

AGING & independence

May 2009

Doctor Has a Prescription for Laughter

BY PAMELA B. SMITH

DIRECTOR, AGING & INDEPENDENCE SERVICES

It's hard to imagine Caroline Meeks was ever in a starched white lab coat with a stethoscope dangling around her neck. Today her necklace is yellow beads with happy faces. Her cap now is a floppy one and her nametag is "Dr. Funshine."

A lot has changed since this 64 year old was a pediatrician at the University of Washington. She has gone from teaching parents about immunizations to handing out prescriptions for laughter.

"We grow up with a certain number of struggles and as adults we continue to struggle more than we need to," she says. "Instead, we need permission to lighten up."

Dr. Funshine is one of a handful of Laughter Yoga coaches who lead groups who yuk it up at senior centers, retreats, business meetings, in hospitals, wherever stress needs a break. Laughter Yoga is being featured for family caregivers during the Learning Festival this month at selected County Library branches (see www.learningfestival.org).

Humor will also play a leading role at the upcoming Vital Aging Conference to be held June 4 at the Balboa Park Club Ballroom in Balboa Park. The theme will be "Using Body, Mind and Laughter to Thrive in Uncertain Times." The keynote speaker will be Dr. John Glick, a physician



DR. CAROLINE MEEKS; AKA DR. FUNSHINE

and a clown with the Patch Adams Gesundheit! Institute. His talk will be "Laughter for the Health of It."

But how can we tickle our funny bones with so much weighing on our minds? That's the point. The best time to lighten your emotional load is when you're burdened. It's for your own good, according to Drs. Glick and Funshine.

It wasn't too long ago that Dr. Funshine faced serious health problems. She left her medical practice to be a caregiver for her parents, plus she was a single mom with three teenagers. The stress of those roles led to serious heart problems and neuropathy. She had to control her stress or it was going to kill her.

She went back to school to study art, which she continues to enjoy. And she discovered Laughter Yoga.

Laughter Yoga is a series of simple movements and imagery combined with laughter and deep breathing. The laughter can be simulated at first, but eventually leads to spontaneous laughter in the groups.

"Just the act of laughing opens up blood flow and can interrupt physical and emotional pain," says Dr. Funshine, who is now certified with the American Board of Integrative

(CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE)



DR. FUNSHINE AND HER SUNDAY LAUGHTER YOGA GROUP.

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE ONE)

Holistic Medicine. She has realized dramatic physical improvement from this different way of healing herself.

One of the regulars in her Sunday morning Laughter Yoga session at the Mission Bay Visitor's Center has Parkinson's disease and he comes with his wife; they both benefit from the fun and the social connection. Another participant's husband died recently and she uses what she learns from this group to help her cope with her grief.

At a recent Laughter Yoga session, Dr. Funshine had group members chase down imaginary balls, do lunges and to imagine themselves making a laughter milkshake, each activity followed by laughter. The group learned how to vent anger in a humorous way, but arguing in gibberish, which, of course, led to laughter. Group members share a "should" (a self-imposed expectation) and "we all laugh," she says. This helps people see the humor in the stress we impose on ourselves.

"These are sane-looking people," Dr. Funshine says of her group members. "We just give each other permission to try things out together. Some people are skeptical in the beginning, but they are pleasantly surprised when it feels like a safe, enriching place to be."

Dr. Funshine recently began a Laughter Yoga group (third Wednesdays of each month from 1 to 2 p.m.) at LiveWell San Diego in the Clairemont area. Participants in the social day program there have been really excited by the program, according to Phillip Castillo, outreach coordinator: "We were impressed by the level of activity and excitement from participants after the class. Many of them are wary of new classes, but this one they all wanted to know when the next one was planned."

As the Laughter Yoga group often says together, "Very good, very good... Yeah!"

You can reach Dr. Funshine through her Web site: www.drfunshine.com. For more information about Laughter Yoga, visit www.LaughinginSanDiego.com or www.laughteryoga.org. ♣

LEARNING FESTIVAL AT COUNTY LIBRARIES

Want to learn how to maintain your brain? How about some brain teasers? Or learn to use the computer. Or take an art class. As a result of last year's Aging Summit focused on lifelong learning, AIS has partnered with the San Diego County Library on a Learning Festival this month, which is also Older American's Month. There will be a variety of interesting programs for older adults at each of the County Library branches. Some of the branches will also have special programs for family caregivers, such as Senior/Caregiver Yoga and Microwave Magic for Caregivers.

To find out more about the Learning Festival, see www.learningfestival.org or contact the County Library for information on programs at branches near you: **(858) 694-3900**; call Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. ♣

REGISTER FOR VITAL AGING CONFERENCE

Every two years, AIS joins with health promotion partners to offer the Vital Aging Conference, which promotes healthy lifestyles for seniors and others. This year, the theme is "Using Body, Mind and Laughter to Thrive in Uncertain Times." The keynote speaker will be Dr. John Glick, a physician and a clown with the Patch Adams Gesundheit! Institute. His talk will be "Laughter for the Health of It."

The Vital Aging Conference will be held from 8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. on Thursday, June 4, at the Balboa Park Club Ballroom (near the Puppet Theater in Balboa Park). Sponsors include Sharp HealthCare, San Diego Park & Recreation Department, At Your Home FamilyCare and Mount Miguel Covenant Village.

Registration is required; call Sharp at **(800) 827-4277**. ♣

USING THE ELDERCARE LOCATOR

People in San Diego County know to contact the AIS Call Center **(800-510-2020)** for any questions about services and resources for older adults and people with disabilities in our county, but where do you call if you need similar services in another county or state?

The Eldercare Locator is the first step to finding resources for older adults in any other U.S. community. Just one phone call or Web site visit connects you to resources to help a relative who lives away from you.

The Eldercare Locator is a free service of the U.S. Administration on Aging; administered by the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging (n4a).

To use the Eldercare Locator, call **(800) 677-1116** or see www.eldercare.gov. ♣

HONORING



RETIRED AND SENIOR VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

VOLUNTEER OF THE MONTH

Jim Thomas, nominated by Mike Sole with the Chula Vista Police Department, is our RSVP Volunteer of the Month. Jim has been an RSVP volunteer for more than five years and has served more than 1,480 hours. Jim wrote the procedure manual for the traffic/speed trailer. He was also in charge of writing the procedure manual for court delivery and wrote guidelines for the auto abatement ordinance. Jim is the lead training officer and teaches the training academy for the new Senior Volunteer



JIM THOMAS

Patrol volunteers. He developed the recruitment program and marketing materials which reach out to more than 200 locations in the city for recruitment. Jim also serves patrol duties every week. Congratulations, Jim. Your dedication to volunteering is making a difference in the community.

RSVP VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

Public, nonprofit and health agencies seek volunteers in their communities. Potential volunteers can call RSVP at (858) 505-6399 for information on the following opportunities:

VA Healthcare System seeks patient aides and van drivers.

The Ray & Joan Kroc Community Center needs Kroc Day Camp Helpers to aid counselors with a camp program that includes games, art, creative play, and more.

Elder Help of San Diego needs drivers, shoppers, financial advocates, handypersons, and home visitors.

County of San Diego **Mission Valley Family Resource Center** needs office assistants.

Santee Fire Department needs volunteers for fire safety inspections; training and uniform provided.

2009 RSVP VOLUNTEER BRUNCH

This year's RSVP Volunteer Recognition Brunch will be held from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Tuesday, May 12, in the Grand Exhibit Hall at the Town and Country Resort Hotel in Mission Valley. RSVP members with more than 50 reported volunteer hours for 2008 will receive an invitation to be our guest. Invitations were mailed in mid-April with return cards provided for reservations. Sponsor exhibitor tables will be available prior to the meal and program, which will feature awards, music by the Moonlight Serenade Orchestra, the RSVP Senior Idol Talent Show, and opportunity drawings. The parking fee is \$5. Special bus transportation will not be available this year due to budget constraints.

RACE FOR RECRUITMENT

Do you know someone you think would make a great volunteer? RSVP needs your help to find potential volunteers to mentor foster youths, work as docents in museums, do patrol work to keep our neighborhoods safe and many other types of volunteer work available throughout the county.

Please chat with the potential volunteers you know and tell them you would like to recommend them to RSVP. Send us their contact information and we will send them a packet of information about the program and the many sites where they could volunteer.

The top 15 recruiters will be eligible to win cash prizes of \$25. Those referred must actually join RSVP. Contest deadline has been extended to June 30. Refer a prospective volunteer today!

I would like to refer:

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

Referred by: _____

Phone: _____

Fax this referral to (858) 495-5236 or mail it to RSVP Recruiting, 9335 Hazard Way, San Diego CA 92123.

FORUM TO FOCUS ON SENIOR CENTERS

The forum "Senior Centers: Launching the Third Age" will look at the future of senior centers and discuss new innovations for these sites. The event will be held from 9 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. Thursday, May 21, at the War Memorial Building in Balboa Park, 3325 Zoo Dr.

The forum, sponsored by a coalition of agencies, will present an opportunity for professionals, providers and advocates to hear about the latest ideas to bring senior centers into the future. AIS Director Pam Smith and Paul Downey, president and CEO of Senior Community Centers of San Diego, will welcome the participants.

Cost to attend is \$5, which includes lunch and a light breakfast. You can send your check (made out to "Jewish Family Service" and contact information to Jewish Family Service, 8804 Balboa Ave., San Diego CA 92123.

For more information, call Ashley Fifield at **(858) 637-3000**. ▲

TAKE A BRAIN FITNESS CLASS

Posit Science Brain Fitness is a computer program designed by brain researchers to improve cognitive and visual abilities and daily living skills. Evidence shows that confidence, sharpness, focus, reaction times and driving skills can be improved as a result of this type of program.

Jewish Family Service (JFS) is taking reservations for classes that will start in June at the University City Older Adults Center, 9001 Towne Centre Dr., San Diego 92122. The classes will run from June 23 through Sept. 23 and be held on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays from 9:30 to 11:30 a.m. Participants must be able to commit to participation during this 12-week program. Cost is \$129 for the 41 classes.

The Brain Fitness program is self-paced and adjusts to fit each person's capability level. Absolutely no computer experience is required; in fact, many participants have had no prior experience with computers.

For more information or to register for the program, call **(858) 637-3247**. ▲

WHAT ARE YOUR MEDICARE OPTIONS?

Do you know your Medicare benefits and options? Find out before you make a decision to delay medical insurance (Part B) or the Medicare Prescription Drug benefit (Part D). For free, one-to-one counseling about your Medicare options, contact HICAP (Health Insurance Counseling and Advocacy Program) at **(800) 434-0222**. ▲

ATTEND THE NEXT PA/PG AUCTION

The County Public Administrator/Public Guardian's office now coordinates a personal property auction quarterly, with the proceeds benefiting clients or their beneficiaries. Items for sale at this live auction include vehicles, furniture, appliances, electronics, household items, jewelry, artwork, antiques, coins, collectibles and more.

The next auction will be held Saturday, May 16, at the PA/PG warehouse, 5201-A Ruffin Road in Kearny Mesa.

Registration begins at 8 a.m. Vehicles will be auctioned at 8:30 a.m.; all other items will follow. Customers are required to pay for and pick up the property by 2 p.m. that day.

Proceeds from the auction are returned to individual estates in which the assets originated. Money earned by decedent estates is distributed to the heirs or beneficiaries. Funds earned by conservatorship estates are used to pay for housing, medical care and other personal needs for persons found by the court to be unable to provide for their own care.

To see some of the items for auction, or for additional information, see www.papg.org. ▲

JOIN A COMMUNITY ACTION NETWORK

The San Diego Community Action Network (SanDiCAN) meets from 10:30 a.m. to noon the last Tuesday of each month at the War Memorial Building, 3325 Zoo Dr., San Diego. For more information, call **(619) 476-6223**; www.localcommunities.org/lc/sandican.

The East County Action Network meets from 1 to 3 p.m. the third Wednesday of each month at Wells Park, 1153 E. Madison, El Cajon. Call Kathy Holmes-Hardy at **(619) 401-3994**, or see www.EastCountyActionNetwork.org.

The South County Action Network meets from 1 to 3 p.m. on the fourth Tuesday of each month at the San Diego County Library, Bonita-Sunnyside Branch, 4375 Bonita Rd., Bonita. Contact Anabel Kuykendall, **(619) 476-6223**, or see www.localcommunities.org/lc/socan.

The North County Action Network meets from 1 to 3 p.m. the fourth Tuesday of each month at 1370 San Marcos Blvd., Room 100, San Marcos. Call Kathy Holmes-Hardy at **(619) 401-3994**; www.localcommunities.org/lc/atf. ▲

SHARE AIS WITH OTHERS

Do you know people who could benefit from this *Aging & Independence* bulletin? Send mail and email information to Denise Nelesen, 9335 Hazard Way, San Diego, CA 92123; or denise.nelesen@sdcounty.ca.gov, or call **(858) 505-6474**. ▲

SEND IN YOUR ITEMS

This monthly calendar welcomes your contributions. Just send items by the 10th of each month preceding the issue date to: Denise G. Nelesen, editor, Aging & Independence Services, 9335 Hazard Way, San Diego, CA 92123-1222. Or fax to: (858) 495-5080. Or you can email to: denise.nelesen@sdcounty.ca.gov.

MAY 6, WEDNESDAY

10 TO 11:30 A.M.

Free five-week, basic computer class for adults ages 55+ will be held at the Bayside Community Center in Linda Vista, 2202 Comstock St., San Diego 92111. To RSVP, call (858) 278-0771, ext. 3033.

MAY 7, THURSDAY

9 A.M. TO 1 P.M.

“Live Your Best Life,” the City of Encinitas Senior Information Fair, will be held at the Encinitas Senior Center, 1140 Oakcrest Park Dr., Encinitas 92024. There will be exhibitors, entertainment and food (to the first 500 participants). Call (760) 943-2250.

MAY 7, 21 & JUNE 4

11 A.M. TO 1 P.M.

Food for Thought at the Vista Library, 700 Eucalyptus Ave. in Vista, features yoga and lunch (for a donation of \$3.50 for seniors and \$6 for others). The yoga program is free. To sign up for the lunch, call (760) 726-1340, ext. 1531.

MAY 15, FRIDAY

10 A.M. TO 1 P.M.

Senior Health and Information Fair pre-

sented by the East County Senior Service Providers will be held at the Santee Trolley Square, on the corner of Mission Gorge Road and Cuyamaca in Santee. There will be exhibits and health screenings. No reservations required. For information, call (619) 464-0505.

MAY 16, SATURDAY

10 A.M. TO NOON

“Good Start Workshop” for people recently diagnosed with Parkinson’s disease and their family members, presented by the Parkinson’s Disease Association of San Diego. Reservations required. For additional details, email Karen.Jensen@pdasd.org or call (858) 273-6763.

MAY 21, THURSDAY

8:30 A.M. TO 2:30 P.M.

“Senior Centers: Launching the Third Age,” a forum for senior center professionals and other senior advocates interested in taking senior centers into the future, will be held at the War Memorial Building, 3325 Zoo Dr., near the San Diego Zoo in Balboa Park. Cost is \$5 and includes a lunch and a light breakfast. To pre-register (by May 15), call (858) 637-3223, or email ashleyf@jfssd.org.

MAY 29, 30 & 31

VARIOUS TIMES

The Southwest Computer Conference, featuring Bruce Pechman, the Muscleman of Technology, will be held at the Town & Country Resort & Convention Center in Mission Valley. There will be workshops and other presentations, exhibitors and discounts. The event is for adults only. Early bird registration (by May 15) is \$60. For more information, see www.theswcc.org.

MAY 30, SATURDAY

9 A.M. TO NOON

First annual “Walk for Rides,” a fundraiser for ITN*SanDiego*, a transportation service for seniors, will begin at LiveWell San Diego, North Clairemont Park, 4425 Bannock Ave., San Diego 92117. There will be no charge to walk in the two-mile event. Participants with at least \$25 in donations receive a free t-shirt. For more information, see www.itnsandiego.org or call (619) 282-0073.

MAY 30, SATURDAY

9 A.M. TO NOON

East County Arthritis Expo, featuring speakers, exhibitors and resources, will be held at the Grossmont HealthCare District Conference Center and Herrick Library, 9001 Wakarusa St., La Mesa. Sponsored by Sharp Grossmont Hospital and the Arthritis Foundation. For more information, call (619) 740-4214.

JUNE 4, THURSDAY

8 A.M. TO 12:30 P.M.

Vital Aging Conference, featuring the theme of “Using Body, Mind and Laughter to Thrive in Uncertain Times,” will be held at the Balboa Park Club Ballroom in Balboa Park. To register, call (800) 827-4277.

ADVISORY COUNCIL

The AIS Advisory Council will meet at noon Monday, May 11, at AIS, 9335 Hazard Way, San Diego 92123. Open to the public.

CA SENIOR LEGISLATURE

The San Diego CSL meets at 10 a.m. on the second Monday of the month at AIS.