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2ND YEAR ANNIVERSARY

JANUARY 2023



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## On the Cover ↗

Poway Living feature photographer Janet Bark did an amazing job wrangling everyone in her studio for our feature photos this month. The individuals on the cover represent a handful of Poway Chamber nonprofit members who serve the community. Left to right, standing: Leopold Harston-Sam's Posse; Mary Mendoza-Villa de Vida, Inc.; Ari Klotzkin-Poway Rodeo Queen; Ruxin Graham-Unified Esports League; Bailey Brown-SOLE Effects. Left to right, seated: Barry Cunningham-North County Special Needs Community Foundation and Poway Padres; Garry Vaughn-Kiwanis Club of Poway; Mary Beth Doss-Friends of Poway Seniors.



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**POWAY  
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POWER!**

**POWAY CHAMBER LEADS A GROWING  
COMMUNITY OF GIVING**



By Anita Edmondson | Photos by Janet Bark Photography

We would like to thank Dr. James Spalenka, Rancho Bernardo Dentistry, for sponsoring this month's Resident Feature.

The individuals on the cover of this month's magazine have one thing in common: they have all been touched by the power of Poway-area nonprofit organizations. They represent thousands of residents who benefit from the good works of local nonprofits such as Anvil of Hope, Kiwanis Club of Poway, Friends of Poway Seniors, Poway Rodeo, Soroptimist International of Poway, Foundation for Unified Esports, Villa da Vida, Inc. and many more.

Instrumental in harnessing this power is the Poway Chamber of Commerce and its Nonprofit Committee led by chair John Couvrette, who also serves as chief financial officer for the chamber, past president of Kiwanis Club of Poway and president of Kiwanis Club of California Foundation. He is also co-owner of Halcyon Real Estate Services.

As a business owner and nonprofit leader, Couvrette immediately saw tremendous need—and potential—to connect those two worlds when he joined the chamber board of directors in 2021. "We wanted to create a conduit for chamber members to connect with businesses, other nonprofits and the community," he says. He proposed forming a committee that encourages and

promotes nonprofit involvement in the chamber. The committee hosts monthly meet-and-greets at a different nonprofit location every second Wednesday of the month. The meetings are free for chamber members; nonmembers are welcome to attend their first meeting at no cost.

**A new ecosystem for success**

This "nonprofit consortium," as this growing group of members has become unofficially known, has proven wildly successful on many fronts. Mike Leland, president of the Poway Chamber of Commerce, says, "When John came to me with this idea, I knew it would be a winner. We had no idea what it would become, but it has exceeded our expectations. It has added tremendous value to our members and the community."

Couvrette explains, "We're seeing nonprofits connect with each other to collaborate on programs. Business members are attending these meetings to learn more about how they can give back. We've created this amazing ecosystem for people to plug into." The synergy has become so powerful that the number of nonprofit chamber members has more than tripled since the efforts began less than two years ago.

**Collaborative sharing and caring**

"One of the magical things that came out of this early on," says Couvrette, "is seeing nonprofits help each other fulfill their mission and offer other nonprofits ways to work through a particular challenge." Vicky Zien, founder/president of Anvil of Hope which provides mentoring/training/youth-enrichment programs to at-risk school children, agrees. "When I think about the compassion and collaboration within this group, I think of a quote by Mother Teresa: 'I can do things you cannot, you can do things I cannot; together we can do great things.'"

**• Activities for youth with special needs**

Matthew Iske, a teacher at Abraxas High School and founder/general manager of the Foundation for Unified Esports can attest to the collaboration firsthand. His foundation helps provide healthy and constructive gaming experiences for students to increase career and college opportunities in gaming and STEM industries. "I was lucky enough to meet Tony Rubino with the North County Special Needs Community Foundation and coach of the Poway Padres softball team at a nonprofit meeting in the fall of 2021," Iske recounts. "Tony and I developed a strong relationship and have collaborated to bring

our esports project to life. We now work closely with several large San Diego city organizations to provide constructive gaming experiences to people with special needs and disabilities."

Rubino has also been able to create additional opportunities for his organization, which helps special-needs families with issues of concern for their children; part of their focus includes social activities and sports for young adults. "We have received financial support from chamber members as well as their personal time in hosting our annual Heroes Softball Game with the Poway Padres Special Olympics softball team, Poway Girls Softball League 16+ team and Poway firefighters," Rubino says.

#### • **Developing young leaders**

Also intersecting these groups is SOLE Effects, a youth leadership and wellness organization that empowers high school and college students to become confident, purpose-driven leaders. Cofounder and Chief Executive Officer Karen Ogden says Couvrette and the chamber have been key to the valuable connections their organization has made recently. "In addition to generously providing us meeting space in his own business facility, John has helped us connect with Matthew Iske's esports group, the Poway-Scripps Rotary Club, as well as other opportunities such as volunteers, donors and potential grants, which all continue to help us flourish."

#### • **A fresh start for women and children**

Soroptimist International of Poway and Friends of Poway Seniors, which operates the thrift store ReRuns ReSale Shoppe, provide other services and programs for local seniors. They also work together to help support the Soroptimists' Transitional Housing program. The Soroptimists' public relations director, Mary Mitchell, explains, "We currently have five apartments that shelter women and children escaping domestic violence for up to 18 months while they get their

life back in balance. We furnish these apartments with the help of items from ReRuns ReSale and provide chits to the women for clothes, shoes and so on that they might need."

#### • **Fun and games for all**

Friends of Poway Seniors brings its popular bingo game program to residents of the Villa de Vida, Inc. apartment complex in Poway which serves adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities with housing, programs and employment opportunities. Cynthia Elizondo, president of Friends of Poway Seniors, says, "Every month some of our bingo volunteers host a fun, friendly game of bingo for Villa da Vida community members. Everyone laughs, smiles and all bingo participants win fun non-cash prizes by the end of the session. Our volunteers love engaging with this special and fun community!"

#### • **PowPAC gives back**

PowPAC, Poway's Community Theatre, regularly supports other nonprofits with proceeds from performances for local organizations. "We have raised money for other nonprofits locally, including the Friends of Poway Seniors, VFW, Community Food Connection, Poway Elks, and more," states Lynn Wolsey, publicity manager for the theater.

#### • **Making connections that count**

Couvrette notes that business owners who attend the meet-and-greets and hear nonprofit leaders share their "wins" each month are overwhelmed by the good work these organizations do. "For business owners and leaders who don't know how or have time to personally get involved, this gives them insight into ways they can support various causes."

#### • **New shoes for local students**

Galloway shares, "Last year when Kiwanis was coordinating a shoe drive for local elementary school students, Mary Mitchell shared the

CONTINUED ON PAGE 10...

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## Dr. James Spalenka

Dr. Spalenka believes in keeping up-to-date in both technology and training. He has a fellowship from the Academy of General Dentistry and from the Pierre Fauchard Academy, an international Dental Honor Society. He has also studied advanced implant dentistry at the world-renowned Misch International Implant Institute and has a fellowship from the International Congress of Oral Implantologists as well as a mastership from the International Academy of Dental Implantology.



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Nonprofits riding high include Poway Rodeo Queen Ari Klotzkin, Leopold Harston-Sam's Posse rider, Buck and Deborah Burt-Sam's Posse and Murray Bankhead-Poway Rodeo.



Poway Chamber of Commerce Nonprofit Committee members include (left to right) Vicky Zien-Anvil of Hope, John Couvrette-Kiwanis Club of Poway, Cynthia Elizondo-Friends of Poway Seniors, Tony Rubino-North County Special Needs Community Foundation, Liz Papineau-Friends of Poway Seniors and Beth Galloway-Kiwanis Club of Poway.



Special relationships include Villa de Vida resident Barry Cunningham (left) who plays with the Poway Padres coached by Tony Rubino of North County Special Needs Community Foundation, and fellow resident Mary Mendoza (second from right) with Hunter Christian, Villa de Vida Executive Director (right).

information with coworkers at her real estate office. In a matter of a couple of days she had collected enough money for 93 new pairs of shoes!"

**• Supporting youth programs**

Last spring, Iske brought a student from his Entrepreneurship Program at Abraxas to present at a meet-and-greet. "Our hope was to raise money for his idea to host esports tournaments for high schools in Poway," recounts Iske. "He was incredibly nervous but was well-prepared and helped us raise several thousand dollars from local businesses and individuals in Poway to host ground-breaking esports tournaments for Poway schools."

Zien has benefitted similarly. "I have met numerous members who have either volunteered their time to us or connected us to potential partners. For example, one member became a baseball coach to our Bell Middle School Blazers Girls' Baseball Team. Another member is partnering with us to bring mentoring and art programs to our at-risk students in need in Southeast San Diego."

**• Vital program and work opportunities**

Hunter Christian, executive director at Villa de Vida, points to a recent big win as a chamber member. "Members voted for us to receive proceeds from the chamber's annual golf tournament last year. That donation allowed our day program to continue for a six-week period." She says the funds are also enabling Villa de Vida to expand its day program for residents, which sends them to volunteer with businesses and nonprofits in the Poway area.

**• Business and community outreach**

Terry Norwood, executive director of The Rise Concept credits her chamber involvement with helping successfully launch Rise Resale, a Rancho Bernardo resale store that uses profits to help at-risk youth, survivors of human trafficking and challenged veterans. "The chamber helped organize our grand opening which shared our business throughout the community. We have received many donations and customers from this valuable network."

The Poway Unified School District (PUSD) Foundation is gaining similar community outreach. Dolores Canizales, Partners in Education Manager with the foundation, says, "I rely on my connections with the Poway Chamber to recruit volunteers for the PUSD Foundation and for our academic advisory committees. Several chamber members serve as advisors to review curriculum and provide feedback for various adult and K-12 classes."

"The Poway High Alumni Association has been able to reach a larger audience since we became a chamber member," says Larry Ott, president of the association. "That has allowed us to better connect with the Poway High community, grow and accomplish our goals."

The consortium also opens up other avenues for nonprofits to connect with local leaders.

**• Civic outreach**

"Our association with the Poway Chamber gives Community HousingWorks a strong and known connection in the community," states Katherine Griswold, the organization's vice president, philanthropy and community engagement. "And it has most likely influenced the financial support and volunteering decisions from Poway residents and businesses."

As a chamber member, the Green Valley Civic Association (GVCA), an organization representing residents in north Poway neighborhoods, is better able to serve its members. "Through the chamber we're able to develop relationships with city leaders and staff, which helps us provide our members accurate and important information on local issues," says John DeSantis, GVCA President. "We've also had a long-standing collaboration with the chamber to host public candidates' forums during general election years." Additionally, the GVCA has also been a long-time supporter of the Abraxas High School Foundation, Poway High School Grad Night, Poway OnStage and the Poway Symphony Orchestra.

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Education outreach gets a boost thanks to nonprofit leaders and those they serve. Pictured left to right: Ruxin Graham-student with Unified Esports League, Dolores Canizales-PUSD Foundation Partners in Education, Tamac Bolkvadze-Foundation for Unified Esports, Bailey Brown-SOLE Effects mentor, Garry Vaughn-Kiwanis Club of Poway student of the month, Matthew Iske-Foundation for Unified Esports, Beth Galloway of Kiwanis Club of Poway.

Cynthia Elizondo- Friends of Poway Seniors (left), Liz Papineau-Friends of Poway Seniors (second from right) and Mary Mitchell of Soroptimist International of Poway (right) celebrate 97-year-old active senior Mary Beth Doss.

**• Serving the community**

The Poway Valley Riders Association connects with segments of the community in need. "We work with the Poway Valley Therapeutic Riding Center to enable kids with disabilities to ride horses," says the association's president Jim Walls. "And we work with the Poway Polo Club to provide interscholastic competitions for young riders."

In a similar vein, the Poway Rodeo partners with Sam's Posse during the fall rodeo weekend to provide inclusive activities for individuals of all abilities. Kiwanis Club of Poway added to rodeo entertainment this past year by sponsoring a fun zone for children.

Other organizations like the Poway-Midland Railroad Volunteers, Inc., who restore, operate and maintain antique railroad equipment in Old Poway Park, use their chamber connections to reach the public. "Our membership helps us raise awareness of the type of community that exists in Poway," says President Chuck Cross.

**Bringing your power to nonprofits**

It is remarkable to note that many of the nonprofits serving the Poway-area community have been formed locally and operate without the funding and support of a nationwide organization. This makes community involvement even more important. As Jill Schafer, marketing coordinator/publicist for the Poway Symphony Orchestra, puts it, "Nonprofits rely on volunteers more than ever to fulfill their mission. And volunteers enjoy personal growth, make new friends and gain a sense of purpose in knowing they are making a difference." Murray Bankhead, chairman of the Poway Rodeo, concurs, "Getting involved with your community is rewarding, fulfilling and needed."

Fortunately, Poway is ready and willing to step up. "Giving back is so interwoven into the fabric of our community," observes Couvrette. "When you come across people in need, helping or doing something positive for them is just something you do. I see that so often here in Poway." Mary Mitchell adds, "We are neighbors helping neighbors and that is how we

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empower our community to be a great place to live."

"There are so many wonderful nonprofits in Poway that we didn't know about before," says Allie Sarnataro, executive director for Ride Above Disability Therapeutic Riding Center. "If you are looking to volunteer there are so many great opportunities and a variety of options in all different fields. The best way to get started on giving back is to just make the connection!"

"Nonprofits are great at what they do but are hesitant to ask for help," says Couvrette. Fortunately, the power of Poway nonprofits is growing in a community that is open to generously giving their time, talent and treasure.

For more information on the Poway Chamber of Commerce, visit [www.poway.com](http://www.poway.com). See pages 14-15 for a list of Poway Chamber of Commerce nonprofit members and other local nonprofits featured in Poway Living.

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