

# The Mercury News

## Stroke Awareness Foundation charts a new path for its future

The San Jose nonprofit, founded in 2002, will spread its mission by merging with AbilityPath



Stroke Awareness Foundation Executive Director Noemi Conway, left, AbilityPath CEO Bryan Neider, center, and foundation board member Bill Baron, right, talk during an interview Monday, April 27, 2026, at the San Jose Municipal Rose Garden. The foundation will hold its 15th annual Stroke Walk at the garden on May 3. (Dai Sugano/Bay Area News Group)



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The 15th annual Fight Stroke Walk at the San Jose Municipal Rose Garden on Sunday morning will be momentous. And not just because of the 800 people who are expected to don their red T-shirts and take laps around the historic garden to raise awareness about strokes.

It will be a celebration of a merger in the works between the Stroke Awareness Foundation — founded in 2002 — and AbilityPath, a Peninsula-based nonprofit that provides services for people with disabilities. The partnership will create Stroke Awareness & Recovery, powered by AbilityPath, a name that's a lot to put on a T-shirt but sends the right message.

Stroke Foundation CEO Noemi Conway says she fields calls all the time from people looking for support for themselves or families members who have been released from the hospital or rehab centers following a stroke. Now, as director of the merged initiative, Conway will be able to provide them with the help they're seeking.

"Our work will still continue in the education part, supporting systems of care," she said. "We think of ourselves as the educational arms of our hospitals and stroke centers. And now we'll step into the recovery part."

AbilityPath CEO Bryan Neider said the partnership makes sense for their organization, too. "We're bringing in some of the recovery services, but the deep knowledge of how to reach the community in a broader way is something that Stroke Awareness Foundation is very skilled at. That is not our sweet spot in this particular service area. Our job is to amplify what's already been happening and take it to the next level."

To that point, the Stroke Awareness Foundation's app will remain the same, as will the Fight Stroke Walk fundraiser. The Stroke Awareness Foundation's current board will transition to an advisory board and will oversee the event. Board member Bill Baron said "better together" has become his new favorite phrase because of this merger.

"The Stroke Awareness Foundation has been on the front side of stroke for its existence and to create the continuum of care is something SAF has been striving to do," he said. "From education about how to minimize risk of stroke to knowing about what stroke symptoms are, all the way to the post-recovery."

The Stroke Awareness Foundation was started by Chuck Toeniskoetter, former San Jose Vice Mayor Pat Dando and Korean War vet Chuck Hoffman. All three had suffered strokes and wanted to create better outcomes for survivors in Santa Clara County. They sought to make sure people recognized the signs of stroke in friends or family members and got them to treatment as soon as possible. Hoffman died in 2014, and Dando died in 2017; the Stroke Awareness Foundation planted a bed of yellow roses named in honor of the Texas native as a tribute to her.

"My recovery depended on having someone nearby who understood the urgency of getting me to the right treatment center," Toeniskoetter said. "It is incredibly rewarding to see how far we've come in improving stroke outcomes in Santa Clara County — and even more so to know that this progress will continue and expand through our partnership with AbilityPath. I couldn't be prouder."



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