

RIVERSIDE COUNTY NOW NEWS



JULY 2023

President's Message

July is Disability Pride Month. We celebrate Disability Pride Month in July because the Americans with Disability (ADA) Act was passed on July 26, 1990. The ADA prohibits discrimination based on disability in employment, state and local government, public accommodations, commercial facilities, transportation, and telecommunications. Most of us don't think about what it is like to be disabled until the day we are disabled. And, only a few of us think about how inaccessible our public places are for people with disabilities, until it affects one of our family members or friends and we are inconvenienced. But, really, we should all be fighting for it because any of us can become disabled at any time.

Our Communications Chair, **Susan Dye**, has been a member of the disabled community for decades now and she inspires us every day with all that she is able to accomplish and her determination to not let her disability get in the way. She talks about the Disability Civil Rights Movement in this newsletter as well as some of her personal struggles. She's not looking for sympathy, she's just looking for equal access, especially when attending events at venues boasting "wheelchair accessible seats", only to be faced with a flight of stairs before being able to reach them!

Our monthly guest for our July meeting is our beloved **Lanny Swerdlow** from our community who is involved in local politics, a Registered Nurse, one of Board of Directors for the San Geronio Memorial Health Care District and Founder of the Brownie Mary Democrats of California. He wanted to name it the Democratic Cannabis Club but when he got pushback, he named it after the woman who was known for baking 600 brownies a day and delivering them to AIDS patients in San Francisco. I sat in at the last in-person meeting for the Brownie Mary Democrats of California at the CADEM convention in LA back in May and soon realized the road to legalizing Marijuana in California in an equitable manner is a long one. And, getting it to the patients, many of whom are living with disabilities, is even a bigger obstacle. Right now, the investors are dominating the market and making it difficult for the everyday folks to be able to get in this new and growing market and make it a viable business. Most doctors will prescribe pharmaceutical drugs

Join us in our conversation with Mr. Swerdlow as we talk about some of the hurdles we are facing on the road of legalization of cannabis in CA.

As always, we will continue to fight for issues that affect our communities locally, including far-right churches trying to take over our school boards, constant attack on our reproductive freedoms, LGBTQIA+ rights and rights of all underrepresented groups.

Please continue to support us:

<https://riversidecountynow.com/donate/>

-Maliha Williamson, President Riverside County NOW

Calendar of Events

July 27 - RC NOW Monthly Zoom Hybrid Meeting

Disability Pride Month Speaker: Lanny Swerdlow, RN, LGBTQ+ activist, Brownie Mary Club

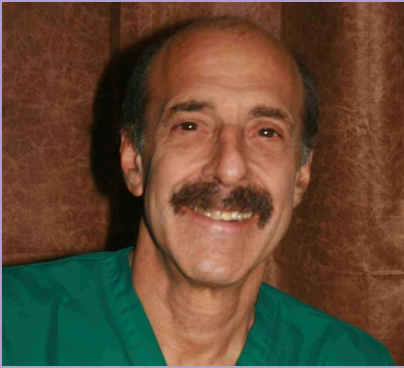
If you wish to attend the meeting in person in Lake Elsinore, RSVP to malihawilliamson@hotmail.com for the address.

**August 24 - RC NOW Monthly Zoom Meeting
Black-Owned Businesses**

**DISABILITY
PRIDE MONTH** 

LANNY SWERDLOW

Brownie Mary Democrats of California



Lanny Swerdlow, R.N. is a self-described “gay, Jewish, atheist, liberal, in a mixed marriage to a Native American, left-handed, tree-hugger.” Born and raised in Los Angeles, the younger of two brothers. His father died at 32 when Swerdlow was only 2 years old. “My ‘real’ dad was my mom’s second husband,” he says. “He was an accountant, somewhat distant, but a good dad and provider for our family. My mom lived a life of quiet desperation, pretty ignorant of the real world—but you have to remember that women in those days didn’t go very far. There were a lot of things she could and should have done that she never did. One of the lessons I got from that is: If I want to do something, I do it ... even if it’s not always a good idea.”

Swerdlow chose to attend L.A. High, which was very mixed instead of the other option, Fairfax High, which was very white and Jewish because: “I wanted something different, and it opened my eyes to other cultures. ... I was interested in theater arts; I wanted to go into that, because that’s what ‘homos’ did.” Instead, he got a degree in zoology and later studied fisheries’ biology.

Swerdlow surprised his family when he came out as gay. “My mom cried; my dad was upset. They were my liberal parents! Then they said I wouldn’t be happy for the rest of my life. I told them I would go straight, but I couldn’t play that role. When I finally confronted them, they accepted me for who I am.”

He became involved with the gay-liberation movement in Oregon. He started a newspaper, and the police-advisory board asked him to join and represent the groups with which he was involved. One of the issues concerning the advisory board was the lack of a safe place for young people to congregate. He was approached by six teens who were trying raise money to open a club, so he told them to find a place, and he would help fund it.

They opened an underage gay/lesbian nightclub which became well-known, but overnight, the problems began.

“The police started coming and busting kids for curfew violations, batting them around and dragging them off.” Swerdlow consulted a lawyer and sent a letter to the city attorney to try to resolve these issues and seek funding. “I ... went to the head of the police bureau and began to learn about how politics works. I told him we couldn’t run the club if he kept putting police in front of the club. He got on the phone, requested some budget information—and then we never saw police there again. I learned that just because something isn’t right, that doesn’t mean it will get fixed. I also learned that something can get done if you have something hanging over someone’s head, like the threat to take away budget money. My experience with the club taught me not to just trust the system.”

Swerdlow and his partner of more than 27 years, Victor Michel, moved to the Whitewater in the Coachella Valley because Swerdlow’s mom had taken ill and needed help. His path toward becoming a nurse began when his father could no longer care for himself. Swerdlow decided to become a medical tech, and ultimately completed his R.N. at the College of the Desert in 2006.

He became involved in Democratic Party politics, representing a Riverside County assembly district on the party’s state central committee. He serves on the San Geronio Memorial Healthcare District’s board of directors. Swerdlow has been passionate about the legalization of marijuana for many years. As a nurse, he is cognizant of the medical benefits of marijuana use and has specifically championed the need for the Veterans Administration to make it available. He was instrumental in getting language into the state Democratic Party platform supporting legalization prior to the passage of Proposition 64. He also has an [online radio program](#) and leads the [Marijuana Anti-Prohibition Project](#), focused on the Inland Empire.

In 2012, Swerdlow started the Brownie Mary Democrats of California. “I wanted to form the ‘Democratic Cannabis Club,’ but they didn’t want me to put that name on it, so I named it after [the woman who was known for baking 600 brownies a day and delivering them to AIDS patients in San Francisco](#),” he says. “I want to get more involved in health-care issues, especially the need to ensure that everybody has coverage. And I’ll stay focused on cannabis. With thousands of people on alcohol or drugs, they can get off using cannabis. It doesn’t solve their problems, but it doesn’t have all the down sides, either. We need on-site use localities, and it should be as available as liquor.”

Adapted from an article by [Anita Rufus](#)
[Know Your Neighbors: Coachella Valley independent](#)

THE DISABILITY CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

Susan Dye, RC NOW Communications Committee Chair



The road to remove obstacles for the disability community has been a long journey, a journey that still has a long way to go... I believe that barriers that inhibit people from contributing to their fullest capacity weaken society. Unfortunately, not everyone shares that viewpoint. Moreover, most “able bodied individuals” do not want to think about the possibility that anyone, anytime, can join the Disability Community through illness, accident, or advanced age.

Judy Heumann, considered by many to be the founder of the disability civil rights movement, helped stage a sit-in in a San Francisco federal building in 1977. (Shapiro, 2002) This group of disabled activists demanded enforcement of Section 504 civil rights law, which protects the rights of persons with disabilities in programs and activities that receive federal financial assistance.

In response to the sit-in, two congress members from California arrived to conduct a special hearing. One government official testified that “it would be cheaper to set up separate but equal programs for the disabled”. At that point, Judy Heumann responded with emotion “...We will no longer allow the government to oppress disabled people...We will accept no longer discrimination”.

After 24 days of the sit-in, the demanded regulations (with a few small changes) were signed into law. This protest is a little-known moment in history, but to people with disabilities it is as important as Selma or Stonewall.

The Americans with Disability Act (ADA) was signed into law in 1990. ADA provides further protection against discrimination for people with disabilities. Unfortunately, the ADA does not require every public building be made accessible, only new ones or older ones when a change is easily made. The law states that “reasonable accommodations” should be made in these cases, and the term “reasonable accommodations” is open to interpretation. There is little enforcement of the law when older buildings are inaccessible, and often only is resolved after legal action is taken. This lack of enforcement creates an adversarial relationship between the disability community and business owners.

I am a member of the disabled community and use a power wheelchair since being injured in a near-fatal car accident in 1998. There is not a day that goes by that I don’t thank the activists that fought to make my world more accessible to me! I live in a city which has many new buildings that are wheelchair accessible. I enjoy going to restaurants, movie theaters, etc. However, traveling is difficult for me. For example, when visiting relatives in New York City, I found that many public buildings were not accessible, often requiring walking up steps to even enter the building. I remember going to a play on Broadway where great care was given to ordering tickets for “wheelchair accessible seats”. Upon arriving the usher pointed to the accessible area which required the ability to climb a flight of stairs to sit there. Education is necessary to understand how to remove obstacles as well as a well thought out enforcement plan to enable ADA to be successful. Although much has been accomplished, there is still much more to do to enable people with disabilities to contribute fully to our society.

Reference Links:

[The Americans with Disabilities Act \(ADA\)](#)

[Know Your Rights: Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act | NEA](#)

[Shapiro, N. J. \(2002, April 28\). 504 Sit-In: Winning Rights for the Disabled.](#)

Disability Resources:



You Are Not Alone (YANA) Program

In 1995, the United States Postal Services created a program to aid senior citizens and persons with disabilities. The program offered assistance and referrals to a variety of social services for at-risk populations.

The YANA program is free to all Riverside residents and helps to provide on-going contact for seniors, persons with disabilities, or anyone that can benefit from the routine contact.

Riverside Police Department Volunteers make the phone calls to the participants. If several phone calls are unanswered, the Volunteer contacts the program coordinator, and a welfare check is made at the persons residence.

In addition to the regular phone calls, the Riverside Police Department hosts YANA functions twice a year to get people together in a comfortable and welcoming setting. Participants can meet other seniors and members of the police department.

To sign up, please contact our YANA program at 951-826-5544 or CSO Franco by email at GFranco@riversideca.gov

Riverside County Dept. of Social Services
<https://rivcodpss.org/seniors-disabled-adults>

Southern California Resource Services for Independent Living (SCRS-IL)

"We believe that every individual has the right to lead a fulfilling and independent life, and we are committed to providing the resources and support necessary to help them achieve this. Our services promote independence and self-sufficiency, allowing individuals with disabilities to lead fulfilling and productive lives within their communities."

Their page is full of various resources: <https://www.scrs-ilc.org/>

Individual advocacy, personal assistance, housing assistance, assistive technology, transition services, peer counseling and more can be located on the SCRS-IL web site.

1950 S. Sunwest Ln., Suite 104, San Bernardino, CA 92408

Monday – Friday, 8:30 AM – 5:00PM

Phone: (888) 331-1451

City of Murrieta Disability Resources

<https://www.murrietaca.gov/456/Disability-Resources>

