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Alzheimer's O.C. – adult day center attendance plummets, gala postponed due to COVID-19 outbreak

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Irvine-based Alzheimer's Orange County / Photo: Courtesy Alzheimer's Orange County

By Ann Frances –

Irvine-based Alzheimer's Orange County today announced that its planned March 21 annual gala will be postponed to Aug. 22 of this year, a result of increasing concerns over the spread of

coronavirus. Of more concern, the organization says, is keeping their Adult Day Health Centers open and accessible to seniors.

Jim McAleer, president and CEO of the organization that offers information, education and support for Alzheimer's patients and their caregivers to some 34,000 people, said in a digital communication to its supporters, "We are taking this course of action after recent governmental recommendations and warnings issued by the CDC and California Public Health Department. The spread of the virus and its potential impact on the community, particularly older adults, is not something we can ignore or underestimate. After consultation with our executive board members, community leaders and staff, we feel this is the only responsible course of action."

The gala has been rescheduled for Aug. 22, 2020, at the Balboa Bay Resort in Newport Beach. It will be combined with the organization's 2020 Visionary Women's Luncheon. The organization believes its donors will hold their tickets and plan to attend the rescheduled event in August.

"We anticipate that most of those who were planning on coming to the March 21 event will join us (in August)," said Amanda Helvie, director of communications.

Helvie added: "Our greater concern is for our Adult Day Health Centers: Acacia (Garden Grove) and South County Adult Day Services (Laguna Woods). As the coronavirus is being discussed on every media channel, fears grow as the number impacted by COVID-19 increases."

Attendance at the centers has dropped 20 percent, said Helvie, as participants are opting to stay home.

McAleer said today, "It is important to stay calm and look at the facts, and respond accordingly. As a provider of services to frail seniors, we believe it is vital for our organization to have a comprehensive plan to keep our participants, staff, volunteers, and friends safe."

In an effort to help educate seniors, caregivers and family on how the coronavirus may impact those with Alzheimer's, Alzheimer's Orange County plans to host a Facebook Live session with Irvine Clinical Research's Chief Medical Officer Dr. Dung Trinh. Trinh will discuss what older adults need to know about COVID-19 and will answer questions from attendees.

The event will be streamed March 12 on Facebook from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m. The Facebook page link is: www.facebook.com/ALZOC