Local organization C.A.R. comes to aid of those with disabilities

‘Aquathon’ fund-raiser set for Sept. 17

By Pam Walatka
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Three years ago, Kim Ahrens was on vacation in Denver with her family when a drunk driver hit their car. Her husband’s foot was crushed; Ahrens suffered a broken neck. She lost use of her arms and legs. Fortunately, their four-week-old baby was not hurt.

Ahrens turned to C.A.R., the Community Association for Rehabilitation. She now has regained use of her arms and is making progress with her legs.

“C.A.R. really helped me with my confidence in the water,” she said. “At first I was really scared; they helped me get in the water again and swim again. They helped me develop an individualized program to do yoga in the water.”

C.A.R. helps young people with developmental disabilities, such as Down’s syndrome or cerebral palsy, but also helps those with acquired disabilities, such as those caused by injuries or stroke.

Other services include a children’s development center, after-school care, respite services for caregivers, training for independent living, a day program for adults with disabilities, employment services, the swim center and a pre-school. The integrated pre-school brings children with disabilities together with typically developed children.

Located on Charleston Road near Middlefield Road in Palo Alto, C.A.R. features the Peninsula’s only public aquatic therapy facility, a warm-water pool. The wheelchair-accessible, 90- to 92-degree pool provides clients with therapy, fitness and relaxation in an atmosphere of support and encouragement.

Linda Chin, a Los Altos resident and associate director of development at C.A.R., said, “C.A.R. was started by local parents who didn’t want to send their children with disabilities to a state institution. C.A.R. allows the parents to keep their children at home, while providing care that helps the clients integrate into the community. You may have seen our clients bagging groceries at Safeway or working the snack bars at Century Theaters.”

“C.A.R. is a fantastic community service, especially for people with children with special needs,” said Los Altos resident Elizabeth Ball. Ball is the mother of 10-year-old twins who have cerebral palsy. They have been with C.A.R. since the Bells moved here eight years ago. She especially appreciates “the swimming program with the therapeutic pool with very warm water, warmer than most. It’s a wonderful benefit for people with muscular issues. The people who run it are great.”

She also applauds the respite program, which provides relief for regular caregivers a few hours per week or month.

C.A.R. is holding its annual aquathon fund-raiser on Sept. 17. The event brings together employees from local companies, as well as families and individuals, who form teams, collect pledges and swim to raise money for C.A.R. Sign-ups are due by Saturday.

Donations of vehicles, cash, e-script, stocks and endowments also are welcome donations.

The organization also has scheduled an author’s luncheon for Nov. 5, featuring such names as Anne Lamott.

To sign up for the aquathon, make contributions, or receive rehabilitation services, log on to c-a-r.org or call 494-0550.