

CaregiverSD

+ HEALTH

Multitudes provide meals for seniors who can't fetch their own



K.C. ALFRED U-T

Jewish Family Service volunteer Peter Graham delivers meals to a client in University City. JFS provides 65,000 meals a year in the San Diego area.

Handy helpings

BY MICHELE PARENTE

For caregivers hungry for some help with meals, there are a multitude of programs and services throughout San Diego County that will deliver or provide meals that are tailored to seniors' nutritional needs.

Food for thought: Seniors unable to cook for themselves, or for whom it's dangerous to cook, often rely on carb, fat and salt-heavy packaged, processed and convenience foods. Those choices wreak havoc on their



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health and lead to — or exacerbate — heart disease, diabetes, constipation and other issues.

Added bonus: Meal delivery programs, such as those offered by Meals on Wheels and Jewish Family Service, have specially trained volunteers who also conduct safety checks on seniors, noting their well-being and reporting any concerns.

Keep in mind: Most programs have meals created by a registered dietitian. Make sure that's the case before signing on to any service. Also, you can ask to have meals meet specific dietary needs.

SEE MEALS • E4

JFS volunteer Louis Vener picks up hot meals from Foodmobile distribution specialist Darla Marcus.

BEAUTY AND GRACE AMID THE GRIEF

In year caring for ailing mom, author learned to appreciate dying mindfully

BY DOUG WILLIAMS

Just days before her mother died, Lannette Cornell Bloom heard her mom ring the bell.

At that point, her mother couldn't speak. So Bloom, who had quit work as a nurse to take care of her as she slowly slipped away from pulmonary fibrosis, gave her a small bell. It sat on a table next to the bed she could no longer leave. When she needed something — water, a tissue — she rang and her daughter came.

This time, when Bloom hustled from across the house, she found her mom smiling at her. She hadn't needed a thing. She just wanted to see her daughter.

Ten years after her mother's death, it's one of countless moments she savors from the year she spent as her caregiver. Losing her mother was terrible. There were times she wept and felt the sharp stab of loss. But she also recalls how her mom wanted to watch comedies about death — like "Weekend at Bernie's" or "Death at a Funeral" — and laughed hard.

Or how she beamed — "a smile that could light up any room," says Bloom — when her husband and



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Lannette Cornell Bloom turned 300 pages of memories into a book, "Memories in Dragonflies: Simple Lessons for Mindful Dying."

"Paying attention to all the little moments, all the hidden little gifts of beauty or comedy, humor that might be just sitting around."

Lannette Cornell Bloom

family gathered around her bed with Champagne to celebrate her 50th wedding anniversary.

Four years after her mother's death, Bloom one night dreamed she should write about her experience. So, the next morning she bought a pen and a notebook. Over six months, she filled 300 pages with memories of that year by her mother's side. In

SEE DYING • E2

VERONICA MITCHELL Caregiving Advice

'Social capital' is antidote for caregiver burnout

Last month was National Suicide Prevention month, which got me thinking about two recent presentations at the Caregiver Coalition of San Diego.

One was from NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness) San Diego, and the representative was addressing suicide rates for older adults. She said it's prevalent, especially among men, but can be prevented with conversations, medication, increased "social capital" and regular mental health assistance.

The second one was a presentation from Dr. Brent Mausbach, a psychologist who runs the UCSF Caregiver Study. Mausbach's research overwhelming shows that stress can cause health problems for caregivers, notably high blood pressure and depression.

In both presentations, the issue of "social capital" was addressed. What is social capital? I say it's like recharging your battery. I liken it to a bank account in

which you deposit all the good benefits from being around people and exchanging with them in social situations, benefits such as increased energy and endorphins.

Humans are social beings. We know from years of research and studies that isolation for any population is not good. Caregiver stress and duties can often cause a caregiver's world to shrink.

I hear it all the time from caregivers that they "have no life," that they can never travel, or go out with friends. With seniors, I'll hear that they don't want to go out for fear of falling, or they don't have friends, or they're too old, so they stop interacting with other people. In both circumstances, the senior and the caregiver are reducing their social capital.

Caregivers' lives can become very isolated due to the demands of the job, so it's imperative they do things — social things — outside of caregiving.

SEE SOCIAL • E4

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HOWARD LIPIN U-T

Anne Stillman, 70, holds her daily delivery of food from Meals on Wheels in Vista.

MEALS

FROM E1
Programs to know

Meals on Wheels San Diego County

Arguably the best-known of all the meal delivery programs, Meals on Wheels distributes food six days a week (Sunday meals are delivered Saturday) to residents countywide. It serves 450,000 meals to 3,300 meals clients a year. To be eligible, recipients must be 60 or older, a caregiver of a senior 60 or older, or a disabled veteran of any age. Three types of meal options are offered: heart-healthy; healthy Latino cuisine; and easy-to-chew meals. \$35 one-time upfront charge, meals \$4-\$7. Cat and dog food also delivered for free through a partnership with the Helen Woodward Animal Center. **Contact:** (800) 5SENIOR or (800) 573-6467 to be connected with the nearest service center. You can also contact that service online at center directly; see the list of locations here; meals-on-wheels.org.

Jewish Family Service

JFS's Foodmobile serves San Diegans of any, or no, faith, providing hot, kosher meals to homebound seniors and younger adults with disabilities. Each year, 65,000 meals are delivered. Meals are delivered Monday-Friday and frozen meals are available for weekends and holidays, as well as for the parts of the county that don't get daily delivery service. Meals are \$7 or \$8, depending on the size of the protein ordered. If eligible, recipients can pay on a sliding scale. Pet

food can also be requested. **Contact:** (858) 637-3230; jfssd.org

Interfaith Community Services

One of this North County organization's programs is a weekly lunch and social gathering at a food truck located at a four senior mobile-home communities and one faith center in Vista, San Marcos and Oceanside. The North County Senior Connections "Thyme Together" food-truck program serves healthy, prepared-to-order meals for \$4 and also features educational speakers and entertainment. **Contact:** (760) 294-6356 ext. 103; interfaithservices.org

Serving Seniors

This nonprofit organization serves close to 600,000 meals a year to seniors at nine sites around the county as well as delivery to 500-plus homebound elderly residents. Breakfast and lunch is provided for those 60 and older seven days a week, 365 days a year, at the Gary and Mary West Senior Wellness Center at 1525 Fourth Ave., downtown San Diego. Communal meals are also served five days a week at locations that include City Heights, La Mesa, Lemon Grove, Spring Valley, San Ysidro and Mira Mesa. Home-delivered meals are provided 365 days a year to 11 service areas throughout San Diego County. Since Serving Seniors primarily works with low-income residents, it asks for a small donation for meals, but seniors who can't pay aren't turned away. **Contact:** (619) 235-6572 (for communal meals); (619) 487-0707 (for home-delivered meals); servingsenior-

s.org

The Salvation Army. Among the programs for seniors offered by The Salvation Army's Club 60 are dining centers and home-delivered meals. The five Senior Dining & Social Centers are located in Chula Vista, El Cajon, Lakeside, Oceanside and San Diego. No charge for meals; a donation of up to \$4 is suggested. Non-seniors pay a fee of \$6. In the summer, the air-conditioned centers are designated as community Cool Zones. Meals can be delivered to select ZIP codes in Chula Vista, El Cajon and San Diego. **Contact:** (619) 231-6000; sandiego.salvationarmy.org/san_diego2/love-the-elderly

Additional sources: For other senior centers and service organizations around San Diego that serve or deliver meals, see the county's Aging & Independent Services, as well as 211.

Also consider: A number of private delivery companies sell meal programs specifically adapted to seniors' nutritional needs, including San Diego-based Martha's Senior Gourmet and Silver Cuisine, which delivers ready-to-heat meals by FedEx. Schwan's, the Poway online frozen food delivery company in business for 65 years, has more than 300 items and meals, which can all be ordered to suit a particular dietary need, such as low sodium or heart healthy. A special LiveSmart category makes it easy to order healthier fare.

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SOCIAL

FROM E1

The caregiver must make time for their friends and the things they enjoy doing, just like they schedule their caregiver duties. Many caregivers have to train themselves to have fun again. It takes practice to get back into the game of life. I have always encouraged caregivers to do this to prevent themselves from getting stuck in a rut.

In that same vein, let's talk about the importance of resilience and positivity in our lives. After 16 years of working in the aging and caregiving populations, I

have seen the good, bad and ugly side of human beings. There are those who choose to complain all the time about their lot in life, and there are those who decide to move forward and adjust to things as needed.

I write this with the hope that this message is received in the manner in which I'm sending it, with love, understanding and empathy. I bring up venting because in many support groups, workshops and blog posts, there is a lot of conversation about the difficulties but not much discussion about how to get on with living and doing the things that bring us joy.

Many times, when you encounter caregivers who

are typically negative, are down in the dumps and can't get over a loss, it's likely due to some of the things I'm writing about here. This caregiver may have let their world become so small that it's easier for them to stay in it than venture out for a start fresh with new relationships and activities. The caregiver needs to practice building their own social capital, scheduling some "me" time and getting back into living for themselves.

Mitchell writes "Ask Veronica — Let's make caregiving better, together" for caregiverSD.com; email her at veronica@veronicamitchell.com

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