

# Community

# FOCUS



A Publication of Community Services Agency,  
Serving Mountain View, Los Altos and Los Altos Hills

Spring/Summer 2006

*caring for our* HOMELESS

## New Model for Alpha Omega

Earlier this year, Community Services Agency (CSA) held a Celebration of Transition event for its Alpha Omega Rotating Shelter program at the **Los Altos United Methodist Church**. "We're changing the way we serve homeless people with our Alpha Omega program," remarked **Executive Director Tom Myers**, "We're expanding the services that we offer so that we are more than just a rotating shelter program. While the rotating shelter program was an innovative model for grassroots involvement around homelessness for over 16 years times have changed, and so must Alpha Omega"

"There have been many expressions of emotion, even relief, over this news," said **Reverend Matthew Broadbent** who as Minister of the **Foothills Congregational Church** was host to the rotating shelter, and who is also a member of the CSA board of directors and chairperson of the board task force set up to study the issues around homelessness and the effectiveness of the Alpha Omega Program. "We had to examine one of our best loved and best community supported programs from the perspective as to whether it was the best model in dealing with homelessness. But, no matter how hospitable we wanted to be, that fact remained that a church floor and a foam

mat is not a home."

On any given night there are between 200 and 250 homeless individuals and families (SCC Homeless Count, Dec 2004) in the Mountain View, Los Altos, and Los Altos Hills and the rotating shelter had a capacity to house fifteen (15), a limit set by the Mountain View and Los Altos City Councils. "We knew it was inevitable," continued Broadbent in his remarks. "Alpha Omega started as a 3-4 year project... (16 years ago!) and funding sources have been advising us for some time that they wanted to fund programs that housed more people and which fit into a regional approach to ending homelessness."

"We will continue our work in partnership with the local churches and other communities of faith," Myers says, "They have brought and continue to bring enthusiasm, energy, and good will to not just the issues of homelessness, but also to all those that might be considered *'the least among us'* such as the working poor, low income families, low income and frail seniors, the unemployed; in other words, all the people who are our clients here at Community Services Agency, and who are also our neighbors and members of our community."



Program Director Nancy Noel at Transition Celebration

Russ and Joan spent several weeks in the Alpha Omega Rotating shelter during its final months of operation. Russ had excellent job skills and steady employment. Alpha Omega provided what was needed most to help the couple get back onto their feet: the "bed and breakfast (& dinner)" stability of a place to stay; an opportunity to save money; and the support services of counseling, financial assistance, and advocacy that will still be available through the new Alpha Omega Homeless Services while clients are sheltered in other facilities.

With Joan expecting a baby the pressure was on for them to get settled before the new arrival. Neither pregnancy, nor the winter rains, affected their good humor and determination to take the next step in finding their own place to live. Having done that, they are continuing to save money, Russ is steadily employed and, best of all, their baby was born healthy and happy.

"We are happy to have been there with the strong support of so many in the community to have made such a difference in their lives," says Nancy Noel, Alpha Omega Homeless Services Director. "It's what we're all about here... *caring for our community*. We wish them now only the best of luck."

Russ and Joan have expressed deep appreciation for the services and kindness they received from Community Services Agency, the Alpha Omega program, and the many church volunteers they met along their way to self-sufficiency.

### How To Stay Connected With The Issues Of Homelessness

- Support a fund to provide rental, vision, and dental assistance, tools, special clothing/uniforms, bus passes etc. as part of the new Alpha Omega Homeless Services program.
- Study Santa Clara County's 10-year plan to end homelessness and its "Housing First" model.
- Stay involved and work with the Alpha Omega Homeless task force to come up with new and innovative ways to help our fellow citizens.
- Get involved in proposals to bring low-income housing to Mountain View and Los Altos.

—From the remarks of Reverend Matthew Broadbent, March 8, 2006

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caring for our SENIORS

# Senior Services Log On



With funding from the **Silicon Valley Council on Aging** and **The Valley Foundation**, our Senior Services case managers are now equipped with wireless laptops and the latest technology to assist them in monitoring their clients' health care and in presenting up-to-date workshops on a variety of aging-related topics wherever seniors gather.

Since October we have been able to schedule

over 20 presentations. Popular topics are: "To drive or not to drive" with one focus on the adult children of aging parents (safer driver or driver retirement) and the other on the mobile and driving seniors themselves (self-evaluations and car adaptations for safer driving); "Stress management;" and the ubiquitous "Private Medicare D Assistance." Upcoming topics are: "How to talk to your Doctor" (to improve interaction be-

**\$50,000 SOBRATO FOUNDATION 2:1 Challenge Grant Received:** To receive the full \$50,000 (the last 18 months) donations from people like you. Details and a Donation Envelope will be mailed to

## New Faces

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## OUR COMMUNITY



There was no "fooling" around at the April 1 Gala "April Fool's" as over 200 people attended the event. Next year's Gala Event



tween patient and provider, to encourage a more proactive approach to medical care, and to learn how to ask the right questions); and "Learning to live alone" (for widows and widowers).

Our developing Senior Services "library" of presentations is a combination of purchased series on "Caregiver Issues" and in-house developed PowerPoint presentations. It is also part of a new collaboration with the **El Camino Hospital Health Library** to assist seniors in being more proactive in accessing health and medical information over the Internet and being able to evaluate and determine reliable information.

Presentations have been given so far at both the Mountain View and Los Altos Senior Centers, along with a number of senior housing complexes (Ginzton Terrace, Central Park, Monte Vista Terrace), and church groups (St. Simon Church, Los Altos United Methodist Church, First Presbyterian Church).

There are plans, too, for one-on-one, customized presentations in seniors' homes on topics identified by the individual client needs. These sessions will be targeted to the most frail and homebound seniors, those who are typically under-served because they're unable to access resources out in the community. These seniors are usually in their mid-80s to 90s and tend to be resistant to or can't afford computers for their own personal use. Case managers will be able to address their needs by providing information and interventions that will increase their control over their health care and improve their quality of life during home visits.

We are also working with the Council on Aging and the Q-database to complete the design of a system to meet the in-home client assessment needs of our case managers. And then all current client files (approximately 200+) will be added to the internet-based database. Case managers will then be able to complete their assessments directly on their laptops during the home visit, reducing the amount of time spent on maintaining up-to-date case records. They will also be able to make on-the-spot referrals to other services offered by the Council on Aging, such as Meals on Wheels.

We are the only social services agency in Northern Santa Clara County providing this intensity of integrated case management for the low income and frail elderly to improve both their access to and quality of health and community resource information through the use of a technology-based service delivery. Your support helps us in caring for our seniors, and for that we truly appreciate and thank you.

**Did you know...?**

- By 2020 it's projected that the number of people age 65 or older in the San Francisco Bay Area will increase 84%.
- The number of people age 85 and older, the group with the most severe mobility and health related limitations, will increase 108%.
- Our senior client cases are up 11% this year over last year.
- Our case managers enrolled 38 seniors in the new Medicare Prescription Plan D on the spot with their laptops.
- Eighteen seniors were registered online for Section-8 housing with the help of our case managers.

**Cathy Chavez**, our Senior Services Director for the past 4 years is retiring this summer. With an MA in Counseling from Columbia University and over 15 years experience working with seniors, she has conducted geriatric research at Stanford University Medical Center and has put to good use her experience working with diverse ethnic populations in both New York and California. Being an adult child of an aging parent, as many of us are, she has been extremely sensitive to the demands and challenges of being a caregiver. Her compassion and professionalism will be truly missed.

Community Services Agency must raise \$25,000 from **NEW** (if you haven't given within the last 18 months) or **INCREASED** (more than you've given in this summer. Every dollar you give in **NEW** or **INCREASED** giving will be matched with \$2 from the Sobrato Foundation up to \$50,000!



"Fools" Fundraiser: Over \$80,000 was raised and it will kick off our 50th Anniversary year!

**Chefs Who Care (CWC)** is a monthly dine-out fundraiser rotated among many of our finest local restaurants who support our Emergency Assistance programs with 50% of a Prix-Fixe dinner menu cost. Over \$20,000 will be raised this year! No speeches. No appeals. All you need is an appetite.



Executive Director Tom Myers presents a certificate of appreciation to Lucy Li of Lucy's Café (top) for hosting the CWC



Chinese New Year's Dinner. Cinco de Mayo was celebrated by CWC at Vive Sol (bottom).



"Time" and "talent" is just as vital to Community Services Agency as "treasure." We need more than 500 volunteers (or 25,000 hours) each year to provide and support the many programs and services we have for the working poor, the unemployed, the homeless, and the frail elderly.

Volunteers from Onizuka Air Force base help unload produce for our Food & Nutrition Center.



PHOTO COURTESY OF JOYCE WILES

The Orchard Valley Ceramics Art Guild donates the hand made bowls; local restaurants donate the soup and the Community Services Agency Alpha Omega Homeless Services

program benefits from the annual event known as "Empty Bowls." This year's event raised over \$8,000 to help the homeless in our community.



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## Hidden Villa to supply organic produce to CSA

In a strategic alliance with **Hidden Villa** (a nonprofit organic farm in Los Altos Hills) we will soon be offering *seasonal, organic,* and *fresh* produce to our low-income clients; produce specifically grown for them at the **Hidden Villa Farms**. Program staff is excited with this new collaboration. **Nutrition Programs Director Laura Schuster** summed it up best: “Educating a family about nutrition is one thing, but now we will be able to offer fresh and nutritious produce so it will be easier for clients to make healthier choices. This will be the best way we can affect behavioral change to impact the diet and health of our low income clients that will have long-term benefits for themselves and the community.”

With previous funding from **The Health Trust** and the **Mountain View Kiwanis Club** we have

been offering food-tasting, nutrition workshops, and health education regarding the relationship between diet, exercise and lifelong health. We want to teach our families and their children to incorporate healthier eating and exercise as permanent lifestyle changes, in addition to minimizing their food insecurity.

While **Village Harvest** and the **Second Harvest Food Bank's Produce Mobile** provide a lot of fresh produce for our Food and Nutrition Center, the bulk of our food comes from in-kind donations from local grocery stores, which results in mostly bakery items and excess products which are often near the end of their shelf life. The challenge has been in working with the food we receive to eliminate food insecurity and to teach our clients to make better food choices, a job made much easier now thanks to this collaboration with Hidden Villa.

Carmen shops at our Food and Nutrition Center for herself, her husband Juan, and their 3 children (ages 2 yrs, 5 yrs, and 7 yrs). Their monthly income is about \$1100 from Juan's work at a restaurant where he is paid minimum wage. Their rent is \$800/month, not leaving a lot left over for food or for transportation to get Juan to and from his job. Juan and Carmen shared with their case managers that it's better for Juan to ride his bike the 8 miles roundtrip every day than to have a car. If they had a car they realized that not only would they be paying a lot for gas, but they'd have to have car insurance, auto registration, and money saved for car repairs. The money they're saving can be better spent on clothes and school supplies for the children. Our Food and Nutrition Center helps them to make ends meet while keeping them in a food-secure household.

### Just The Facts

- Overweight children miss significantly more school days than normal weight children.
- Overweight children who develop type 2 diabetes may have a heart attack and need coronary by-pass surgery before age 30.
- More children are killed by obesity than by gun violence each year.
- Childhood obesity disproportionately affects the Latino community, who make up almost 2/3 of the CSA emergency assistance clients.