "Peace of mind is a big thing. Knowing that ElderHelp is there is a big thing." ElderHelp's clients know the security of their lives is improved with stable housing. They know better days are ahead. They know they are safe. They know they will be able to stay independent longer. They can age with dignity every second of everyday. In short, their lives are transformed.

Are you wanting to make rent more than a transaction? Visit elderhelpofsandiego.org/solutions-for-living/homeshare/ or call (619) 284-9281 and give it a try.



Exchanging services for reduced rent is a win-win for these ElderHelp HomeShare clients.

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. Flu shots may be received at the same time as COVID-19 vaccinations or booster doses. The flu 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**.

COVID-19 BOOSTER SHOTS FOR THOSE WHO RECEIVED PFIZER VACCINE

Following the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the California Department of Public Health’s (CDPH) recommendation, the County is urging eligible San Diegans to get a Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine booster shot if they initially received the Pfizer two-dose vaccine series and it has been six months since they became fully vaccinated (i.e., people are considered fully vaccinated two weeks after they received their second shot of the two-dose series). The federal review process is underway for the Moderna and Johnson & Johnson boosters and they will likely be approved at the state and local levels for older adults later in October. Please visit **www.coronavirus-sd.com** for details.

The following groups **should** receive a third dose of Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine:

- People age 65 and older
- Residents age 18 and older in long-term care settings
- People 50–64 years old with underlying medical conditions, such as cancer, diabetes, heart disease and compromised immune systems

The following groups **may** receive a booster shot of the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine:

- People age 18–49 with underlying medical conditions
- People age 18–64 who are at increased risk for COVID-19 exposure and transmission because of occupational or institutional setting, such as first responders, grocery store workers, etc.

San Diegans who received the Pfizer two-dose series and who fall into the above categories should talk to their health care providers about whether getting a booster shot is appropriate for them. A physician’s referral is not required to receive a booster shot. For a complete list of vaccination locations, visit **www.coronavirus-sd.com** or call **2-1-1**.

TAI CHI: MOVING FOR BETTER BALANCE

Tai Chi: Moving for Better Balance (TCMBB) is a modified version of the Yang style of Tai Chi that has only eight essential positions and involves moving in a slow, flowing, and controlled fashion. This program was designed especially for older adults to reduce their risk of falls. Evidence suggests that participants reduce their risk of falls and fear of falling, and increase their functional balance and physical performance. Free Tai Chi classes are held:

- Mondays and Thursday from 12:30-1:30 p.m. at Park De La Cruz Gymnasium, 3911 Landis St., San Diego 92105
- Wednesdays and Fridays from 4-5 p.m. at Unity San Diego, 3770 Altadena Ave., San Diego 92105
- Tuesdays and Thursdays from 1:30-2:30 p.m. at Colonel Irving Salomon San Ysidro Community Activity Center, 179 Diza Rd., San Ysidro 92173
- **NEW:** Tuesdays and Thursdays from 11:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m., Imperial Beach Library, 810 Imperial Beach Blvd., Imperial Beach 91932

COMMUNITY CALENDAR

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

NOVEMBER 4, THURSDAY 1-2 P.M.

A free, online class, *Get a Restful, Refreshing Sleep*, will be offered by experts from Sharp Grossmont Sleep Disorder Center. Do you or your partner have trouble sleeping through the night? Snoring? Too much or too little sleep can affect your overall health. A board-certified sleep specialist will discuss common sleep disorders such as sleep apnea, insomnia and restless leg syndrome. Visit www.sharp.com/classes or call (800) 827-4277 to register.

NOVEMBER 4-5, TH/FRI 8:30 A.M.-2:30 P.M.

A free, virtual event, *Get Connected: Technology Fair for 50+*, will be hosted by San Diego Oasis and the County of San Diego. Brief “tech talks” will feature a variety of topics, such as health-related technology, online security, smart home and smart wallet tech, and more. Visit www.sandiegooasis.org and register for class 700.

NOVEMBER 9, TUESDAY 1-2 P.M.

A free, online class, *Healthy Living for Your Body and Brain* will be offered by the Alzheimer’s Association. Learn about research in the areas of diet and nutrition, exercise, cognitive activity and social engagement, and use hands-on tools to help you incorporate

these recommendations into a plan for healthy aging. To register, visit www.alz.org/sandiego/events and click on “Educational Programs” or call (800) 272-3900.

NOVEMBER 13, SATURDAY 4-6 P.M.

The *Age-Friendly Film Festival* will be hosted by the Media Arts Center at the Reading Cinemas Town Square, 4665 Clairemont Dr., San Diego 92117. Youth filmmakers received training and mentorship to produce short films highlighting local efforts to build age-friendly communities. This free event will include Q&A with the youth filmmakers. To learn more or reserve tickets, visit www.mediaartscenter.org. For questions, contact Jana Schwartz at Jana.Schwartz@sdcounty.ca.gov or (858) 495-5712.

NOVEMBER 17, WEDNESDAY 5:30-7 P.M.

A virtual event, *Navigating the Holidays and the Pandemic After the Death of a Loved One*, will be hosted by Sharp HospiceCare. Navigating grief can be difficult. Navigating grief in the middle of a pandemic has been a special challenge. This evening program will include inspirational speakers, personal stories on grief and hope, and time for questions. RSVP by Nov. 12 by calling (800) 827-4277 or visit www.sharp.com/classes and click on the “Bereavement” category.

NOVEMBER 18, THURSDAY 1-2 P.M.

An online class, *Cox Presents: A Sampler of Fun Smartphone*

Apps (course #399), will be offered by San Diego Oasis. Do you have a smartphone and want to know more about the latest apps? Explore a sampling of apps including voice recording, free video calls, movie reviews, travel enhancers, e-readers, and many more! Cost: \$5. Visit www.sandiegooasis.org or call (619) 881-6262 to RSVP.

NOVEMBER 20, SATURDAY 9-10:30 A.M.

How to Talk About Memory Loss, a free, virtual workshop, will be hosted by Alzheimer’s San Diego. As the holidays approach, learn how to plan for successful, lower-stress family discussions about difficult topics like changes in memory, driving, and living alone. This class is open to everyone, and advance registration is required. To RSVP, visit www.alzsd.org/classes or call (858) 492-4400.

DECEMBER 2, THURSDAY 9:30 A.M.-12:45 P.M.

A free, virtual caregiving conference, *Caregiving & the Holidays: From Stress to Success*, will be hosted by the Caregiver Coalition of San Diego. The conference will feature workshops, virtual exhibit booths, one-on-one expert advice for your unique caregiving challenges, and opportunity drawings. To RSVP, visit www.caregivercoalitionsd.org and click on “caregiver events” and then “conferences.”

SEND IN YOUR ITEMS

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



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