



Newsletter May

STRIVING FOR MORE

September 2017 marks an important milestone for Laredo Stroke Support Group. Five years ago, Bill and Deedee Hrnir hosted the first support group meeting for stroke survivors with just one expectation – to offer others facing the seemingly insurmountable challenge of stroke recovery the support they sought. Since that first meeting, the group has seen changes and growth in a myriad of ways, and a newsletter seemed like the perfect fit to commemorate our fifth anniversary. In our time as a non-profit organization, our membership has grown tenfold. We adopted a new logo. We now offer therapy activities up to five days a week. Most importantly, we have created a family among many stroke survivors and families who share the same struggles and hopes. Everything good that has happened within our group has been a direct result of helping others. Thanks to the community of Laredo, staff and volunteers, and the sheer tenacity of our survivors, we have been able to reach this high point in our existence. We are excited to celebrate five years of hope and strive for more in the time to come, especially at our first 5K happening this November. You have been instrumental in our mission and we cannot thank you enough.



Board Members

Bill Hrnir, <i>Co-Founder</i>	George Juarez
Deedee Hrnir, <i>Co-Founder</i>	Lydia Juarez
Allison Flores	Hilda Mercado
Mary Freeman	David Newman

Dr. Fernando Sanchez

Staff

Paola Huerta, *Executive Director*
Luis Mercado, *Program Supervisor*



A Letter From Our Co-Founders

Bill's sister Nancy once inspired us with the quote, "you either get bitter or you get better. It's that simple. The choice does not belong to fate, it belongs to you." Those words carry so much weight. But they forget one very important detail – SUPPORT. From the moment that you suffer a stroke, you are for that quick moment at the whim of those around you. Whether or not you get immediate care impacts how much of your brain cells are recovered and then the therapy in the following months has a greater effect on your physical and cognitive progress.

As founders, we have been blessed to be honored numerous

times by community organizations, grants, and other notable non-profit organizations in Laredo. We would like to say that we truly appreciate every moment of recognition, as it always sheds light on our mission and extends the reach of our network of survivors, caregivers, health care professionals, therapists, and volunteers. It means that we can be that last important detail for survivors – SUPPORT.

As we inspire others to make the leap from victim to survivor, we help each other make positive choices towards regaining our health and discovering our new lives as stroke survivors.

We know that our lives have been touched by stroke for a higher purpose – to serve others. Fortunately, we have been able to expand our organization allowing us to reach even more individuals. What we most hope to achieve in the future is to educate others on the signs of stroke and the ways that you can prevent a stroke. A healthy lifestyle is important, but keep in mind that stroke does not discriminate. It can happen to a busy CEO or a couch potato. The key is to know your risk factors and get screened. Learn more at www.laredostrokesupport.com.

Bill & Deedee Hrcncir



Laredo Stroke Support held its second biennial benefit concert on November 11th, 2016. The event, held at the Laredo Country Club, honored stroke survivors, caregivers, and families whose lives have been impacted by stroke.

Over 250 attendees were treated to a night of live music by Bo de Pena, silent and live auctions, the unveiling of our new logo, stroke survivor art displays, and a keynote speech presented by

Bob Whitford. Bob is a Senior Occupational Therapist at St. David's Medical Center in Austin, Texas. Since 2001, he has worked primarily with stroke and brain injury clients as they navigate their "new" life. As a former Paralympic cyclist, he utilizes his passion for cycling to encourage his clients to ride a bicycle (or tricycle) again. We were honored to have him speak about his experiences and what hope means to him.

The success of our 2016 fundraiser would not have been possible without our board members and staff, friends, family, and generous benefactors. Believe us when we say that your donations, your time, and your advocacy for our stroke survivors do not go unnoticed. We want to express our deepest and sincerest thanks to all of you who have supported our group. Hope is the certainty of future goodness, and it truly does rock.





SPEECH TETHERAPY

In January 2009, co-founder Bill Hrnir began traveling weekly to receive speech therapy at Austin Speech Labs, a non-profit organization that provides affordable and intensive speech therapy to stroke survivors. His personal experience led him to believe that other stroke survivors in need of speech therapy could benefit from their services. The Austin Speech Labs Laredo Branch began from the Hrnir home in 2014. Speech therapists and stroke survivors connected via Skype, in what is known as teletherapy, for periods of eight weeks. By the summer of the same year and through much persistence, Bill established a formal partnership with Austin Speech Labs and the Laredo branch was officially opened at the UT Health Science Center Library. Since its inception three years ago, Austin Speech Labs Laredo has completed 14 boot camps and provided speech therapy for 16 stroke survivors, many of whom are still a part of the program today. The partnership between Laredo and Austin has been a lifeline for stroke survivors and there is no greater reward than seeing them learn to speak again.

LIFE SKILLS

Technology is a major aspect of today's society and often plays a big role in many of our stroke survivors' therapy. In our Life Skills class, the focus is to help teach the survivors skills that will help them function better in everyday life. Currently our instructor, Luis Mercado, is focusing on teaching the members of our group computer and Internet usage skills. During this weekly class, survivors have set up personal email accounts with Google and are learning to properly utilize all the features that come with having a Google account. Additionally, survivors have been taught to safely navigate the Internet and avoid the potential problems and pitfalls that can be encountered on the World Wide Web. The class also focuses on the use of Microsoft office and its programs to better facilitate computer literacy. We believe these skills have the potential to help them keep up with the technologically advancing world we live in. Through collaborative efforts and group interactions, the attendees of the class develop social skills to help them appropriately interact with one another and help each other when needed. The survivors have the opportunity to voice what skills they are interested in learning in this Life Skills class thus always leaving the door open for learning to occur.

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP

Community involvement is a cornerstone of our organization. The University of Texas Health Science Center in Laredo has played a significant role in the development of two of our programs. Dr. Gladys Keene and Lourdes Castaneda graciously welcomed our survivors to the Laredo campus in 2014 when we were in need of a facility for our speech therapy program. For three years, the library on campus has served as the meeting place for stroke survivors to receive intensive speech therapy. In February of this year, the regional campus library also became home to our Life Skills course. In conjunction with program supervisor Luis Mercado, library staff members Erika Silva and Cynthia Carrillo have facilitated a couple of the hands-on computer classes to focus specifically on health literacy. Without a doubt, the partnership with the regional University of Texas Health Science campus has been indispensable.





*Tennis with
Laredo Tennis Association*



*Art class with
Paty Orduna*



Laredo Rider's Club



*Exercise & Strengthening
with Enid Vargas*

THERAPY ACTIVITIES

Monthly calendars have become a staple for our group. Through community connections, we have expanded involvement for our survivors from just monthly meetings to several days of classes and events. At the start of 2015, we decided to partner with volunteers from Casa Yoga and Laredo Tennis Association to offer weekly yoga and tennis classes adapted for stroke survivors. Diana Lowry, along with friends and yoga peers, wholeheartedly gave of her time and talent for many months. Tennis continues to attract many of our members thanks to the dedicated efforts of Ben Espitia and Jennifer Lopez. Between the summer and fall of 2015, co-founder Bill Hrcir saw a need to begin volunteer coaching fellow survivors who shared his passion for bike riding. Now, a majority of the stroke sur-

vivors join Bill every Saturday in what is now the Laredo Rider's Club. In 2016, we expanded our therapy activities with the addition of art classes taught by the skilled Paty Orduna, gardening provided by Lynne Nava at Keep Laredo Beautiful and Jimmy Rodriguez of Simon's Nursery, and music classes presented by Bill Trevino. Growth is an integral part of our therapy program and 2017 has already seen the addition of exercise and strengthening classes taught by fitness instructor Enid Vargas and a life skills class facilitated by the patient and technology savvy Luis Mercado. We aim to provide members with the classes and skills they need, and we cannot thank our team enough for the unconditional support.

JOE

In July 2010, Joe was a professor at Laredo Community College and a commander of the Catholic War Veterans Post 1908 responsible for honoring fallen soldiers. In July 2010, Joe suffered a hemorrhagic stroke and a massive heart attack. Nine hours passed before he received any medical attention. By the time doctors flew him to San Antonio, he slipped into a coma which lasted two days. Joe's family was told there was no guarantee for his survival – he was too far gone, unable to eat, speak or walk. After spending 35 days in the hospital, Joe willed himself to walk again and he embraced a new outlook on life. Having a stroke changed him completely. "I became more sentimental, I became more giving, and I talk with God every day and I do it all straight from my heart." In 2013 Joe joined Laredo Stroke Support Group. Meeting Bill and Deedee and developing a fellowship with other survivors is a blessing to him. He has found great joy in participating in speech therapy, riding his bike with the group, and attending monthly meetings. "We are a gift from God and nothing will stop us from living our lives."





FUNDING AND RECOGNITION

As a non-profit organization, we rely on our community for support and funding. The success and growth we have experienced over the last five years has only been possible because of the many agencies and individuals who have believed in our cause. It is because of their faith in us that we have and continue to offer essential therapy services free of cost to all survivors. In addition to the funds raised during our biennial benefit concert, yearly contributions, such as those from the David T. and Ana L. Newman Charitable Fund, and grants, like those awarded by the Guadalupe and Lilia Martinez Foundation and the Prairie Foundation, ensure the day to day operations of our program.

Over the last year, our work has earned us many distinctive accolades. Co-Founders Bill and Deedee Hrnir were named 2016 Laredoans of the Year for their diligence and commitment to improving the lives of those affected by stroke. In 2017, Bill was selected as the recipient of the Jefferson Award for Public Service, which also honored Laredo Stroke Support Group with the Jefferson Acorn Award, an endowment fund to guarantee a future for us as we continue to expand our membership. Most recently, we were bestowed with the 2017 Social Responsibility Award by the Laredo Chamber of Commerce. These commendations prompt us to continue to serve our community as much as we can.

THANK YOU TO OUR 2016 SPONSORS!

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& thank you to all
donors for financial
contributions and
in-kind donations!
Your support has
helped our survivors
**connect, learn, and
recover.**