

Lindsay Raika's speech at Mickelson Pool Reopening, August 20, 2024

Today marks a meaningful moment both personally and collectively.

I am filled with a profound sense of gratitude and joy. I first discovered the Mickelson therapy pool over 25 years ago. Like many of you, I came here seeking relief from chronic pain. This pool became my sanctuary—a place where the soothing waters provided not just physical relief but also a sense of hope and community.

When the pool closed in 2020, it felt as though a vital part of my life had been taken away.

In April 2021, I called then San Mateo Mayor Eric Rodriguez and asked if there was anything he could do about the permanent closure of Mickelson. He offered me some sage advice. He said, "Create a petition, get some LTEs in the Daily Journal, start a movement and get the community involved." He made it sound so simple. And I thought, "OK, I can do that." Naively, I figured one mayor could solve this problem, and we would wrap this up in a month or so. Fast forward 3 ½ years, and here we are.

The Herculean effort it took to get to this day cannot be overstated. It took a village of dedicated volunteers, elected officials, and thousands of community members contributing time, money, and effort to restore this precious resource.

After creating a petition that quickly gathered thousands of signatures, I connected with a small group of former pool users and together we reached out to attorney Joe Cotchett, who generously invited us to meet with him and quickly became a trusted advisor. He encouraged us to start a non-profit organization and several of us banded together to create Warm Water Wellness.

Over the next three years, Warm Water Wellness Board members and other passionate supporters spoke at hundreds of city council, BOS, and healthcare district meetings. We submitted over 30 op-eds and letters to the editor in local newspapers. We held a rally with over 100 supporters. Our cause was featured in dozens of articles, tv and radio segments. It took a long time, but one by one we garnered the support of every city council in San Mateo County. We became allies with the Board of Supervisors, the local health care districts, and elected leaders at all levels of government. We are eternally grateful to those who heard our pleas and championed our cause.

Many people have asked me how a group of severely mobility impaired individuals had the persistence and resilience to carry on and to lobby for so long.

As anyone who has been touched by chronic illness knows, living with pain and disability means fighting an often daily battle against hopelessness. It means getting beaten down by bad days and setbacks and choosing to get up, dust yourself off and try again. It means learning to be patient and accept that things "normal" people can do seemingly easily can take us forever. So we know a thing or two about resilience.

Twenty years ago, I found myself in a very dark place suffering from severe jaw and throat pain that rendered me unable to speak for nearly two years. I became extremely socially isolated because I couldn't communicate. I recall wondering what my life would look like in 10 or 20 years and promised myself that if I could ever speak again, I would use my voice for something meaningful in the community. I'm sharing this because if there's one thing that I've learned from my own

challenges and from this collective experience, it's that you never know what the future may hold. I hope if someone out there is going through a difficult time, that you'll have faith that there will be better days ahead.

These past few years have been transformative. Chronic pain is isolating and can shrink your world. But this experience has expanded mine in ways I never could have imagined. I've witnessed our community come together with an incredible sense of shared humanity and collective purpose. Many of you here today have never stepped foot in this facility but went to bat for us. I thank every single one of you for believing in us when we said that we couldn't live without this pool. Whether you signed our petition, donated to Warm Water Wellness, helped stuff envelopes, or spoke at city council meetings, your efforts - no matter how seemingly small - were essential to achieving our successful outcome.

I want to take a moment to recognize the board members of Warm Water Wellness. Saving the pool was truly a team effort, and success could not have been possible without them. Romy Bauer, Pam Heman, Mike Schrader, Jane Stahl, Steve Stahl, Astrid Varteressian, and Brian Zywiec: please raise your hands. Every board member (except healthy Jane) has severe mobility limitations. One member conducted research while bedridden on medical oxygen; another is a quadriplegic who set up our accounting spreadsheet with his one usable finger; our chief writer used adaptive technology. Much of this effort was a labor of love supported by heating pads and ice packs.

I also want to recognize Supervisor Canepa and his staff with a special thanks to his right hand Bill Silverfarb. I can't even imagine what this journey would have been like without their unwavering support.

I would also like to thank Sutter Health for rebuilding our pool, and in doing so, helping to rebuild our Mickelson family. I am grateful to CEO Harris and VP of Operations Jillian Thomas for their collaborative partnership over the past year. They patiently listened to our feedback and we felt genuinely heard. We are delighted that Sutter is offering a free community swim day today. Thank you for this gracious gesture and for bringing actual warm water wellness back to our community. I hope the reopening of Mickelson inspires providers to make aquatic therapy available throughout the Bay Area.

A couple of years ago, I ran into Naomi, a former Mickelson patron, at the Jewish Community Center. After complaining about the water temperature and the challenges of trying to do gentle exercises next to someone doing the butterfly with torpedo toys flying overhead, Naomi said, "I just want to go home." Well, today, we are finally home.

Thank you all for being part of this incredible journey. Let's celebrate this moment and look forward to the many years of healing and community ahead.