

NAMI Santa Clara County Celebrates 35 Years



Emcee Brian Wetzel; Honorees Peter Newman, Donna Mechanic, Marie Hibler, Bill Logan

On November 11, 2010, NAMI Santa Clara County in California celebrated its 35th Anniversary with a dinner and awards presentation. It was an outstanding success. Over 200 people attended and helped honor our achievements over thirty-five years and some of the individuals who have truly made a difference. We honored nine individuals: two founders of the original organization, **Marie Hibler** and **Bill Logan**; three people living with a serious mental illness who inspire us all, **Donna Mechanic**, **Peter Newman** and **Leslie Barry Connors**; two unsung heroes who have been our

benefactors, **David** and **Mary Alexander**; an individual who has gone above and beyond in her efforts on behalf of those affected by mental illness, **Luisa Perez**; and a special award to **Lt. Brenda Herbert** of the San Jose Police Department who helped bring the Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) training to California.

One of the wonderful surprises of the Celebration was the attendance and participation of the **Honorable Zoe Lofgren**, Congresswoman from the Bay Area. Congresswoman Lofgren grew up two doors from Marie Hibler's family and on November 17, 2010, entered remarks into The Congressional Record about Marie's leadership in the founding of NAMI SCC in 1975. Those remarks were read at our Celebration and here is a partial reprint of them: "Marie, a mother and homemaker, came to be one of the prime founders of PAMI, Parents of Adult Mentally Ill (our original name). She gave speeches and wrote articles. I know this because I was a neighbor, and my mother was Marie's volunteer typist and editor....It is especially fitting at this 35th anniversary to thank those parent volunteers who stood up to be counted when there was little help for them or for their sons and daughters. Marie Hibler is someone who fearlessly stepped forward. She wasn't an expert in psychiatry. She was a mother who loved her son. That made all of the difference."

Our emcee for the evening was **Brian Wetzel**, a professional stand-up comedian and speaker who has created and toured the West Coast with his autobiographical one-man show, "Side by Side: A Journey With Depression — a funny look at serious survival."

More About Our Honorees

Early 1970's: The terms schizophrenogenic mother and schizophrenogenic families were in vogue, indicating that schizophrenia was caused by bad families or at the very least by bad mothers. Much of the mental health establishment still believed this nonsensical fiction despite the total absence of supporting scientific evidence. Furthermore most of the general population believed it as well. After all we had been hearing it for three decades from the mental health professionals. Also at this time mental hospitals were closing, releasing patients onto the streets with very little or no support.

By 1975 families were wondering why parents of a child with leukemia were treated with respect and humanity while parents of a child with schizophrenia were treated with scorn



Past President Sharon Roth, Honoree Mary Alexander, Diedre Alexander, Past Present Carol Calkins, Author Rebecca Woolis

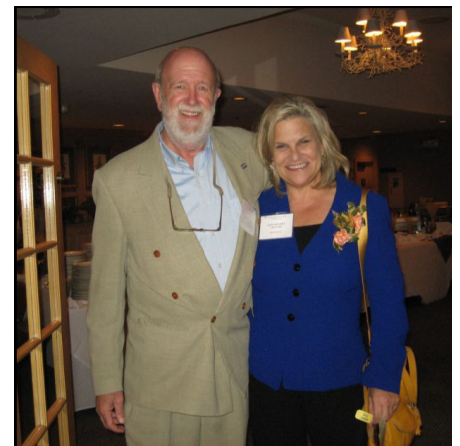
and derision. Families started wondering what was going to happen to their ill family member who was released from the hospital.

On April 5, 1975, twelve persons came together in downtown San Jose to form Parents of Adult Mentally Ill (PAMI). The new organization's goals were to help parents, educate the public, and advocate for the rights of parents and their ill family members. At this 35th Anniversary Celebration we proudly honor and sincerely thank two of those 12 founding members, Marie Hibler and Bill Logan.

Bill Logan verbalized the acronym, pam-ee. He and his wife Arlove wrote our first newsletters. Bill was a successful architect when Pete, one his three sons, became ill. Bill and Arlove together advocated for and supported not only Pete but the ill children of other PAMI members. During all of our 35 years Pete has lived in the family home in Palo Alto and now as Bill gets older, Pete is a big help to his father.

In the early years Bill worked hard, if not always successfully, as an advocate for adequate housing for people with mental illness. Recently he has continued his advocacy on Pete's behalf. Through years of work: chasing down very old medical records, writing to congressional representatives, talking with physicians and lawyers, and yes, consulting with NAMI colleagues, Bill finally was able to obtain the disability benefits for Pete that he had long been entitled to.

Marie Hibler became the first president of PAMI. A stay-at-home mom when one of her 5 children, Roger, became ill, Marie quickly became a very effective advocate for her son and for PAMI. Her formal education ended with high school where she sometimes skipped school rather than have to give an oral presentation in class. Yet the power of her dedication was such that she agreed to give a talk in San Francisco at a national convention of the American Psychiatric Association. The talk brought tears to many and an invitation to publish her paper in one of the APA's journals, Hospital Community Psychiatry, where it appeared in January, 1978. The talk and its publication led to Marie making invited trips to various locations including the East Coast to describe the formation of PAMI and to spread the word about family activism and support.



NAMI SCC Immediate Past President John Mitchem; Honoree Leslie Barry Connors

Marie eventually moved to Stockton where she continued her NAMI activism for years and lives near Roger. They spend many weekends together in Stockton.

One of the common misconceptions about serious mental illness is that people with illnesses such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, and clinical depression cannot get better, that they cannot have a good life. We at NAMI Santa Clara County know this is false. Every day we see friends and colleagues who despite their illness have a life in



Honorees Luisa Perez & Lt. Brenda Herbert; NAMI Santa Clara County President Kathy Forward

the community. This evening we are greatly honored to recognize three such individuals who through a combination of their personal strength and fortitude, excellent professional care, and support of family and friends are an inspiration to all through their life in the community.

Donna Mechanic has worked part-time in our NAMI SCC office for almost 14 years. Her official title is typesetter but in fact she does much work on the newsletter beyond the layout of articles. For example, she sends the e-version of the newsletter to all who request it and, working closely with our newsletter volunteers, she solicits articles and helps to edit them. She does very useful record keeping work as needed in the office and this past year performed invaluable duties as the NAMIWalk Administrator. Recently she has become one of the leaders in our Connections Recovery Support Group for consumers.

Just as important as these practical leadership tasks is Donna's friendly smile and kindly presence in the office. For more than a dozen years Donna has set the tone for the NAMI Office to be a welcoming place for all who come to it. Thank you Donna for all that you do as an inspiring presence for everyone.

Peter Newman is a very successful Silicon Valley engineer who like many local tech workers enjoys hiking, traveling and skiing when his work hours are not too long. For NAMI SCC he takes care of our website, he teaches our signature Peer-to-Peer class, and he was very instrumental in changing one of our support groups so that it welcomes both families and consumers as participants. He also helped to start the consumer support group which is now known as the Connections Recovery Support Group.

Peter is a very articulate and informed presence in NAMI SCC, and we heartily recommend to all his insightful personal website, www.lucidinterval.org which he subtitles, "A Self-Management Guide to Bipolar Disorder". Thank you Peter for all that you do for those with mental illness and their families.

Leslie Barry Connors is the Director of Development, Marketing and Communications at Momentum for Mental Health. In that position she is the leader of a team which works to increase philanthropic funds that support Momentum programs and services for those affected by mental illness, to reduce stigma, and to advance awareness of mental health issues in the community.

Despite her busy schedule of her work at Momentum, her care for herself, and her care for ill loved ones, Leslie finds time to volunteer at the NAMI office. With her very wide experience as a family member and with her personal lived experience she brings great insight, empathy, and inspiration in her volunteer work at our help desk/warmline. Thank you Leslie.

Luisa Perez founded and led for more than two decades our NAMI SCC Spanish Speaking Group. She introduced and taught Family-to-Family and organized and ran family support groups, all in Spanish, serving hundreds of people with limited facility in

English. Just as important as these valuable contributions is Luisa's long time work at the end of a phone line helping families and consumers in crisis.

Luisa Perez through her work and leadership with NAMI SCC created one of NAMI's first comprehensive outreach programs to minority communities. Her 20 plus years of dedicated service has been recognized by a plethora of local, state, and national awards including NAMI National's Multi-Cultural Outreach Award. Thank you Luisa for going above and beyond in your efforts on behalf of all affected by mental illness.

In the 1990's it became apparent that law enforcement officers were ill trained to react with people they encountered who were in crisis due to their serious mental illness. In 1997 San Jose Police Lt. **Brenda Herbert** and NAMI SCC leader Sharon Roth both heard a KQED radio broadcast about a new program in Memphis, Tennessee, which educated officers about serious mental illness and trained them on how to help severely ill persons in crisis. Brenda and Sharon got together and convinced the San Jose Chief of Police to send Brenda to Crisis Intervention Team Training in Memphis.

Lt. Herbert brought CIT back to San Jose and to California where it has grown and thrived. The San Jose P.D. and the Santa Clara County Sheriff's Office have provided CIT academies to approximately 1000 law enforcement personnel and together they now train more than 150 annually. A couple of dozen California counties now conduct CIT training. Brenda Herbert's work has saved much heartache, many injuries, and lives. Thank you Lt. Brenda Herbert.

David and Mary Alexander came to Silicon Valley from England in 1962, via Philadelphia. David, a very successful engineer and entrepreneur, retired in 1982, expecting to lead a life of leisure. Shortly after, however, their son Peter became seriously ill. Both David and Mary became very involved with mental health issues, particularly housing. When David passed away in 1999, Mary carried forward with two homes for seriously ill persons and as a volunteer at our HelpDesk/Warmline.

In addition to this important work which included active management of the properties, Mary became a major benefactor for the mental health community. Because of Mary's substantial financial support NAMI SCC has been able to greatly upgrade our office facilities in the past 6 years, allowing us to better serve and support consumers and families. Thank you Mary Alexander.