



UNRAVELING ALZHEIMER'S

A closer look at an initiative to be presented Tuesday at the county Board of Supervisors' meeting to assist the 60,000 area residents with the disease.
SD4

SAN DIEGO NEWSMAKERS, IDEAS + OPINIONS

U-T

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SD IN DEPTH

SUN
DAY



Alford Clairborne holds a photo of his wife, Rita, taken before her Alzheimer's diagnosis in 2001. Since then, Clairborne has been a full-time caregiver. NELVIN C. CEPEDA • U-T PHOTOS

'The job nobody applies for'

In this county alone, 650,000 are facing the challenges of caring for loved ones with Alzheimer's or other debilitating diseases

MICHELE PARENTE • U-T

Alford Clairborne was a marathon runner, so he knows how to push through pain, how to dig deep to muster the will to keep going. Even when he's spent, even when it feels like he can't take another step.

One in an occasional series on the challenges facing family caregivers.

Nothing in his training, though, could have prepared him for what has turned into the longest-running challenge of his life.

For 13 years, Clairborne, 70, has been a full-time caregiver



for his wife. Rita was diagnosed with early onset Alzheimer's disease when she was 54.

Every day at their Encanto home, he cooks all her meals. He holds her drooping head up to feed her. He brushes her teeth, helps her go to the bathroom and grooms her. He lifts her 170-pound body in and out of her wheelchair. He meticulously tracks her medications, her doctor's appointments, her decline.

Rita doesn't sleep at night, so neither does Alford. He's tired, he admits, and sometimes gets frustrated and forgetful — "caregivers' dementia" he calls it.

She's almost completely unresponsive now, but he hasn't given up on her ability to understand him.

"We're going to go out together, aren't we Rita?" he says to her one day, even though she's been sitting

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WINNERS & LOSERS Your Weekly News Score Card

WINNERS

► **Ice princesses:** Disney's "Frozen" toy line trumps Barbie as the top toy for girls this holiday season. Does the Dream House have a panic room?

Whale watchers: A rare pod of killer whales off the coast of Oceanside gives Harbor Patrol and lifeguards the Thanksgiving gift of a lifetime. So much for pie.

Waistlines: New FDA rules will require food establishments with



more than 20 locations — including movie theaters — to post calorie

counts on menus. Turns out popcorn tastes like regret.

Endless summer fans: The mercury soars past 80 on Thanksgiving. Pass the turkey, green beans, stuffing, cranberry sauce and sunscreen.

Retailers: With 140 million Americans hitting the malls, real and virtual, experts predict the strongest holiday sales in years. Tablets and smartphones for everyone!

LOSERS

Ferguson fallout: Turmoil from the controversial Michael Brown grand jury decision sparks protests, arrests and a freeway fracas in San Diego. Outrage needs no map.

University of Virginia: Rolling Stone's report about alleged fraternity gang rape sends this storied school into a very dark place. Let there be light. And justice.

Chuck Hagel: Under pressure from the White House, the defense

secretary steps down after less than two years on the job. Washington is a battlefield.

Holiday sanity: Shoppers impatient for Black Friday flood stores on Gray Thursday, the day formerly known as Thanksgiving.

Mystery fans: Novelist P.D. James, the "Queen of Crime," dies at the age of 94. Whodunnit? Shedunnit, with exquisite psychological insight and literary skill.

KARLA PETERSON & PETER ROWE • U-T

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