



PRESS RELEASE

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National Arthritis Month Brings Attention To Local Partnership

SAN DIEGO, CA – Two local nonprofits are celebrating May, National Arthritis Month, the same way they celebrate every month – by making sure San Diegans with arthritis live a little healthier each day.

The Mission Valley YMCA and the Arthritis Foundation, San Diego Area Chapter have partnered together to offer the Arthritis Foundation Aquatic Program classes at the Mission Valley and Toby Wells YMCAs, as well as land-based classes at the Hazard Center Annex of the Mission Valley YMCA. The programs, designed to relieve pain and increase range of motion, have served YMCA and Arthritis Foundation members for more than 10 years. And as participation continues to surge and class offerings increase, it becomes all the more obvious that these crucial programs are needed every month, not just May.

“Research has shown that obesity and lack of exercise significantly increase the likelihood of someone developing arthritis,” said Sandra Hayhurst, M.A., Director of Health Promotion at the Arthritis Foundation, San Diego Area Chapter. “Regular exercise and an active lifestyle can significantly improve quality of life for people already living with arthritis. The National Arthritis Foundation developed this exercise program specifically to offer relief to those folks. It was just a matter of finding the right partners who could deliver the program to people who need it.”

Enter Mission Valley YMCA, already a fitness leader with multiple pools and cross-training centers in San Diego. Using a thorough training curriculum developed by the national Arthritis Foundation, 18 instructors currently teach 9 different aquatic classes in the 90-degree Art Pratt Pool at the Friars Road location. The pool and the warm temperature combine to provide a comfortable, low-impact setting ideal for people with arthritis, lupus, and other conditions that affect movement and the joints.

“The Arthritis Foundation Aquatic Program classes are amongst our most popular. They offer people with arthritis the opportunity to improve their quality of life by increasing their range of motion and giving them more flexibility,” said Dick Webster, Executive Director of Mission Valley YMCA. “But it’s more than that. Our members don’t come solely for the exercise; they have an opportunity to socialize and build bonds with others who are going through similar challenges.”

On one particular Thursday, more than a few participants agreed. “My doctor said I needed more exercise after my knee replacement, so I started coming here [Mission Valley YMCA] almost 10 years ago,” said Mary Lou Heflin. After her husband died, Heflin, 82, realized benefits other than the doctor-recommended exercise. “These classes are a way for me to get out of the house and socialize with people my age. I look forward to coming each week so I can catch up with my friends. We even have nicknames for each other.”

Other participants agreed, but cited the intended physical benefits as their biggest draw. “Before I started at Mission Valley, I could hardly walk a block,” said Richard Thunhorst, a Vietnam veteran living with both arthritis and diabetes. He was told by his doctor to get more exercise after retiring several years ago and heeding his doctor’s advice, starting taking the aquatic classes at Mission Valley YMCA. Now, after three years, Thunhorst, 67, not only has greater range of motion, he’s back in the workforce, working in Human Resources at the local VA Hospital. “I swim 25 laps in the pool every Sunday morning. I don’t go very fast, but considering where I was just 3 years ago, I can’t complain.” Added Thunhorst: “I never would have met the new friends I’ve met or gone back to work had it not been for these classes and Mission Valley YMCA. It’s been amazing.”

Since the Arthritis Foundation Aquatic Program started at Mission Valley YMCA, more than 1400 people – and counting – have participated in the aquatics program alone. Several hundred others continue to benefit from the land-based programs at the Hazard Center. All classes remain free to members.

“We couldn’t be happier with this partnership,” said Webster, of the Mission Valley YMCA-Arthritis Foundation collaboration. “We’re using their expertise and our staff and facilities; it’s worked out great for both of our members.”

While National Arthritis Month is a great time to raise awareness, these organizations are working hard to make a difference in San Diegan’s lives every day. And by all accounts, they are succeeding.

Mission Valley YMCA, located at 5505 Friars Road, is dedicated to building strong kids, strong families, and strong communities. In addition to the AFAP programs, the Mission Valley YMCA, with additional locations in Kearny Mesa (Toby Wells YMCA) and Hazard Center (Hazard Center YMCA), offers a number of fitness and wellness opportunities for all ages, from youth to seniors. To get updated program offerings and the latest information, visit us online at www.missionvalley.ymca.org or call 619-298-3576.

The Arthritis Foundation, San Diego-Area Chapter, is a 501(c)(3) dedicated to improving lives through leadership in the prevention, control, and cure of arthritis and related diseases. For more information on the Arthritis Foundation, upcoming events, and how to become a member, visit www.arthritis-sandiego.org, or call 858-492-1090.

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Arthritis Fact Sheet

- 46 million people are living with arthritis in the United States
 - The California Health Interview Survey (CHIS) estimates that 18% of the population in San Diego County lives with 1 of the 120 different forms of arthritis.
- Arthritis is second only to heart disease as a cause of work disability.
- Excess body weight is a well-established risk factor for several types of arthritis. In women, being overweight accounts for more osteoarthritis than any other known factor.
- Research from the California Department of Public Health shows that more than 28% of California adults with a body mass index (BMI) considered obese were also found to have arthritis. Just 17% of those with normal BMI's were diagnosed with arthritis.
- Overweight, obesity, and their associated health problems (including arthritis) cost California an estimated \$7.7 billion in 2003

** The national Arthritis Foundation is the source for all information unless otherwise noted. **

Mission Valley YMCA – Arthritis Foundation Aquatic Programs

- The Arthritis Foundation Aquatic Programs at Mission Valley YMCA, developed by the Arthritis Foundation, are designed to alleviate pain and stiffness associated with arthritis and increase range of motion and wellness through low-impact aquatic workouts.
- The classes take place in the 90-degree, indoor pool at the Friars Road location, which features a state-of-the-art retractable roof to regulate temperature and ensure maximum comfort for participants.
- There are 18 trained instructors, all certified by the National Arthritis Foundation, to lead 9 different AFAP classes at Mission Valley YMCA.
- Regular and more advanced participants may progress to an endurance component, the Plus Program, with longer periods of sustained activity. This class involves minimal or mild joint involvement.
- More than 1400 people have participated in the Arthritis Foundation Aquatic Program at Mission Valley YMCA since the program's inception.
 - Per month, attendance averages close to 700 people.
 - Classes average about 40-50 participants, and varies by time of day and focus (e.g. Knee & Hip Post Rehab, Hydro Healing, etc)
- Classes are free to Mission Valley YMCA members.

- Throughout all the programs, participants do not need the ability to swim, though some classes require medical clearance from a doctor.

Mission Valley YMCA - Arthritis Foundation Exercise Program (AFEP)

This land-based program held at the Hazard Center YMCA (an annex of the Mission Valley YMCA) is another option for arthritis sufferers who may not be comfortable with the aquatics programs. As with the aquatics programs, classes are taught by Arthritis Foundation-certified instructors and contain many of the same elements.

For more information about the Arthritis Foundation Aquatic Programs at the Mission Valley YMCA, visit www.missionvalley.ymca.org, or call 619-298-3576.

For media inquiries and/or photo opportunities, contact Sidd Vivek, Director of Marketing & Public Relations, 619-666-1307.