

# 2024 OPTIMISM AWARD RECIPIENTS & NOMINEES

## OPTIMISM AWARD RECIPIENTS

### COMMUNITY MEMBER AWARD RECIPIENT



#### **Deb Ivancovich**

Deb was introduced to her local PD community while working on her bachelor's degree in counseling. She learned about a small support group for people with Parkinson's. The plan was to work with the group for six months as part of her degree work. Over two decades later, Deb has grown the group to a thriving monthly meeting that has supported hundreds of people with Parkinson's and their care partners.

As a respected private practice mental health counselor and adjunct faculty teacher for Trinity Western University in British Columbia, Deb brings her knowledge, positivity, and facilitating skills to serve the needs of those affected by PD. She devotes countless hours to making the group feel comfortable sharing their struggles and helping them feel empowered without taking the limelight herself.

In addition to facilitating this support group for over 25 years, Deb's compassion and concern for her PD community go above and beyond. One example is helping several members of the group over the years with transportation to the meetings after they lost the ability to drive.

Living with Parkinson's is a challenging road, but Deb's help and support have made life for those who are on it easier. Members of this thriving support group rave about Deb's optimism and genuine love for them.

"She is so refreshing that I forget I have Parkinson's disease when we are together."

"Deb's optimism has made the world of Parkinson's disease sufferers not one of adversity, but one of hope."

Thank you, Deb, for the hope and optimism you bring and your commitment to making a positive impact on our Parkinson's community. APDA Northwest is honored to recognize you as this year's Community Member Optimism Award recipient.

### SERVICE PROVIDER AWARD RECIPIENT



#### **Bill and Nadean Meyer**

Before his Parkinson's diagnosis, Bill Meyer had always been active outdoors, enjoying hiking, rafting, skiing, and fishing. As the disease progressed, his tremors and balance got worse, and hiking became increasingly difficult, especially carrying a heavy backpack over his Deep Brain Stimulation (DBS) batteries.

Determined to keep hiking and share his love for the outdoors, Bill took matters into his own hands, created a supportive hiking experience, and founded an organization that he named PasstoPass. Since 2016, PasstoPass has provided multi-day supported backpacking trips for people with Parkinson's (PwP).

Trips are planned and led by PwPs or people with close connections to PD so that routes, trails, and distances are selected with the physical challenges of participants in mind. Support hikers help on the trails and in camp, and pack llamas carry gear so that Parkinson's hikers only have to carry a light day pack.

Nadean Meyer has been Bill's foundation and strength to achieve his goals with PasstoPass. She is always in the background doing paperwork, accounting, logistics, transportation, etc. Nadean's commitment, efforts, and labor of love have been pivotal in making PasstoPass so successful.

Since its inception, PasstoPass has offered 34 backpacking trips involving 174 Parkinson's hikers and 115 volunteer support hikers. In addition to logging over 10,000 cumulative miles, PasstoPass has helped PwPs in the Northwest and across the country experience the joy of being outdoors while challenging themselves and building confidence and camaraderie with others. All experiences are free of charge.

As one recent hiker said, "It's not only the trip itself, but meeting everyone else on our trips that has been wonderful. We have made friendships with other people impacted by Parkinson's from other parts of the country. And those relationships, too, have made our lives with Parkinson's easier."

On behalf of APDA Northwest, we'd like to thank Bill and Nadean for all they have done to help our Parkinson's community stay active and optimistic. We are honored to recognize you both as this year's Service Provider Optimism Award recipients.

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## OPTIMISM AWARD NOMINEES



### **Carin Mack**

Carin Mack has supported hundreds of individuals impacted by Parkinson's disease across Washington State throughout her decades-long career as a social worker and support group facilitator.

She is highly regarded for her compassion, wisdom, and expertise in navigating the healthcare system and connecting individuals to community resources. Carin has helped countless families through individual and group counseling, and her support group members have raved about her genuine dedication to caring for and supporting them.

Carin has been the epitome of "Strength in optimism, hope in progress" through her understanding, knowledge, and experience with people with Parkinson's and their families.

Thank you, Carin, for your devotion to caring for our Parkinson's community!

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### **Christie Agtarap**

Christie is a certified personal trainer and PWR! Moves instructor in Olympia, Washington. She has a caring heart for people with Parkinson's and a passion for helping them slow their progression through daily exercise.

Christie brings her contagious positivity to every class and makes exercise fun. She goes out of her way to make classes enjoyable by including games, prizes, seasonal activities, birthday celebrations, and her own homemade PD exercise videos.

Christie's PD exercise classes serve as support groups where PwPs can help and encourage one another and exchange valuable information. As one participant says, "It's important for us to feel and know that we are not alone and are in it together."

Christie has been instrumental in helping establish and grow the APDA Olympia Optimism Walk, which doubled the number of participants from 50 to 160 in two years and raised over \$37,400 in 2023.

Thank you, Christie, for inspiring our Parkinson's community to keep moving and help them feel connected!



### **Peter Lynch**

Peter Lynch has been teaching yoga classes for people with Parkinson's and their care partners for 13 years. He is devoted to providing a safe, welcoming, and positive environment.

Through his in-person and virtual classes, Peter inspires individuals to breathe more deeply, move more freely, and take the calm and balance they experience in class into their everyday lives.

Peter's genuine love for the PD community and for the practice of yoga ensures everyone feels included and supported. Peter fosters an environment where participants can laugh and share, so much so that they say Peter's class is more than yoga – it is a support group!

As one participant says, "I was struggling and feeling alone until my husband and I joined Peter's classes!"

Thank you, Peter, for providing an inclusive space for PwPs and their care partners to feel strong and optimistic!



### **Megan Foster**

Megan is an ARPN practicing in Spokane, Washington, who specializes in providing mental health services to people living with neurodegenerative conditions such as Parkinson's disease. Her patients deeply value her knowledge of Parkinson's dementia, psychosis, and hallucinations. She is also very knowledgeable about PD medications and other drug interactions.

Her office has a sign that says, "Kindness is my religion," and she exemplifies that motto in all her patient interactions. She is warm, caring, and thorough.

Not only does Megan show concern for PWPs but also for their care partners. Her contributions have increased the quality of life in her patients, and as one recently said, "She has saved my life."

Thank you, Megan, for the specialized care you give to our Parkinson's community!



### **Suzie McMahon**

Suzie is a valued volunteer at several weekly Parkinson's exercise classes at Thrive Community Fitness in Lacey, Washington. Inspired by her late husband's experience with PD, Suzie has a passion for assisting the class instructor and participants in any way she can.

Suzie works selflessly and tirelessly and is always ready to give class participants positive and helpful advice regarding exercise with humor and a smile. She always arrives early, sets up the room with chairs, weights, and other equipment, and then speedily puts them away as soon as they're done. She also demonstrates the modified version of exercises for those who require a chair to sit on.

Suzie's selfless commitment and dedication to these PD exercise classes inspire those around her. As one participant recently said, "Her positive attitude motivates us, PD patients, to have an optimistic outlook on life and our prognosis."

Suzie was an instrumental volunteer in helping to establish and grow the APDA Olympia Optimism Walk, which doubled the number of participants from 50 to 160 in two years and raised over \$37,400 in 2023.

Thank you, Suzie, for your selfless dedication to our PD community!



### **Diane Hutchins**

Living with Parkinson's since 2005, Diane is passionate about raising awareness about PD. She has been a devoted community advocate for Parkinson's, always willing to tell her story – speaking with legislators, the press, and others living with this disease. Diane has also dedicated herself to participating in research studies to support scientists in learning more about the mysteries of PD.

Diane has been instrumental in building and fostering the PD community in the greater Olympia, WA, area by bringing people together and making herself available to those seeking local resources and support. She is known for her sense of humor, genuinely optimistic outlook, and passion for helping others.

Diane has facilitated a local support group for many years and her positivity, gentle presence, and demeanor make all feel welcome. A member of her support group shared, “Her leadership style is gentle, tactful, and very effective.”

Thank you, Diane, for your love and dedication to the PD community!



### **Heidi Bowen & Cheryl Remington**

Heidi and Cheryl are the heart of NeuroFit in Auburn, Washington. Designed for people with Parkinson's, this thriving, growing program provides a well-rounded exercise and maintenance program. They specialize in helping PwPs address the unique challenges faced by individuals with Parkinson's, including essential body movement, balance, strength, and cognitive tasks.

Participants love Heidi and Cheryl as they understand Parkinson's and tailor their program to the needs of each individual. Their warmth and compassion provide the foundation for PwPs to learn and grow in their skills.

Heidi and Cheryl are known for making their classes fun and energetic, so everyone looks forward to the next one.

As one of her participants said, “They continue to give me hope and understanding. They have helped me improve and maintain my good health and outlook on life.”

Thank you, Heidi and Cheryl, for helping our PD community remain active and hopeful for the future!



### **Anne Tiernan**

Anne is a cherished member of the Parkinson's community. As a person living with Parkinson's, Anne has participated in dozens of fundraisers to raise Parkinson's awareness and research initiatives in hopes of finding a cure.

A frequent participant in APDA's annual Optimism Walk, Anne's "Team Tiernan" participants have raised thousands of dollars for APDA and held the title of largest team at several walks. Anne has also been involved in other fundraising opportunities by creating a quilt to donate to their annual Magic of Hope gala.

Known to her friends as an unrelenting and uncomplaining warrior, Anne faces her unknown future with courage and optimism. She counsels and supports other people with Parkinson's, unselfishly giving her time and sharing her talents to help the greater community.

Thank you, Anne, for all you do for our APDA community!



### **Sharon Jung**

Sharon is an ARNP and CHRN who works at Puget Sound Neurology in Tacoma. Never rushing her patients, Sharon always provides a listening ear and practical guidance on living with PD. She is valued for the support and optimism she provides each individual.

Sharon abides by a four-point philosophy in her practice: 1) Hope unleashes the power to overcome hardships, 2) We can all handle a nuisance, 3) Don't let a hiccup become a setback- ask for help, and 4) I learn more from my patients than they learn from me.

As one of her patients said, "We left that first appointment feeling like we had amazing support to help us through the unknown. Sharon gave us hope for our future."

Thank you, Sharon, for all the PWPs you have helped and for inspiring a positive outlook in living with Parkinson's!



## **Chris Daigre**

Chris has been a well-known and respected dance instructor in the Seattle community for his entire career. After his Parkinson's diagnosis, Chris set out to transform lives by giving people with PD and other movement disorders ways to overcome the slowing, stiffness, and loss of balance that became his new reality.

Chris transformed his vibrant and insightful choreography into uplifting experiences that transcended these limitations, igniting hope for others living with this disease and their families. He created online classes that reach families, caregivers, and people living with movement disorders nationwide.

Whether a professional or newbie dancer, all participants feel welcome and successful in Chris' class. He collaborates with other dance teachers, support groups, and the University of Washington movement disorders clinic to spread hope and build strength of mind and body.

Participants say Chris has created more than a dance class. As one says, "He has created a brotherhood of hope and joy." Thank you, Chris, for inspiring us and sharing the joy of movement with the Parkinson's community!