

AGING & independence

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

“It’s a Joy”: Giving Back and Gaining Community through Senior Gleaners

By Allison Boyer
Interim Director, Aging & Independence Services

Volunteering has always been in Carol and John McKay’s blood. While raising their two daughters, the couple devoted much of their time to supporting school and extracurricular activities. After the 9/11 terrorist attacks, John went to New York City for a month with the Red Cross to provide respite, food supplies, and comfort to the first responders at Ground Zero. John also served for many years on the Citizen’s Adversity Support Team (CAST) through which he provided on-call support to residents who had experienced trauma or loss. Eventually though, John wanted to find an

opportunity to give back that was more relaxed and less emotionally demanding. One day, Carol learned about Senior Gleaners of San Diego County (Senior Gleaners).

Senior Gleaners aims to redistribute quality food to people in need that would otherwise be wasted. Older adult volunteers pick, sort, and deliver surplus fruit and unsold groceries to more than 75 food distributors. In 2025, over 1.25 million servings of food were provided to individuals and families. These donations also prevented usable food from going to the landfill.

John and Carol decided to give it a go. They were hooked right from the start. Carol has earned the



Members of Senior Gleaners (from left to right): Lisa Lindgren, Sue Hamilton, Robin Perrino, Chris Mara, Barry Scher, Carol and John McKay

nickname “tree monkey” as she prefers to get on a ladder to reach fruit hanging on upper branches rather than use a fruit picker tool. But Carol adds, “Everyone picks according to their ability.” People can modify their approach and only do what they are comfortable doing, such as picking what’s right in front of them.

The couple loves supporting a good cause. It is not uncommon for their South County team to pick 800 or more pounds of fruit in a morning. They also enjoy being part of a solution to prevent food waste and address food insecurity. Carol

shares. “It’s a joy!” John adds, “It’s good for the soul. It becomes a community between us. You see these people over and over again. We are an easy talking group...we josh around, pick on each other every once in a while...and just have a good time.”

One of the friends Carol and John have made through Senior Gleaners is Sue Hamilton. Sue splits her time between San Diego and Lake Tahoe where her daughter lives. Because of this, she needs a flexible opportunity to serve and Senior Gleaners fits the bill allowing her to “pop in and out.” Sue has always been a big proponent of the mantra “reduce, reuse, and recycle.”

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LIVE WELL
SAN DIEGO

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Senior Gleaners' mission aligns perfectly. And as much as Susan knows she is making a difference by addressing local food insecurity, she realizes that she is benefiting too. "It keeps you out of the house, engaged with other people, and broadens your experiences a little bit. It is crucial for people to have a community, friends...it keeps you healthy, keeps your mind active." Sue notes that there's the added benefit of getting in some functional movement. "We are climbing hills, stretching, and doing all the stuff you are supposed to do."

Robin Perrino is another faithful fruit picker with the South County crew. Robin was surprised to learn how much food insecurity there is right here in San Diego County. "I never had a real sense. National City is considered a food desert...I didn't even know what that meant," she explains. To be part of a local solution, neighbors helping neighbors is especially meaningful for Robin. She says, "This is one way I can step up and do something right here. It's a great way for me to feel connected and give back...in a way that I never really have before."

Robin has earned deep respect amongst her friends and family for her participation with Senior Gleaners. She shares, "My friends are all like, 'this is so cool.' My family thinks it's great. Everybody loves to tell people about what I do, and they are incredibly proud of me. They like being associated with it because it's such a good thing...it's like being a celebrity!"

Older adults age 55 and over are welcome. Robin jokes, "I feel like the kid in my group and I'm 69." While Robin enjoys being outside doing the picking, there are also opportunities for folks who would like to pick up excess food from grocery stores and deliver to various food distribution sites.

Robin urges others to give Senior Gleaners a try. "Just do it! Show up once...don't overthink this whole thing," she says. "Everybody's been extremely welcoming."

John, Carol, Sue, and Robin invite anyone who is interested to come out and give it a try. Robin shares, "Before you know it, you'll come back a second time and a third time...and then you buy a t-shirt!"

Would you like to help with the effort? Senior Gleaners is open to all people 55 and older who can spare a couple of hours to volunteer on weekday mornings. There are no set time commitments, although most Senior Gleaners quickly make friends with like-minded peers, enjoy the outdoor exercise, and readily come back knowing they are making a sustainable local contribution. To learn more about Senior Gleaners, visit seniorgleanerssdco.org or sign up to volunteer at seniorgleanerssdco.org/vol_registration.php.

The organization was recently featured in a County News Center Story. Check it out to see the Senior Gleaners in action!

HAVE FRUIT TO SPARE? SHARE WITH SENIOR GLEANERS OF SAN DIEGO COUNTY

If your family and friends can't eat all the fruit from your trees, consider donating the excess to hungry people rather than letting it go to waste. Let's put it into bellies and not landfills! The Senior Gleaners of San Diego County will pick your excess fruit and deliver it on your behalf to local food pantries, churches, and other organizations that regularly help feed our neighbors. It's free to you and at the end of the year, the Senior Gleaners will provide you with a receipt for the value so that you can write it off on your taxes! Whether you have one tree or a dozen, the Senior Gleaners will arrive when the fruit is ready. Register your trees at seniorgleanerssdco.org/site_registration.php.



In the COMMUNITY

AREA PLAN PUBLIC HEARING

At the regularly scheduled AIS Advisory Council meeting at the County Operations Center, located at 5560 Overland Avenue, 3rd floor, San Diego 92123 on Monday, April 13, 2026, at 12:00 p.m. (noon), attendees will have the opportunity to provide feedback on the 2026-27 Area Plan Update. The Area Plan contains AIS' goals and objectives for services to support older adults and persons with disabilities. To join by phone, call (619) 343-2539 (Meeting passcode: 402 109 836#) or visit <https://www.sandiegocounty.gov/AISAdvisoryCouncil> to join by TEAMS video conference, (Meeting ID: 224 849 240 117; Meeting passcode: eq7c5wR2).

BECOME A PROFESSIONAL CAREGIVER

Help older adults and disabled individuals who receive In-Home Supportive Services (IHSS) by pursuing a rewarding career as a caregiver! Earn extra income and enjoy a flexible schedule while helping people to live independently in their homes. No experience necessary. The San Diego IHSS Public Authority will assist you with training. Apply by calling (866) 351-7722 or visiting www.sdihsspa.com/regapp. For more information, visit www.sdihsspa.com.



PUBLIC AUTHORITY
In-Home Supportive Services
San Diego County

SAN DIEGO CONTINUING EDUCATION EMERITUS PROGRAM

San Diego Continuing Education's Emeritus Program challenges adults to stay intellectually stimulated, socially engaged and physically fit. A variety of courses meet the diverse needs of an aging population. Classes such as Brain Fitness, Job Search Skills, Music Appreciation, and the Writer's Workshop are designed to benefit the mind, while others such as Health and Wellness Nutrition, and Tai Chi benefit the body. Instruction is specifically designed for adults 55+ years and helps students maintain independence, rejoin the workforce and be actively engaged in the community. To learn more, visit <https://sdcce.edu/emeritus>

KINSHIP FAMILY RESOURCES

If you are a kinship caregiver, such as a grandparent raising a grandchild, explore the following links and resources:

[Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Resource List \(English\)](#)

[Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Resource List \(Spanish\)](#)

[Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Newsletter Sign-Up](#)

[Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Handbook \(English\)](#)

[Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Handbook \(Spanish\)](#)

[Kinship Roadmap \(English\)](#)

[Kinship Roadmap \(Spanish\)](#)

[211 San Diego Kinship Caregivers Resources](#)

[YMCA Kinship Support Services](#)

For assistance with kinship navigation services, contact that YMCA at kinshipyfs@ymcasd.org or (877) YMCA-4-KIN (877-9622-4-546).



VOLUNTEER RECOGNITION

The Retired and Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) hosted two regional Volunteer Recognition events in January to celebrate and thank volunteers across San Diego County. More than 140 volunteers attended, sharing stories and being recognized for their service supporting older adults, families, and County programs.

In 2025, RSVP volunteers contributed over 76,000 hours of service, valued at more than \$3 million. The events included special recognition for volunteers with 20+ years of service, those with the highest service hours, and over 40 volunteers nominated for new awards highlighting their impact.

Distinguished Lifetime Hours of Service Awardees

- Herbert Argrow
- James M. Baynes
- Thomas A. Beltz
- Thomas F. Grace
- Joe Leppien
- Rosemary Pope
- Cynthia S. Roark
- Elizabeth Shade
- Wayne K. Sieckman

Rookie of the Year Awardees

- Danna Atkins
- Kevin Campbell
- Miranda Escoto
- Tony (José) Gomez
- Angela Harcq
- Carla Murry
- Stephanie Neal
- Robert “Bob” Taylor

Dedicated Years of Service Awardees

- Thomas Beltz - 22 years
- Michael Gailband - 23 years
- Joe Leppien - 23 years
- Elizabeth Shade - 23 years
- William “Bill” Hicks - 24 years
- Richard H. Schroeder - 25 years
- George Stoneback - 25 years (In Memoriam)
- Herbert Argrow - 27 years
- Thomas Grace - 28 years
- Marilu Tibett - 30 years
- Richard Rafter - 31 years

Inspired Innovator Awardees

- Paul Does
- Ida Ford
- Robert “Bob” Riel

Amazing Mentor Awardees

- Mark Emch
- Michael Gailband
- Thomas F. Grace
- Dawn Jordan
- Cathlean “Cathy” Ramsey
- Mark Ross
- Randy Sherman

Heart of Gold Awardees

- Karla Richardson
- Ron Martino
- Anne Wood
- Johnny Brown
- Robyn LaNatte
- Bonnell Goycochea
- Nancy Everett
- Chris Wilcox
- Robert Watson
- Carol Bausch



REASSURANCE PROGRAMS

FRIENDLY CHECK-IN RESOURCES

Do you live alone? Would you like a friendly volunteer to check on you? Would you like to feel more connected to your community?

If you — or someone you know — lives alone and/or does not have friends or family available to regularly check on you or your loved one's well-being, services like the **You Are Not Alone (YANA) program** may be a perfect fit!



YANA is a free service provided in many areas of San Diego County through a partnership between the Aging & Independence Services Retired & Senior Volunteer Program and local law enforcement agencies like the San Diego County Sheriff's Office. Through scheduled phone calls and/or personal visits, trained older adult volunteers connect with YANA clients to provide:

- A friendly social connection
- Regular wellness check-ins
- Peace of mind
- A sense of community and support

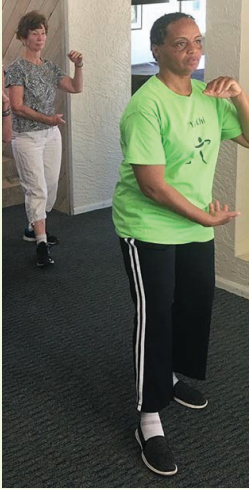
YANA participants are individuals who are able to manage their daily lives independently but understand that a medical issue or unexpected situation could quickly become a crisis without someone checking on them. With YANA, you truly are not alone.

Another option for individuals who are not in the YANA service area is Project CARE. The program serves adults age 60 and older, with priority given to those with the greatest economic and social need, including low income individuals, minority older adults, those with Limited English Proficiency, residents of rural areas, and individuals at risk of institutionalization. Core services include:

- **Information and Assistance:** Information regarding community services and connection to those services.
- **Comprehensive Assessments:** An in-home assessment to identify needs, strengths, and establish care plan goals.
- **Telephone Reassurance:** Weekly phone calls to provide support, safety checks, and check-in on care plan goals.

Please call the Aging & Independence Services Call Center at **(800) 339-4661** to find out more and identify a reassurance program that serves your community. Call Center staff can also provide information about other community resources to support independent living.





NEW TAI CHI CLASSES

Aging & Independence Services offers free in-person and virtual Tai Chi classes. These evidence-based falls prevention programs improve movement, balance, strength, and flexibility. Two new classes are beginning in April.

Tai Chi: Moving for Better Balance (Starting April 14th): Tecolote Community Park, 4675 Tecolote Rd, San Diego 92110 on Tuesdays and Wednesdays from 9:00-10:00 a.m.

Tai Chi for Arthritis & Fall Prevention: (Starting April 21st): Standley Rec Center, 3585 Governor Dr, San Diego CA 92122 on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 9:30-10:30 a.m.

Registration for both classes is required through the [City of San Diego](https://www.cityofsan Diego.org) website. Spring 2026 registration will open soon. For more information on these classes and to learn about additional Tai Chi classes held throughout the county, visit www.healthierlivingsd.org. For questions, email HealthierLiving.HHSA@sdcounty.ca.gov or call (858) 495-5500.

FALL PREVENTION TIPS

One in four older adults (65+) fall each year. To 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 nightlights, and install strong grab bars and handrails. Our eyes often need more light as we age.

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

FALL PREVENTION RESOURCE GUIDES

For more fall prevention tips, check out the **regional fall prevention guides** created by the San Diego Fall Prevention Task Force. The guides connect older adults to organizations, programs, and information that can help reduce fall risk.

To access the guides, visit www.SanDiegoFallPrevention.org and scroll down to the “Task Force Materials” section.



COMMUNITY CALENDAR

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

APRIL 13, MONDAY 1 - 2 PM

Divine Meditation and Gentle Mindful Movements will be held on Mondays throughout April at the Vista Library, 700 Eucalyptus Ave., Vista 92084. In this beginner friendly class, the instructor will guide you through a meditation practice that helps you experience peace, harmony and healing in a world of change, challenge and uncertainty. Class includes a brief period of standing (may be seated if necessary). Q&A of pre-written questions will be answered. Cost: Free. For more information, call (760) 643-5100.

APRIL 14, TUESDAY 3 - 4 PM

Be prepared for your future with a workshop, *Your Aging Journey is Unique to You!* Learn to make a plan for aging, including who would make decisions if you are unable to, what you can do to successfully age in your home, when you should consider assisted living, and more. Hosted by San Diego Oasis at the Rancho Bernardo Lifelong Learning Center, 17170 Bernardo Center Dr., San Diego 92128. Cost: Free. To RSVP, visit <https://san-diego.oasisnet.org> or call (858)-240-2880.

APRIL 16, THURSDAY 11 AM - 12:15 PM

Join Alzheimer's San Diego and ElderHelp for a webinar, *Coping with Personality and Behavior Changes*. People with Alzheimer's disease

and other dementias can experience altered behaviors and personalities. Learn about these changes and new ways to respond, how to approach these situations, and provide care even when it feels challenging. To register, visit www.alzsd.org.

APRIL 17, FRIDAY 2 - 3 PM

Learn about the history of different local sites by attending *Hidden Gems in San Diego County History* at the San Carlos Library, 7265 Jackson Dr., San Diego 92119. Offered by San Diego Oasis, learn from historian Vincent Rossi about museums, gardens, and other local treasures offering different perspectives on life in our county. Free. To RSVP, visit <https://san-diego.oasisnet.org> or register for class #712 or call the library at 619-527-3430.

APRIL 18, SATURDAY 2 - 4 PM

Would you like to explore your family's history? The *Genealogy Club* is for those who want to do genealogy research in a supportive research environment, connecting with others who love learning, and sharing their genealogy research journey. Trace and preserve your ancestor's stories and have fun in the process. Held at the San Diego Central Library, 330 Park Blvd., San Diego 92101. For details, contact Tracy at speccoll@sandiego.gov or (619) 238-6668.

APRIL 23, THURSDAY 9 AM - 2 PM

Spring into Healthy Living, a free

event and resource fair for older adults, will be held at the Grossmont Healthcare District, 9001 Wakarusa St., La Mesa 91942. Learn about community resources for older adults and people living with disabilities and attend presentations on fall prevention, brain health, and advance care planning tips. Registration available [online](#), or call (858) 505-6435.

MAY 2, SATURDAY 4 - 5 PM

Join the *Cinema Club*, a fun and welcoming space for film and television fans to come together twice a month to discuss and explore the stories we love — both new releases and timeless classics. Cinema Club is held at the Oak Park Library, 2802 54th St., San Diego 92105. Registration is encouraged at <https://sandiego.librarymarket.com/event/cinema-club-506028>. For more information, contact mtannihill@sandiego.gov or (619) 527-3406.

MAY 27, WEDNESDAY 1 - 3 PM

The County of San Diego and City of Chula Vista will host an *Emergency Preparedness Resource Fair* at the Norman Park Senior Center, 270 F. St., Chula Vista 91910. Gather disaster preparedness resources and tools, learn how to build an effective emergency kit, and meet agencies that provide disaster relief in our community. To register, visit <https://forms.office.com/g/0kXifaL6UR>.

SEND IN YOUR ITEMS

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



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INFORMATION AND ASSISTANCE HEALTH PROMOTION

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

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

- Older adults
- People with disabilities
- Elders and dependent adults experiencing abuse

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

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

NUTRITION AND MEAL ACCESS PROTECTION CAREGIVER SUPPORT CLIENT ADVOCACY

HOME -BASED SERVICES COMMUNITY ENRICHMENT



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