



Newsletter

NATIONAL ALLIANCE FOR THE MENTALLY ILL

April/May 2007

NAMI Board

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Support Groups

English Speaking

2nd Thursday of

Month, 7-8:30 pm

1067 N. Clark St.

St. Pius X Room

(Corner Geronimo

& Clark)

Spanish Speaking

3rd Thursday of

Month, 7-8:30,

1067 N. Clark, St.

Pius X Room

(Corner Geronimo

& Clark), 79905

Family to Family

Courses. Spanish

course in session.

Am I my Brother's Keeper

by Judge Max Higgs

The following is a condensed version of a speech, which Judge Max Higgs delivered at the Mental Health Congress held in El Paso in September 2006. He addresses the substandard housing conditions in which people with brain disorders often live. Max Higgs retired as Probate County Judge on Jan. 1, 2007.

Honorable Representative Byrd and other distinguished persons; I thank you for the opportunity to speak on matters for which I have a passion. But even more, I thank you for your demonstrated willingness to look at situations which exist shamefully in our community and sadly throughout our state. I commend you for your search for truth and I urge you to be constant in your search for appropriate responses to truth when you find it.

The need for this Congress goes back beyond the founding of this country on principles of equality and justice. It goes all the way back, at least for those of us who follow any of the Abrahamic religions of Judaism, Christianity or Islam when Cain asked of God, "Am I my brother's keeper?" And God's answer was, "Yes, if you don't crawl on your belly like a snake, you are indeed to be your brother's keeper."

I don't wish to judge anyone in this community harshly. APS and the El Paso MHMR Authority are doing, from what I can see, the best possible job with what they are given by Austin. And therein lies the problem.

I had a case in which a man was burned to death and another was severely burned because they were housed in a halfway-type program in which the electric bills were not paid. The electric company turned off the electricity and the residents of this program were given candles to light the home; one of the candles started a fire and these mentally ill persons were burned horribly. This country is struggling to keep the lights on in Baghdad and letting people burn to death for want of electricity in El Paso.

Therein lies the problem. Were you the keeper of your brother who burned to death?

The operators of one of the El Paso housing programs were collecting the Social Security for many of these unfortunates suffering from mental illness and/or mental retardation while providing rancid food and terrible living conditions. I have similar cases where Veterans of the military services of our country have been left in fetid, un-air-conditioned hovels while their VA checks poured in every month but went to nieces or nephews who did nothing for them. Therein lies the problem.

The reason I commenced the hearings and appointed Mr. Hammond as guardian ad litem and special master is that I grew weary of the weight-guilty knowledge. I knew that our city council and our commissioners court and our delegation would do something about these problems. The mentally ill and the mentally retarded simply are not able to

sustain advocacy for themselves, and I will tell you that often the families are exhausted just dealing with the needs of their loved ones and the disabilities experienced by them.

In **you** will lie the solutions of these problems. Are you your brother's keeper?

* * *

¿Soy Acaso El Guardian De Mi Hermano? Por el Juez Max Higgs.

Lo siguiente es un resumen del discurso presentado por el juez Max Higgs, en el Congreso de Salud Mental que tuvo lugar en El Paso, en septiembre del 2006, donde hizo alocución a la existencia de viviendas que con frecuencia no cumplen con los requisitos de habitabilidad y que son habitadas por personas que sufren trastornos mentales. El juez Max Higgs, se jubiló del Tribunal Testamentario el 1ro. de enero del 2007.

Honorable representante Byrd y otros distinguidos asistentes; les agradezco la oportunidad que tengo de hablar con respecto a estos asuntos por los cuales siento una gran pasión. Pero aún mas, les agradezco el interés que han demostrado con respecto a esta situación tan vergonzosa que existe en nuestra comunidad y tristemente por todo nuestro estado. Les felicito por el deseo que tienen de encontrar la verdad y les imploro que continuen con el afán de poder hallar soluciones adecuadas cuando encuentren la verdad.

La necesidad de este congreso va más allá de la fundación de este condado bajo los principios de igualdad y justicia. Va más allá, por lo menos para los que seguimos cualquiera de las religiones de Abrahán, judaísmo, cristiandad o de Islam, cuando Cain le preguntó a Dios, ¿"Soy acaso el guardián de mi hermano?" Y Dios respondió, "Si, si no usas tu vientre para arrastrarte como una serpiente, ya lo creo que eres el guardián de tu hermano".

No quiero juzgar a nadie de esta comunidad severamente. APS y la autoridad de EL PASO MHMR estan haciendo, por lo que puedo ver, el mejor trabajo posible con lo que reciben de Austin. Y allí está el problema.

Yo tuve un caso en donde un hombre murió quemado y otro se quemó quemado gravemente mientras que participaban en un programa de reinserción social en donde la cuenta de la luz no se

había pagado. La compañía de electricidad cortó la luz y a los residentes de este programa les proporcionaron velas para que de esta forma tengan luz en la casa; una de estas velas fue la causa del incendio y estas personas con trastornos mentales se quemaron horriblemente. Este país hace todo lo posible para que la luz siga brillando en Bagdad pero permite que por falta de electricidad una persona muera quemada en El Paso.

Allí está el problema. ¿Acaso no eres el guardián de tu hermano que murió quemado?

Los encargados de un programa de vivienda en El Paso cobraban los beneficios de Seguro Social que reciben muchos de los desafortunados que sufren trastornos mentales y/o retraso mental y, a cambio de eso lo que recibían era comida podrida y condiciones de vida deplorable. Tengo casos similares donde Veteranos que prestaron el servicio militar en nuestro país han estado viviendo en casuchas sin aire acondicionado y hediondas, pero los cheques del VA que reciben mensualmente son cobrados por sobrinas o sobrinos sin que nada de esto llegue a ellos. Allí está el problema.

El motivo por el cual comencé con las audiencias y nombre al Sr. Hammond como tutor u oficial del tribunal fue debido al remordimiento y peso de conciencia que sentía al estar enterado de todo esto. Sabía que el concilio de nuestra ciudad, nuestros comisionados y nuestra delegación harían algo con respecto a estos problemas. Los enfermos mentales como también los que sufren retraso mental simplemente no tiene la capacidad para abogar por sí mismos, y les diré que con frecuencia los familiares están agotados asistiendo las necesidades y discapacidades que sufren sus seres queridos.

En **ustedes** está la solución la a estos problemas. ¿Acaso no eres el guardián de tu hermano?

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A Farewell for Leo DiValentino

You are invited to a farewell reception for Leo DiValentino at the El Paso Psychiatric Center, 4615 Alameda Ave, on Wed., April 4th, 6:00 p.m. – 7:30.

Leo soon will be departing for Spokane, Washington. His move will create a void in NAMI and the El Paso Community. He was the organization's indispensable volunteer for many years. A retired army lieutenant colonel, he joined NAMI in 1996 and with his wife, Mary Kay, completed the *Family to Family Course*. Shortly thereafter they became involved in NAMI El Paso when the office was moved from Cliff Reuschelin's home to EPPC. Leo was instrumental in setting up the office system that is still in use today. Mary Kay soon became president for three and a half years, and together they mobilized the work to re-build NAMI. To help keep organization running smoothly, the board appointed Leo as executive director, a volunteer position that he held until Dec. '06. Leo also served as NAMI president from 2003-5.

His most important accomplishment was to build the education program from an annual, English-only *Family-to-Family Course* to offering it four times a year – two in English and two in

Spanish. He worked diligently with NAMI National to develop the courses' Spanish version. He also started the course for families/caretakers of children with brain disorders, *Visions for Tomorrow*. Not only did Leo oversee training of volunteer teachers, he made sure each course was staffed and even taught the courses himself at least once (and sometimes twice a year).

In his spare time he served as NAMI's Probate Court weekly representative for nine years; the director of Region 3 NAMI Texas; member of the MHMR Redesign Committee; trainer of police officers; and until recently member of the MHMR Board of Directors for six years. Needless to say, Leo has attended countless meetings in the community trying to forge working relationships with other organizations. Not only was Leo an excellent administrator and educator, he and Mary Kay personally helped others in countless problematic situations. This sketch of accomplishments over the last ten years does not do justice to all his work. Leo was the proverbial NAMI El Paso "linchpin" and now will be sorely missed.

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**Check out our new NAMI El Paso website, www.nami.org/sites/NAMIEIPaso
Also our new e-mail address is elpaso.nami@dshs.state.tx.us**

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NAMI Support Groups

The monthly NAMI support groups are open to families and caretakers of people with brain disorders who live in the community.

▪ **The English-speaking group meets from 7 – 9 pm, the second Thursday of the month at 1067 N. Clark St.** Facilitator Andy Vazquez is an MHMR social worker. His phone number is 329-3656.

▪ **The Spanish-speaking group meets 7 – 9, the third Thursday of the month in the same room.** Celia Padilla facilitates this support group and her number is 772-8821. Celia has taught many courses in Family-to-Family.

The St. Pius Church offers us this space, the Mother Theresa Room, at no cost. It is located on the NW corner of Geronimo and Clark St. -- across Clark Street from the church. From I-10 take the Geronimo exit and go south for one block and turn right.

All attendees have an opportunity, if they choose, to update or explain their particular situation. Confidentiality is a must. The groups offer much non-judgmental support. We find that participants learn a great deal from others' ways of successful coping

For further information call Ruth Hill in the afternoon at the NAMI Office, 534-5478.

Did you read the front page article on the NAMI El Paso president, Victor Ortiz in the El Paso Times, the Saturday, March 17th edition. It's titled "Man teaches others about mental illness."

NAMI EL PASO

4615 Alameda Ave., Rm. 157, El Paso, TX 7905

Phone: 915-534-5478 / Fax: 915-532-5726 / To receive announcements by email, send your email address to: elpaso.nami@dshs.state.tx.us Check in at our website: www.nami.org/sites/NAMIEIPaso

MISSION: To provide emotional and educational support to all people affected by mental illness; to actively advocate for the right of the mentally ill to achieve recovery in a high-quality healthcare & support system; and to promote full integration into our community.

- What general meetings subjects interest you the most? Check 4?
- "Ask the Doc." Meds, symptoms,
 - How to handle emergency crises?
 - Guardianship
 - Hospitalization
 - How to testify in court
 - Home care or other options
 - What to expect from the MHMR system
 - Basics – brain biology & brain disorders – What helps.
 - How to help your loved one towards recovery.
 - Social Security, other \$ helps.
 - Other _____

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION OR RENEWAL

Your membership dues to NAMI El Paso will buy you a membership in NAMI Texas and NAMI National. They also support the family education work that is at the heart of NAMI El Paso's mission Dues and donations are tax deductible.

Name _____

Address _____

City, State, Zip Code _____

Phone (home) _____ (work) _____

Email _____

Check one below.

Single, Family, or Professional Member? \$35 _____

Consumer, single? \$5 _____ or Open Door (low income) \$5 _____

Married couple, both consumers? \$6. _____

Return to: NAMI El Paso, 4615 Alameda Ave., Rm. 1157,
El Paso, TX 79905. THANK YOU!

NAMI EL PASO
4615 Alameda Ave., Rm. 1157
El Paso, TX 79905

ADDRESS CORECTION REQUESTED