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Stunt Double Recalls Superhero Feats



Carol Crosby-Ferges Christensen fearlessly lay her body across the windshield of a moving car. She jumped through a ceiling and in and out of trees. She even leaped between tall buildings in a single bound.

No surprise. She was Wonder Woman, after all, or rather a stunt double for actress Lynda Carter, who starred in the late-1970s TV series. Now 64, Christensen has lived at Kelly Ridge in Lake Tahoe, Calif., since it opened in 2009.

How did she come to stand in for a superhero strong enough to lasso a plane, hurl a spaceship or single-handedly snatch someone away from an oncoming tsunami? It seems she was born for the part.

Christensen grew up in a family of acrobats and gymnasts and recalls they “had a trampoline in the backyard since before I could

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ABHOW

Mature Living Since 1949

Stunt Double *Continued from cover*

walk.” When she was six or seven, she started performing with her parents and siblings as a family act in Muscle Beach, Calif., near her hometown of Playa del Rey. They did gymnastics and tumbling, and their signature act was a human pyramid.

“There were 18-story buildings on the studio lot, fairly high, and I had to jump from one building to the other with no net, nothing down below.”

— *Carol Crosby-Ferges Christensen, Kelly Ridge resident*

“Dad would be standing and his feet would be the only two on the ground,” she says. “My twin brother and my older sister would be on their knees on his two legs, my mom would be sitting on his shoulders, I’d be sitting on her shoulders, and my little brother would be in front.”

All except her dad joined her in spending several summers touring the West Coast with a one-ring tent show called The DeWayne Circus.

“That’s a kid’s dream,” she says. “We did not only the trapeze and the trampoline and the gymnastic, acrobatic things we were used to doing already, but we also did acts with ponies and an elephant.”

By the time she was 20, she had gotten to know a number of celebrities — Liza Minnelli was her best friend when she was a child — and through these connections, she started doing stunt work for TV shows, movies and commercials.

“I never had to go on one interview or scratch my way in to get a job,” she says. “They always called and said, ‘Here’s something we need somebody for.’”

Her first movie gig was as Sharon Tate’s double in a film that also starred Tony Curtis. She later performed on the TV show “The Mod Squad,” in the movie

“Brewster’s Millions,” and in other movies with such stars as Julie Andrews, Gene Wilder and Dom DeLuise.

When Lynda Carter’s original stunt double, Kathy Lee, was injured, Christensen stepped in. She was one of five called on to do stunts for Carter, and she says modestly that whenever she thought somebody could do a stunt better than she could herself, she would let them.

“I was never frightened, I never have been,” she says. Still, recalling her most challenging stunt does give her pause these days.

“There were 18-story buildings on the studio lot, fairly high, and I had to jump from one building to the other with no net, nothing down below. I used a mini-trampoline. I had to run and jump off that to the other building with no safety belt. I don’t even know why I did that one.”



Crosby-Ferges Christensen looks at a childhood photo of her family performing on Muscle Beach near their home of Playa del Rey, Calif.

It's 8 o'clock on a Wednesday morning in October, and a half dozen Grand Lake Gardens residents are heading out to gather tomatoes.

Since the Oakland, Calif., community established an organic garden in April, the residents have harvested nearly 550 pounds of fresh produce — including potatoes, string beans, squash, cucumbers, carrots, beets, lettuce, avocados and oranges — and donated this bounty to a nearby food program for homeless and low-income seniors.

When Grand Lake Gardens first planted the vegetable beds, they planned to give the produce to the Alameda County Community Food Bank, says Carole Lee, 75, the resident who leads the project. The first deliveries went to the food bank, but then the residents discovered that one of the food bank's clients, St. Mary's Center, was just three miles away and dedicated to serving seniors.

So, Lee says, they decided to “skip the middleman.” She and other residents harvest on Wednesday mornings,

and the community's van driver helps her deliver the food later the same day.

Several months in the planning, and supported by a grant from Rebuilding Together Oakland, the resident garden took shape after a local Boy Scout troop and students from Piedmont High School spent two spring weekends building raised redwood planter boxes.

“One Saturday they moved all the lumber and soil up to the back [of the property] and the second Saturday they built the boxes,” says Lee. Volunteers from Grand Lake Gardens and from the wider community also pitched in to establish the garden.

A half-dozen residents work on it regularly, weeding, watering and harvesting. A few others maintain small individual plantings and another six or seven serve on the garden committee. “One man is the tomato man and makes sure the tomatoes get watered,” says Lee. Some of the gardeners have years of experience while others — including Lee — have never grown vegetables before.

“I moved here from San Francisco,” she explains. “I was on the third floor there and the garden was three stories down.” She grew flowers at her former home but, because the weather is cooler in San Francisco than Oakland, no vegetables. The garden project fell into her lap simply because she has a lot of energy, she says. Other residents contribute their expertise, and several friends from the wider community advise the gardeners on such tasks as sorting and saving seeds.

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(from left) Carole Lee, Lester Marks, Edmund Bussey and Peg Shaw check the vegetables in one of the community's raised planters.

Partnerships Pair Medical and Nursing Students with Resident Volunteers

Medical and nursing students are learning about and caring for older adults in their entirety — body and mind — through unique partnerships at Piedmont Gardens in Oakland, Calif.

Nursing students from Samuel Merritt University work one-on-one with Piedmont Gardens residents as part of their nursing studies.

The program started with just two students and has grown to a dozen today. At the same time, students from the University of California, Berkeley/University of California, San Francisco Joint Medical Program do physical exams and take residents' medical histories.

Eleven-year Piedmont Gardens resident Sid Spies, a retired internist from Southern California, is preceptor to the medical students, a role he describes as part supervisor, part mentor. Students are paired with resident volunteers for three years, long enough for them to really get to know them.

"This is the last time in their lives they will have three hours to take a history," Spies says, adding that when he was a harried young medical student he and his classmates often viewed their older patients as time-wasters — a persistent belief he hopes programs like Piedmont Gardens' will help dispel.

"Empathy is such an important part of practicing medicine. It's very different from treating a heart attack," he says.

Second-year medical student Asa Tapley agrees.

"This program allows students to apply their learning, to actually practice physical exams and history taking. You don't practice medicine in a lecture hall."

Spies says the experience is especially helpful to new doctors who will probably spend a third of their time treating elders as baby boomers age. He says the situation will be further exacerbated by a general shortage of family practitioners.

Community Services Director Elizabeth Chamish, who oversees programming for Piedmont Gardens' 300



Medical student Asa Tapley confers with Piedmont Gardens volunteer resident Flossie Lewis.

residents, says that the dozen or so resident volunteers in the medical student partnership are valuable resources for the medical students, many of whom live far from their grandparents and can't spend intensive one-on-one time with elders.

"Here the students get a reality check," she says. "There are real people here."

An emerging component of the partnership with

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Grand Lake Gardens

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As fall sets in, the group is planting cool weather vegetables and making plans for the future. “We should probably grow some herbs and thyme,” Lee says. She would also like to get worms for their compost bin, and she dreams of establishing beehives as well.

Sister Marilyn Medau, program director at St. Mary’s, says that last year the center served about 300 homeless seniors and about 600 seniors who have homes but need resources to help them age in place. The center also helps young children and families, but the mid-day hot meal they serve on Thursdays is just for seniors.

“We use the food they bring in for salads or as a vegetable medley,” she says of the Grand Lake Gardens donations. “I’m very grateful for any kind of healthy food we can serve to the seniors, and fresh produce is high on that list.”



Carolee Lee checks the produce at Grand Lake Gardens.

Partnerships

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Tapley speaks with resident Sid Spies.

UC Berkeley and UCSF Medical School pairs 16 medical students with 16 resident volunteers. Led by doctors Claudia Landau and Guy Micco of the joint medical program, the project focuses on the less clinical, more social and psychological aspects of elder care. Chamish says Piedmont Gardens has again proved to be a rich environment for volunteers.

“We needed 16 and got 50,” she says, holding up a single-spaced two-column sign-up sheet of volunteers, adding that every one of the 20 selected showed up for the orientation. “Our residents have the drive to help the next generation, an instinct to pass along their wisdom. They’re saying ‘I want to be a part of this.’”

Executive Director Gayle Reynolds says the partnerships between Piedmont Gardens and the nursing and medical schools greatly benefit the larger community.

“It encourages those entering these professions to focus on older adults at the same time it engages the residents,” she says.

Walking through the busy Piedmont Gardens lobby, greeting many residents by name, Chamish says that seniors are demanding both a stronger voice in their care and a more personal, less institutional environment. She sees the partnership as an incremental step toward that cultural change.

“I like to think that everyone who comes here will retain this powerful experience and use it in the future,” she says.

Design awards have been accumulating at ABHOW in recent years.

The lodge-style Kelly Ridge and Tahoe Senior Plaza affordable communities in South Lake Tahoe, Calif., each received honors for exceptional design and compatibility with their surroundings. And last year the redevelopments of The Terraces at San Joaquin Gardens in Fresno, Calif., and Judson Park in Des Moines, Wash., won ABHOW's longtime architectural partner top awards from the National Association of Homebuilders.

There's a pattern here, and it's no accident. Whether creating new communities or updating existing ones, ABHOW incorporates age-friendly design and pays close attention to how every aspect of a resident's surroundings — from campus layout to flooring to the amount of natural light — affects safety, comfort and independence.

In designing community spaces, the company strives to create a feeling either of home or of hospitality, says Russell Mauk, vice president for design, construction and redevelopment. "We're trying to get any sense of institution out of our aesthetics," he notes.

ABHOW's approach reflects growing national and international interest in age-friendly design, which more architects and academic institutions are beginning to explore. For instance, some providers in South Korea, Japan and Australia are now designing communities for older adults around a household model rather

than a medical model.

In the U.S., MIT's AgeLab, created in 1999 to develop technologies for an aging population, puts some of its considerable brainpower into optimal design for successful aging. This fall, the University of Pennsylvania School of Design held a conference called New Aging. And the American Institute of Architects and the American Association of Homes and Services for the Aging (an

organization to which ABHOW belongs) teamed up recently to track trends in senior living architecture and interior design.

For its part, ABHOW has been convinced for some time that good architecture has a positive impact on the daily life of residents. In the mid-1990s, for instance, the company worked with Irwin Pancake Architects — the firm that recently won honors from the National Association of Homebuilders — to develop The Grove, a cozy-looking therapeutic neighborhood that provides memory support for residents.

"When a person with a cognitive impairment sees The Grove, it doesn't look like a clinical, medical or institutional model," architect Doug Pancake has said. "It looks

like a cottage or a home." And, he notes, making everything "as comfortable and normal and based in reality as we can" helps residents of The Grove feel oriented, reassured and independent. For instance, shadow boxes filled with personal memorabilia are placed by each doorway to help residents identify their own rooms.

Design considerations have been paramount in subsequent company projects, too. These include the cottage model ABHOW has developed for new and

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Russell Mauk leads ABHOW's age-friendly design efforts.

redeveloped skilled nursing centers — in which resident rooms surround a central great room and kitchen — as well as several new affordable communities and redevelopment efforts now underway at a number of continuing care retirement communities. In all such projects, the company incorporates the latest research in age-friendly design.

“We take it as a serious responsibility to stay current with what’s going on in our profession,” says Paul Jepson, assistant vice president, care services. “We create an environment that is as accessible as possible for older adults.”

To enhance interaction among residents, ABHOW has begun combining many community amenities into a town square area, says Mauk. At The Terraces at San Joaquin Gardens, for instance, a coffee bistro, a sitting room with a TV, a library and an outdoor fireplace are now located near one another. “We’re clustering places, not spreading them out over the campus,” Mauk says.

Attention to design also means taking into account such things as the vision changes that come with age. “We make sure there are adequate light levels, not shadows and contrast that could be perceived as a barrier,” Jepson says.

Because corneas tend to yellow as people age, older people perceive colors differently than younger people. So ABHOW’s design teams choose palettes that factor in these changes. Instead of greens and blues, which may look gray as the cornea changes, they select shades of red and gold.



Hillcrest Gardens in Daly City, Calif., illustrates the company’s attention to detail.

The company strives to design each room so that residents will find every feature accessible, Jepson says. Seemingly minor details can make a big difference. “We have a specific range of chair height, arm height and so on that we know will be successful with this age group,” Jepson says. “We know that overstuffed furniture is difficult for a person to get out of.”

ABHOW has made universal design a priority in spaces devoted to wellness, rehabilitation and healthy living. One example is the new wellness center at The Terraces at San Joaquin Gardens. There, a resident panel helped choose the exercise equipment, and the design team incorporated several features not commonly found in gyms. One is a low wall midway

through the center.

“It’s a great area for resting, a great spot to put your coat or hat,” says Steve Case, director of lifestyle enrichment at the community. “You wouldn’t normally think of seating in a gym, but it’s a good place to have a sip of water and catch your breath.”

The center is laid out so there are no steps or barriers, and the entire space has windows to the outside. “Natural light always helps us out with our mindset in a gym,” Case notes. And to encourage new residents and those who may not have used a fitness center previously, there is a tinted window near the front door that allows those outside to look in and decide if they’d like to enter.

“The layout provides a lot of space, so people who

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Asia “Dob” Jessup, resident and former Oregon State University football player, exercises in the fitness center at The Terraces at San Joaquin Gardens. The dividing wall that serves as a resting spot is right behind him.

come in with walkers and wheelchairs can get around really easily,” says resident Mary Nii, who works out with her husband, Ted, five or six times a week. She uses the center’s dividing wall for a quick break, and Ted Nii does sit-ups, crunches and leg extensions on it. “It’s a good warm-up,” he says.

With certain items, such as the finishes on walls and ceilings, close attention to design can sometimes result in higher costs. “People’s houses tend to have more detail than corporations and institutions do,” says Mauk. “We spend a little more effort on ceilings, for example, so you have some variety in pattern and lighting that changes as you go through the space. We could do it less expensively, but it would strip out a lot of the character.”

Because the company incorporates techniques developed at one community into the design of another, it can trim design costs through economies of scale. For instance, fabric and color palettes that work well at one community may be adopted at another.

Mauk worked out an economical way to renovate homes at The Terraces at San Joaquin Gardens to make them more open and bring in more natural light, then he adapted the same technique for Piedmont Gardens in Oakland, Calif. Likewise, he developed a safer and

more convenient kitchen design — with microwaves at counter height, stoves with their controls in the front, and deep, pull-out drawers instead of lower cabinets — that is being used in several communities.

ABHOW team members also keep design costs in line by staying informed about what’s available on the market. Plus the company listens when residents make cost-trimming suggestions. “At Piedmont Gardens, some residents said they liked the furniture that was there and said it would be more economical to recover it than replace it — and ABHOW did,” Jepson says.

In any case, good design is not necessarily more expensive. Suzanne Saucier, assistant vice president for development, has come up with numerous ways to incorporate considerable flair into several of the company’s new affordable communities at very little cost. At Hillcrest Gardens in Daly City, Calif., for example, she designed a striking central staircase from reclaimed wood and took advantage of panoramic views of the San Francisco Bay with a rooftop garden.



Mauk reviews plans.

Whether considering the overall plan of a community or its tiniest details, those concerned with design at ABHOW have one goal.

“We’re trying to create a notably positive environment, not a neutral environment,” says Mauk. “We want people to be energized coming into these spaces.”

Golf Classic Makes Big Impact

Among the volunteers at the 14th Annual ABHOW Foundation Golf Classic Oct. 11, one of those most significantly vested in the outcome was Kenetta Jackson.

“I love the golf tournament because it’s one of the fundraisers where I know for a fact that the money that is received will go where it’s intended — the affordable housing communities,” says Jackson, the administrator of E.E. Cleveland Manor, an ABHOW affordable housing community in Oakland, Calif. “I feel very strongly about it. I tell everyone who donates that I guarantee the proceeds will benefit a good organization.”



Since 1997, the Golf Classic has raised more than \$1 million to support ABHOW’s affordable housing retirement communities, which use the funds to purchase such equipment as paratransit buses and sound systems and to add new programs like lunch and activities — all to improve the quality of life for residents.

Once again, Round Hill Country Club in Alamo, Calif., served as host for the scramble-format tournament. Players departed the links at the end of the day to enjoy a spectacular evening of the club’s hospitality in view of Mt. Diablo State Park.

Jackson helped set up the live and silent auctions held during the evening’s events, and she teamed up with other communities to create an Oakland Raiders-themed auction prize package consisting of game tickets, a backpack and team golf tees.

Golfing prizes went to men’s, women’s and mixed teams, with individual prizes in distance, accuracy and skill challenges.

Along with golf and dinner, the event offered non-golfers a day of pampering from the Claremont Hotel Club & Spa in nearby Berkeley.

“It was a wonderful opportunity to support both affordable housing and the ABHOW Foundation while at the same time enjoying a decadent afternoon with colleagues,” says Tara McGuinness, ABHOW’s vice president and regional operations manager who opted for two massages and a pedicure in lieu of golfing.

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(from left) Affordable housing leaders Kendra Roberts, Kenetta Jackson and Yolanda Barba volunteer at the Golf Classic.

Overall, 180 people participated in this year's Golf Classic, helping to raise a total \$140,125.

“We continue to be thankful for all the sponsors, participants and ABHOW team members who make the Golf Classic such a fantastic event,” says ABHOW Foundation President Joe Anderson. “It’s important to remember, though, that the real winners are the residents of the ABHOW affordable housing communities who will benefit from the generosity of everyone involved in this year’s event.”



Vicki Kattli (at right in above photo) and Lynn Gangi take a break on the course while Dan Hermann (at left in right photo), managing director of Golf Classic sponsor Ziegler, enjoys a moment with ABHOW Foundation President Joe Anderson.



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Published by the Strategic Planning and Communications Department Kay Kallander, Senior Vice President e-mail kkallander@abhow.com
ABHOW Communications Box: abhow.com/about/communications_box (username: communications; password: box2010)

ABHOW, National and State Websites:

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