

CARE

# Programs gives caregivers break

## CAN, Sun Valley Lodge partnership working well

By Rusty Bradshaw

INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Anyone who has been the full-time caregiver for a family member with a chronic disease, such as dementia or

cancer, knows how stressful and difficult it is to take care of someone 24 hours per day, according to Hugh Duncan, Sun City Community Assistance Network board president.

Now some Sun City caregivers have a chance to get a break as CAN and Sun Valley Lodge officials teamed up

to provide the new resource for low-income Sun City residents. The Free Respite Care program provides temporary institutional care at Sun Valley Lodge, 12415 N. 103rd Ave., for dependent elderly, ill or handicapped persons, providing temporary relief for their usual caregivers.

Both Sun Valley Lodge and

Sun City CAN are 501(c)3 nonprofit organizations.

Launched in March 2017, the program has had some interested persons inquire, but so far just two caregivers have taken advantage of the program.

"It was nice to get a break during some intense times," said Kevin Martin.

He and his wife lived with his mother at the time, but now they rent a home next door. His sister also lived across the street and helped care for their mother, but she was away July-September. Mr. Martin was also caring for his ailing wife.

"She (his mother) seemed

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to do well there (Sun Valley Lodge)," Mr. Martin said. "There was some initial disorientation, but she quickly got used to the new surroundings."

Michael Fahey, Sun Valley Lodge executive director, believes the program is a great opportunity for qualified caregivers.

"I think this program can be utilized more than it is," he said.

Mr. Fahey said the second caregiver to use the program had a similar experience as Mr. Martin.

The program is not a substitute for the family providing care, only a temporary option to give the caregivers a break, according to Mr. Duncan.

"Even though many families take great joy in providing care to their loved ones so that they can remain at home, the physical, emotional and financial consequences for the family caregiver can be overwhelming without some support, such as respite care,"

### WHAT DO YOU THINK?

What are your opinions on this issue? Send responses to [rbradshaw@newszap.com](mailto:rbradshaw@newszap.com).

Mr. Duncan said. "Respite care provides a break for the family caregiver to rest and recharge their batteries."

The patients of those caregivers selected for the program receive three days of free respite care at Sun Valley Lodge every three to six months, depending upon the availability of funds. Sun Valley Lodge officials are giving Sun City CAN a reduced daily rate for two of the three days and Sun Valley Lodge will provide the third day free of charge, Mr. Duncan explained. If necessary, Sun Valley Lodge will provide transportation to and from the patient's residence, he added.

"Anyone caring for someone with dementia, cancer or other chronic disease knows just how difficult and consuming it is to care for someone you love," Mr. Duncan said.

He cited a book titled "The Thirty Six Hour Day" that conveys the stress of coping

with the day-to-day challenges of caregiving. But Mr. Duncan also knows first-hand, having cared for his wife prior to her death. It was that experience that prompted him to donate \$10,000 from her estate to initiate the program.

"I just thought this was a fitting way to honor her," Mr. Duncan said.

To qualify for the program, residents must be a full-time Sun City resident; be a primary caregiver for an elderly, ill or handicapped patient for the past three months; have monthly income less than \$2,010 (single) or \$2,707 (married); have less than \$13,300 in savings.

"This is just one of the great programs Sun City CAN has to offer for residents," Mr. Fahey said. "We have a wonderful partnership with them."

Mr. Fahey, who had a passion for caring for the elderly even while in high school, has been in the industry 40 years, the last 17 with Sun Valley Lodge.

To apply for the Free Respite Care program, call the Sun City CAN office at 623-933-7530 or stop by the office



From left, Pete Granucci, CAN Respite Care coordinator; Hugh Duncan, CAN president; Chelsie Hockersmith, Sun Valley Lodge Resident Services coordinator; and Michael Fahey, Sun Valley Lodge executive director. [Submitted photo]

at 10195 W. Coggins Drive and pick up an application.

While Mr. Duncan's contribution got the program its start, to continue it needs continued infusions of cash. Donations for the Free Respite Care program are accepted at the CAN office. Checks should be made out to Sun City CAN and ear-

marked "Free Respite Care."

Other donations to CAN may also be directed to the Free Respite Care program.

The new program adds to the CAN stable of community service offerings. CAN officials are always looking for new ways to provide services to those in need, according to board member Rick Gray.

"Our president (Mr. Duncan) has been a strong proponent of this program. It will be a tremendous benefit for those who need it," Mr. Fahey said. "It is just one example of how Sun City CAN is always looking out for those in our community."

Rusty Bradshaw can be reached at 623-445-2725 or [rbradshaw@newszap.com](mailto:rbradshaw@newszap.com).



| Sun City Independent | April 26, 2017

## LUNCHEON

# CAN tax volunteers honored

### Nearly 100 attend luncheon

By Rusty Bradshaw  
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Volunteers who help file tax returns for the Sun City Community Assistance Network and AARP Tax-Aide were

recognized for their efforts.

A special luncheon April 15 — the traditional tax deadline — drew 90 volunteers who spent nearly four months filing returns. They were treated to a lunch of finger sandwiches, fruit bowl and light desserts.

“The luncheon was for the volunteers that donate four months of their time to do free tax returns for anyone who needs the service,” explained Linda Miskimen, Sun City CAN executive director. “It is for anyone who comes into our office other

than small business owners or people who have rental property.”

The luncheon was sponsored by Palliative Care Alliance. Cameron Svendsen, a PCA social worker, was the guest speaker, explaining his

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SERVICE

# Growing with distinction

## Sun City CAN now 5 years old

By Rusty Bradshaw  
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Sun City Community Assistance Network turned 5 years old in February, but the organization's roots go farther back.

In fact, the agency has been around, in one form or another, nearly as long as Sun City. Sun City CAN's parent was

the Sun City Taxpayers Association, started in the 1960s with the mission to fight unreasonable tax and utility increases. Today, with a new name and mission, Sun City CAN offers a wide variety of human service programs — provided mostly by volunteers.

"Today's Sun City residents owe a debt of gratitude to the people who fought those battles for us, but by the year 2000, all of the tax wars

**IF YOU GO:**

**What:** Sun City Community Assistance Network Board of Directors

**When:** 9:30 a.m. Tuesday, March 14

**Where:** Sun City CAN office, 10195 W. Coggins Drive

seemed to be over and SCTA started to question its mission and its reason for being," said Hugh Duncan, Sun City CAN board president.

Over the past five years, Sun City CAN has provided

free assistance to thousands of Sun City and West Valley residents. Sun City CAN's mission is to connect people with resources to enhance their standard of living.

The organization is governed by a volunteer board of directors and has two part-time employees. The agency's office is at 10195 W. Coggins Drive and is open 8 a.m.-noon five days per week. All services are free of charge.

"Our motto is, 'To connect

people with resources to enhance the standard of living,'" said Linda Miskimen, Sun City CAN executive director. "We give people direction to find help."

CAN has a wide variety of programs and services.

"Most of those we serve are lower income people, but we also serve others, like those who come to us for help in filing their tax forms," said Rick Gray, CAN board mem-

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ber. "We have resources, too, that help people with legal needs."

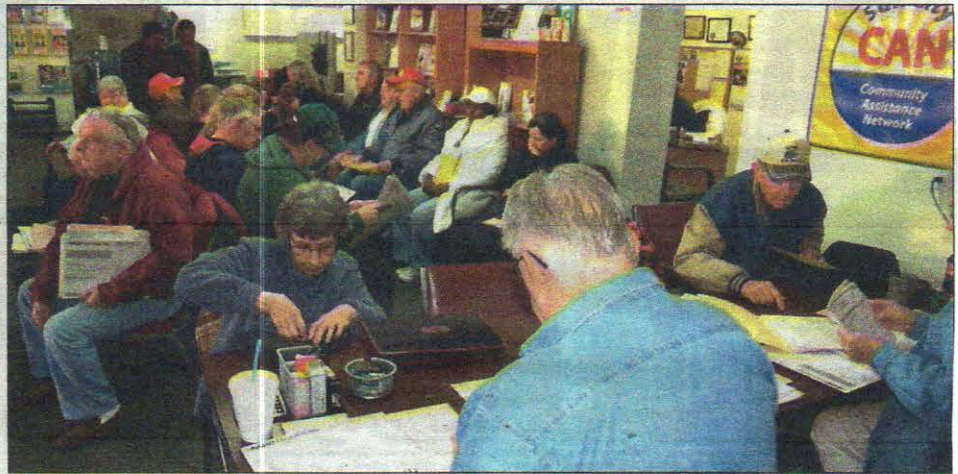
Ironically, it was taxes that started the move toward disengaging the SCTA and starting CAN, according to Marv Worthen, longtime SCTA board member then executive director.

"It was AARP Tax-Aide that generated the move," he said.

In addition to questioning its mission, SCTA was struggling to survive financially, according to Mr. Worthen. A former SCTA board president gave the agency a large grant and that saved it from extinction. Shortly thereafter, in 2012, the agency got its new name and new direction.

"The other thing that was happening was that Sun City was 'aging out,'" Mr. Duncan said.

Sun City was 50 years old. Some people had lived here more than 30 years and their savings were running out or already gone. By 2010, the U.S. Census Bureau reported that 6.5 percent of Sun



With a full house crowd patiently waiting their turn, Sun City Community Assistance Network volunteers help residents file their annual income tax returns through the AARP Tax-Aide program. [Independent Newsmedia/Rusty Bradshaw]

City's population, or about 2,500 residents, were below the poverty line, which today is \$1,005 per month for a single person, according to Mr. Duncan.

To address this new reality, in 2006 SCTA created a nonprofit subsidiary called Sun City Taxpayers Community Action Network. For about five years, there were two organizations, two missions, two boards of directors, etc., and it was very cumbersome, Mr. Duncan explained. Articles of dissolution for SCTA were filed in

early 2012 with the Arizona Corporation Commission and SCTA ceased to exist. The name of the new free standing organization was slightly changed, from Sun City Taxpayers Community Action Network to Sun City Community Assistance Network, and the bylaws for the new organization were signed Feb. 14, 2012.

Mr. Worthen is impressed with what the agency has become.

"It is an incredible amount of stuff they are doing," he said.

Most Sun City CAN services are income-based, which limits who can get help.

"Unfortunately, we can't help everyone," Ms. Miskimen said.

In addition to hosting the AARP Tax-Aide program, that has volunteers helping residents fill out their annual income tax returns, CAN offers benefits counseling, helping residents find and apply for a variety of resources; legal counseling; help with property tax refunds; taxi tickets through the Dial-A-Ride program; administer a water rebate program for condo residents; utility bill discounts; and more. CAN also provides space in its office for the Maricopa County Assessor's Office to have a representative in Sun City to help West Valley residents with property issues.

SCTA officials had begun to make the transition from a solely tax advocate to benefits resources before the agency change, according to Mr. Worthen.

"Tracy Spoon (former SCTA executive director) started making those changes," he said. "Tax-Aide is what made it best known."



## CAN SERVICES

Sun City Community Assistance Network is a 501(c)3 nonprofit charity. Agency services are:

**Free Dial-a-Ride Tickets** – Low-income Sun City residents who do not own a car are given \$50 in free tickets every three months.

**Free Legal Consultations** – Pro bono attorney provides free half-hour legal consultations.

**APS/Southwest Gas Crisis Assistance** – Low-income people who are experiencing a documented crisis can have up to \$400 paid on their electric and/or gas bills.

**Widow/Widower and Disabled Property Tax Break** – Certain widows and widowers and disabled persons are eligible for a \$36,640 exemption off the full tax value of their homes for property tax purposes.

**Free Fire Department Key Lock Boxes** – Low-income Sun City seniors who live alone can have a fire department key lock box installed adjacent to their front door at no cost.

**Free Income Tax Preparation** – During tax season (Feb. 1-April 15) AARP Tax-Aide volunteers prepare and file federal and state income tax returns for free.

**Year-Round Tax Assistance** – Trained volunteers help people file amended returns, respond to

IRS letters and help with other tax problems.

**Condo Water Checks** – Low-income Sun City condo residents are eligible to receive a check for \$24.03 twice per year in lieu of an EPCOR water discount.

**Low Income Property Tax Credits** – Low-income residents apply for a refund of up to \$502 on their property taxes. Available to both owners and renters. Must be filed by April 15 each year.

**Freezing Your Property Value** – A three-year freeze on the full cash value of your property for property tax purposes.

**APS/Southwest Gas Discounts** – Low-income residents can get a discount on their monthly APS and Southwest Gas utility bills.

**Excise Tax Credit** – \$25 check (single) or \$50 check (couple) for low-income Arizona residents.

**Benefits Assistance Interviews** – Trained volunteers familiar with the ins and outs of Medicare, food stamps, Social Security, utility discounts, etc., help low-income seniors access benefits they are entitled to but do not know about. Call 623-933-7530 or visit the CAN office, 10195 W. Coggins Drive, 8 a.m.-noon Monday-Friday.

**Source:** Sun City Community Assistance Network

Perhaps SCTA's biggest accomplishment was the Sun City school tax fight from July 1988 through March 31, 1993, according to Mr. Duncan. Senate Bill 1261 had created a school tax for Sun City residents and SCTA raised \$295,000 to mount a legal challenge. After a four year battle in various court venues, SCTA prevailed and the state of Arizona had to refund \$10 million it had collected and \$8 million in interest to Sun City residents, Mr. Duncan explained.

Mr. Worthen also said a turning point for the agency came when it and Recreation Centers of Sun City officials made peace following SCTA's efforts to fight water rights for the rec centers.

"It is really great to see RCSC working so close-

ly with CAN," Mr. Worthen said.

Ms. Miskimen and Mr. Worthen said working at CAN is personally rewarding.

"To help people is so fulfilling," she said.

Mr. Gray, a former state legislator, agreed.

"We help many people each year and it is heartwarming to hear some of their remarks about how much it means to them," Mr. Gray said.

It can also be beneficial to staff and volunteers.

"Working there gave me a purpose after I retired," Mr. Worthen said.

Rusty Bradshaw can be reached at 623-445-2725 or [rbradshaw@newszap.com](mailto:rbradshaw@newszap.com). Continue the discussion at [www.yourwestvalley.com](http://www.yourwestvalley.com).