A Timely Assist, by Barbara Chavez, Journal Staff Writer

Organization co-founder found way to do more for the world

Michael Gray's co-workers at Friends in Time Inc. refer to him as their "hero and inspiration."

Gray is the co-founder of Friends in Time, an organization that helps people with multiple sclerosis and amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), also known as Lou Gehrig's disease. Foster Hall, Gray's friend, who has ALS, is the other founder of the organization.

Gray spends about 30 hours a week volunteering his time to help people with these diseases. For his efforts, Gray is one of the people honored on this month's Heroes Wall at Coronado Center.

Gray and Friends in Time staff have organized several support groups for people with MS and ALS. At the Paloma Blanca Nursing Home in Albuquerque, Gray talks with younger residents of the nursing home twice a month.

"The support group's not just for people with the two diseases," said Gray. "Often, younger people who have to live in the nursing homes experience some anxieties and don't have a lot of the friend support that they need. I hope our little support group helps address that need."

Gray also reads to a bed-bound friend whose eyesight is failing.

Gray, 56, said it was during a Buddhist retreat that he got the inspiration to start an organization to help people fighting MS and ALS.

"I ran the computer labs at the University of New Mexico for eight years," he said. "While I enjoyed my job, I just always felt there was more for me to do out in the world. Friends in Time is my outlet."

Gray said he hopes the organization continues to grow. The two other full-time staff members say it will as long as Gray is a part of it.   "He's just so motivational because he leads by example," said Pat Simmons, who nominated Gray for the Hero honor.

Friends in Time currently serves about 85 people with disabilities and their families. The organization also provides training and support for caregivers. Gray said Friends in Time could eventually help more people.