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Laguna Woods resident becomes advocate for medicinal marijuana

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LAGUNA WOODS - Whether she's wearing a swimsuit or a nun's habit, Laguna Woods resident Margo Bouer is a busy lady.

As a 14-year veteran of the Laguna Woods Village Aquadettes, she's in the pool three or four times a week. And as an advocate of medicinal marijuana, Bouer frequently gives interviews on the subject. Recently even National Public Radio came calling.

Where does the nun's habit come in? This week the Aquadettes are presenting their popular Aqua Follies and one of the numbers involves a Sister Act-style presentation.

Out of the water Bouer uses a cane and sometimes a walker, her only visible concessions to 30 years of living with multiple sclerosis.

Although Bouer admits to slowing down in recent years — as a "natural born athlete" she golfed, played tennis, and participated in many other sports — she credits her swimming activities with helping to keep her active.

"It equalizes the body temperature and is very supportive," she said.

Then there's her own natural drive that saw her through early dysfunctional family life including childhood psychiatric hospitalizations and electroshock treatments, eventually followed by achievements in the fields of psychiatric nursing and psychoanalytic therapy, all chronicled in her 2000 autobiography, "After Shock: A Memoir."

In recent times, however, increasing nausea caused by Bouer's multiple sclerosis had been trumping that gumption. Then her friend and neighbor Dr. William Schwied suggested she try cannabis.

At first the idea seemed off-putting.

"I'd worked with a lot of addicts as a psychiatric nurse," she said.

But earlier this spring she tried just a puff, "and that first puff removed the nausea."

Bouer is quick to add that cannabis won't cure multiple sclerosis.

"But it does remove pain and makes me comfortable so I can keep functioning," she said.

She wants to reach out to those considering cannabis as a providing relief from symptoms that it can address. It can be taken through through smoking, the use of an inhaler, or simply applying to the tongue, as she typically does.

"If you have a medical problem not being solved to your satisfaction, contact us and we'll help take you

through the steps."

Some people, she says, might find it questionable to use cannabis, which under 1996's Proposition 215 allows marijuana possession and cultivation for personal medical use. Bucking a trend in Orange County, Laguna Woods last year became the first O.C. city to pass an ordinance allowing medical marijuana dispensaries. None have opened so some residents are considering operating a collective.

"Obviously seniors are not pot pushers!" Bouer said.

Then she laughs, stating that she rather enjoys her current status as "Senior Medicinal Marijuana Maven."

Among those who also support that status are her husband, Bob, a retired physician and former mayor of Laguna Woods, as well as her two adult children — both schoolteachers. Bouer also has two grandchildren, ages 6 and 8.

She and Bob are also longtime dog lovers who currently share their lives with a cat and a newly acquired Papillion pup, Gigi.

As for their move to The Regency of Laguna Woods Village about six months ago, Margo is enthusiastic.

"We don't have to shop and shlep anymore!" she says.

Then she quickly requests the statement be amended.

"Say 'shop, shlep or cook!'"