



Making ‘Elderly Wishes’ happen in Contra Costa

By [Shirley Jacks](#) |
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The gift-giving season doesn't end for Mary Chapman, executive director of An Elderly Wish Foundation.

The idea for the organization was born when Rebecca Crowder saw the simple joy she brought to her ailing mother by fulfilling her mom's wish of spending a fun day at a casino and playing the slots, like she used to do. When her mom passed away in 2000, Crowder decided to use her \$10,000 inheritance to grant little wishes to other seniors and bring smiles to their faces, like she saw with her mom on that casino trip.

With two small children and very little time, Crowder enlisted her friend Mary Chapman to form a board of directors to oversee the nonprofit An Elderly Wish Foundation. With a social welfare and teaching background and a career in serving others, Chapman welcomed the challenge of starting a unique organization. It was also a much-needed diversion for her at that time, as she had just suffered a sudden loss of her 19-year-old son Scott in a car accident.

The foundation is a family affair, as both Mary and husband Bill are on the board of directors. All board members are also volunteers who participate in the wishing events, if needed. Both from Sacramento, Bill and Mary have been married 43 years. Bill is a CPA and retired vice president of WindMaster, an Altamont Pass wind farm. Their daughter Julia is a teacher in Discovery Bay, and son Paul is an electrician in Sacramento.

A recent wish was granted to 94-year-old Mila Bell, who lives with daughter Beverly Mackey in Danville. Shortly after moving to the Bay Area in 1964, Bell remembered having a lovely Easter Sunday Brunch at the elegant Claremont Hotel with her family. Her daughters recall that all her life Bell loved to prepare elegant meals for her family. Her wish was to host a brunch at the Claremont for her five daughters and a niece, Dana Barrett, whom the foundation flew in from Detroit. The foundation also

provided a handicapped-accessible van to transport Bell, and a room at the hotel for her to rest during the day.

Her daughters were said to be moved to tears at the sight of their mom, who looked so happy, regal (her hair and makeup were done, and she had a lovely wrist corsage) and truly felt she was queen for a day.

Anyone 50 or older can apply to be a recipient of An Elderly Wish. There are no income restrictions, but you must live in Contra Costa County and have a life-threatening or chronic illness, and that medical condition must be certified by a physician. A paragraph as to what the wish would mean to the recipient also is required. Secret requests can be made by family/friends. The board chooses which wishes to grant. Call 925-978-1883 or email info@elderlywish.org for more information.

Another recent wish was granted to a 90-year-old recipient who was given a Hornblower dinner cruise for a party of 9. Another, for a 99-year-old resident of a nursing home, received an iPad from the foundation so he could use Face Time to speak with a few relatives back east (he has no one left here). Another wish was granted to a wheel-chaired retired teacher in his 70's who wanted to fly to NYC to see the musicals "Chitty Chitty, Bang Bang" and the "Lion King." This is where he had a little help from his friends who gave up their Marriott points and provided the hotel. JetBlue donated one round trip and the foundation provided the rest, including the wheelchair and the ramp to see the cast.

The most elaborate wish granted was to a woman who developed MS when she was 24 and became a paraplegic from the neck down. Shortly after, she moved into a nursing home and her young son went to live with her sister. Her husband also had MS. Fast forward to now and her wish was to attend her son's wedding in Minnesota. This is how it happened. The care home had a fundraiser and raised \$3,000 for a nurse to accompany the wish recipient. The MS Society provided the handicapped accessible van in Minnesota. The airline provided the wheelchair and steward to assist. The foundation provided the rest. This wish was only possible through the kindness of others and the coordination, love and concerted effort of the Elderly Wish volunteers.

The foundation's 16th Annual Heart to Heart Ball, "Celebration of Wishes," will be held on Saturday, Feb. 24 from 5:30 to 11 p.m. at the Lone Tree Golf & Event Center, 4800 Golf Course Road in Antioch. Cost is \$65 per person (No tickets at door). To find out more, call 925-978-1883 or email info@elderlywish.org It will be a fun event supporting a great cause.

For the past 10 years, the foundation has adopted a holiday program called "Santa for Seniors." They choose one senior facility a year to be the recipient of the program. Donned in Santa hats, foundation members give out goody bags of useable gifts (including donations from local merchants), serve refreshments/holiday treats, lead in caroling and bring a day of celebration to the seniors. This past year, Queen Bee's Quilt Shop in Antioch generously donated 30 full-size quilts for the Santa for Seniors event. Here's to many more elderly wishes being granted for the New Year!

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