

## DEPARTMENT SPOTLIGHT:

# Aging



BY YVONNE LIU  
Office of Finance

## Aging: Keeping Seniors Active

Dept. has some good new ideas on how to help seniors stay vibrant.

Story by Yvonne Liu, Office of Finance

Department of Aging General Manager Laura Trejo joined the City of Los Angeles in December 2002 with more than 20 years' prior experience in gerontology research and program development. She is not only the technical and policy adviser to the Mayor and City Council on elderly issues, but also heads and implements nationally acclaimed older American programs.

Since *Alive!* featured her in February 2003, Trejo has had plenty of accomplishments to boast of. First of all, Trejo coached her staff to focus on evidence-based programs, implementing programs based on empirical evidence and successful clinical studies that enrich the lives and benefit the health of older Americans. Together, Trejo and her staff have implemented some national award-winning programs that have reliable outcomes.

"This department is unique in the nation in that [we] test research models from program interventions that work," Laura explained. "The exciting aspect of the size of the City of Los Angeles is that Aging is able to take a program and duplicated it in over 20 multiple sites."

For example, Active Start received an award for its effectiveness from the US Department of Health and Services in 2006. The 20-week program invites frail, low-activ-

ity senior citizens to participate in safe and comfortable physical activity twice a week. Participants receive a fitness test, healthy snacks and rewards for setting and achieving goals. Three months after the program concluded, the same senior citizens maintained more physical activity than ever before. Also, they felt much more self-assured.

A site manager recently shared with Ms. Trejo: "A participant came to see me and kept saying, 'I know I forgot something downstairs, but I just cannot remember what it is.' Later in the conversation, the participant said, 'Now I remember, I forgot my cane.' The client's significant improvement has made the site manager one of Active Start's major advocates," Trejo recalled.

More interestingly, the Active Start Program employs seniors as lay leaders, instead of using young, licensed aerobic instructors.

"This is something we pioneered," Trejo said proudly. The success rate of participant engagement when you have a class taught by lay leaders compared with classes taught by licensed instructors is decidedly higher.

The logic is simple. If you are frail or have mobility problems, it is hard to identify

with a fit and muscular aerobic instructor who walks into a room effortlessly and says, "We are going to touch our toes." Now if the same message comes from an instructor who is 70, who is older than yourself, and who has overcome quite possibly the same arthritic condition, senior participants are willing to try harder. Participants are simply more receptive to a class leader who can say, "I know it hurts, I've been there, and you can do this exercise, too."

"In this situation, we like to think of peer pressure as a good thing," Trejo said.

With 17 years behind her as the former Mental Health Clinical District Chief for the Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health, Countywide Older Adult Programs, Trejo found her passion in gerontology when she was completing her Master of science degree in gerontology at the University of Southern California.

Trejo sees herself as a senior service advocate drawing upon her research knowledge. She and her staff build on their knowledge of senior citizens by exchanging short newspaper clippings on interesting studies.

Other notable program and senior services include the Medication Management

Program that helps seniors correct and avoid negative side effects of using several prescribed drugs simultaneously. In a society where 90 percent of Americans over 60 are taking some kind of prescribed medication, this service can open the discussion on unanticipated side effects with drugs used together.

Another unique program is the Centenarian Club, where City residents more than 100 years old are honored with a beautiful scroll either at City Hall or at their home. This program was started by Councilmember Bernard Parks approximately four or five years ago when he celebrated his mother's 100th birthday this way.

To access more helpful program information, the Department of Aging will soon launch its new Website detailing their services, special events and resources. The Website address is: [www.lacity.org/DOA/](http://www.lacity.org/DOA/)

Trejo emphasized, "We want to be a resource not only for City residents, but also for City employees who are caring for aging parents. Even if you do not live within the City of Los Angeles, we have an extensive network of providers across the country to provide the care and support you need."

Trejo enjoys her work and finds her contact with older persons a constant inspiration.

"Older Americans live inspiring lives. I am always impressed by the resiliency of the body and spirit and the human potential of continuous learning," Trejo said.



Laura Trejo,  
General Manager,  
Department on Aging



Financial Services Division, from left: Lilian Buranabul; Gwen Johnson, Division Director (back left); Susan Ho (front); Elaman Hon (back); Hezkeal (Zeke) Ayele (front center); Henry McIntyre; and Juanita Silaynag.



Program Management Division, from left: Susan Sanocki; Martin Tan de Bibiana, Division Director; Helen Tamayo (front left center); Kevin Sower (back center); Ivy Su (front right center), Daisy Rojas and Robert Rosenwald.



Clerical Services Section, from left: Dale Osborne, Division Director, Tamika Fletcher, Vivian Zavala and Enrique Rivera.



Planning Division and Program Development Division, from left: Gigi Chretien; Somapun Pongquan; C. Jabob Wood, Planning Division Director (back center); Fabre Atkins-Nwadiwe; and Douglas Patterson.

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Administrative Services, from left: James Don, Assistant General Manager; Effiem Obasi; Laura Trejo, General Manager; Karie Chiu; and Marco Perez, Deputy Director.



Older Worker Program Division (Title V), from left: Gloria Maulit, Ramona Rodríguez and Charles Babby, Division Director.



Information and Assistance Division, from left: Helen Vazquez; Víctor Piña; Veronica Sanchez-Perez; Pacita Yance (front center); Charles Shivers, Division Director; Helen Lee and Roger Jones.

AGING Profile

**Date Established:**  
May 15, 1983 by City Council Ordinance

**Number of Employees:**  
51

**Department Heads:**  
Laura Trejo, General Manager; James Don, Assistant General Manager.

**Office Location:**  
3580 Wilshire Blvd., 3rd Floor, Los Angeles 90010

**Website: Internet:**  
[www.lacity.org/DOA/](http://www.lacity.org/DOA/)

**General Contact:**  
Telephone: (213) 252-4000;  
Fax: (213) 252-4020;  
TDD: (213) 473-5990.  
Comment and suggestion form:  
[www.lacity.org/doa/doacu1.htm](http://www.lacity.org/doa/doacu1.htm)

**Mission Statement:**  
“To improve the quality of life, independence, health and dignity of the City’s older population by managing community based senior programs that are comprehensive, coordinated and accessible, and to advocate for the needs of older citizens.”

**Purpose:**  
To provide the following senior services:

- Emergency Alert Response System – EARS
- Senior Community Service Employment Program
- Meals
- Access/Transportation
- Legal Services
- Additional Services
- Multipurpose Senior Centers
- Social Services
- Adult Day Care Program
- File of Life
- Medicare Part D & Extra Help (LA ABC)



Information Systems Section, from left: Dale Osborne, Division Director; Cameron Aguirre and Alvaro Ocampo.