



## **Harris Family Supports New City Heights Senior Housing**

*Harris Family Senior Residence Honors Lifetime of Support to Serving Seniors*

Giving back has been a way of life for the extended Harris Family for generations in San Diego. To honor the cumulative lifetime contributions starting with their parents, the late Howard and Iris Harris, and extending today to a third generation, Serving Seniors announced its newly developed City Heights senior housing will be named the Harris Family Senior Residence. The name was unveiled during an event at the project on Thursday, August 18.

The 117 senior housing units are fully leased. New residents are anticipated to move into the building at Fairmount Avenue and El Cajon Boulevard in October 2022.

## **Longstanding City Heights Community Connections for the Harris Family**

Jerry Harris, brother Robert Harris, and their three siblings grew up in City Heights, attending Crawford High School. Jerry still owns a business in the community. "I see a real continuity," said Jerry. "We've been in that neighborhood for a long time."

Among their City Heights childhood neighbors was Serving Seniors CEO Paul Downey, who grew up on the same street. Harris and Downey reconnected as adults through local politics and through their work; Harris with the San Diego Mediation Center and Downey's tenure at Serving Seniors.

Successful thanks to multiple business interests, the Harris family began donating regularly to Serving Senior programs. In honor of their parents, rooms at the Serving Senior Gary and Mary West Wellness Center in downtown San Diego are named for Howard and Iris Harris. Family members regularly volunteer and serve meals, including niece Cori Harris.

"When I was in preschool, I would have one day of the week that I would spend with my grandparents. I would go with my grandfather to drive and drop off meals to seniors who had you know, low income or couldn't get groceries themselves. So even as a three-year-old I was already kind of developing that service mindset with my grandpa, all the way throughout my childhood."

Cori, her siblings, and cousins all started volunteering for Serving Seniors. "When you're 10-years-old, you don't necessarily think of it as service. You're just spending time with the family. It instilled in us how important service in the community is.



“When I went away to college, it was something that I really, truly missed. I looked forward when I came home to going to Serving Seniors around the holidays and hanging out with my family and tying those two things

together.” Now Cori has joined with her uncles Jerry and Robert in representing the Harris Family name as part of the City Heights facility’s new identity.

### **Collaboration Helps Drive Affordable Housing Goals**

“We were able to go through it during the earlier construction phase, said Richard Harris. ”And we were very impressed. The facility is not only a housing unit, but it's also community.” For example, Harris described the outside patio area which will integrate into existing community activities such as food truck events and community cultural celebrations. “The facility makes a place for the seniors to interact with the people that use that little block area.”

“We’re just really proud that we can help accomplish this goal,” said Jerry Harris. “The whole thing is really an incredible collaboration, which I think everybody can be proud of. It's a unique project, and I think, certainly could be a model for a lot of projects around the country.”

The Harris family acknowledges the many challenges with affordable housing in San Diego. “As a family, we're very proud that we can help move in the right direction to resolve some of the issues, even if it's just for 100 people, because it really makes a difference in their lives,” explains Jerry Harris.

### **Jerry Harris: ‘An Asset to Any Community’**

Jerry Harris says his entire family hopes the new Harris Family Residence will encourage other San Diego neighborhoods to embrace quality inclusive housing.

“Just because a person is poor doesn't make them any lesser than other people. It's nothing for those neighbors to fear. The way Serving Seniors develops its communities and the kinds of activities they do, it's an asset to any community they want to move into. I'm hoping other communities will start embracing these projects because it's necessary,” said Jerry Harris.

“When I'm choosing to give money to any philanthropy, the first thing I want to do, I want to know is that they're using my money to a good end,” said Jerry Harris. “I like local organizations that are providing direct services to people so that I know that my money is getting directly into the hands of the people who really need it.



“Serving Seniors is a San Diego nonprofit that works directly with people who need it. They feed the people, they house the people, they provide counseling and medical services, they are leaders in the field. They can take care of all the seniors’ needs in one place,” explained Jerry Harris, who added it’s not always possible for older adults to navigate complex access to social services, especially when they don’t have the skills needed to access technology. “Having a group like Serving Seniors there to really teach you and hold your hand a little bit and make sure your needs is just a godsend for San Diego.”

The four Harris brothers and one sister are long-time donors to Serving Seniors, including making previous naming gifts at the Gary and Mary West Senior Wellness Center. Their lifetime contributions, and COVID-19 facilitated funding will be used to support Serving Seniors mission: to help seniors in poverty live healthy and fulfilling lives.

### **About Serving Seniors**

Founded in 1970, Serving Seniors is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization based in San Diego, California, dedicated to serving low-income adults aged 60 and over. A leader in senior advocacy and programming, Serving Seniors has created an innovative model of comprehensive services including nutrition meals, housing, health and social services and lifelong learning opportunities to hundreds of seniors in need. It is the largest provider of meals to seniors in the county, and one of the only organizations in the nation providing a robust range of services to vulnerable, at-risk older adults.

Serving Seniors President and CEO Paul Downey has been instrumental in the organization’s growth over the past 27 years. Since being appointed the role in 1995, Downey has guided the nonprofit’s innovative efforts to provide supportive services focused on keeping low-income seniors healthy and independent. Under Downey’s leadership, Serving Seniors has grown to provide more 1.7 million nutritious meals and coordinated services to 7,000 older adults each year. Read Serving Seniors’ groundbreaking 2021 report, [\*\*Senior Homelessness: A Needs Assessment.\*\*](#)