When I was approached about writing an article for The Community Link, I knew right away who I wanted to interview. Since the moment I met him, I have been impressed by Robert Long who is the SPARC Board of Directors Consumer Representative. The consumer representative is the link between the Board and the consumers we serve. The SPARC and Stepping Stone Boards hold joint meetings, so although I serve on the Stepping Stone Board, I get the benefit of interacting with Robert as well.

Robert has been serving in this position since January 2010. Robert’s story is one that inspires. Robert is a born leader who uses his own experiences to help others. He shows genuine kindness and concern for their well-being and is always willing to lend a helping hand. These characteristics have helped him shine as a consumer representative and are helping him excel in both his personal and work lives.

Robert was elected into the consumer board representative position by his peers. Prior to the election, he thumped the pavement trying to convince people to vote for him. He went to each work site and met with consumers. He introduced himself and explained why he wanted to run for the position. He told people what he would do for them if elected and listened to their complaints. His hard work paid off and he won the election.

As Board Representative, Robert visits a different SPARC unit each month. Robert’s concern for his co-workers’ well-being is genuine. When he goes to visit a work site he always makes sure everyone gets the chance to speak. Robert has a gift as a facilitator and people are comfortable talking to him. True to his word, Robert reports back to the Board at the monthly meeting, relaying both the good and the bad.

Robert’s personal history helps define who he is and the person he has become. He has lived in Grants Pass since he was eight years old. He attended North Middle School and then Grants Pass High School, graduating with a full diploma in 2000.

Robert continued to live with his parents after high school and got a job on a janitorial crew with SPARC. He made some bad decisions and did some things he should not have done and was fired from that position. He soon found a job as a dishwasher at Sizzler. Around that time, he fell in love and, at 21 years of age, got married. As Robert’s life became more stressful, he started using drugs, drinking, and hanging out with the wrong people. He used drugs and alcohol to avoid his problems and found out the hard way that this was not an effective way to cope. His problems did not go away, his marriage began to fall apart and it didn’t take long before it affected his job. After two years at the restaurant, he was fired. His marriage fell apart soon after and Robert found himself at his lowest point. He was homeless and jobless and his marriage was over. Depression was quick to follow.
Message from the Executive Director

We have all been affected by the economic downturn in the last two years. SPARC / Stepping Stone is no exception. We have seen a dramatic reduction in commercial revenue based on the commodities market and the state has reduced funding by 2% for all vocational services. We too have tightened our belt so we can continue to provide necessary services yet remain financially solid.

More importantly, the developmentally disabled people we serve have also been negatively affected by the economy. For a variety of reasons, a large majority of the people we serve live well below the poverty level and earn sub-minimum wage.

There are currently 123 disabled employees earning a paycheck through SPARC. An additional 35 are served at our Alternatives to Employment Center. Stepping Stone Residential Services provides housing and independent living supports for 80 people with disabilities.

People with disabilities work very hard to be independent and are an energetic workforce. However, intellectual and physical limitations prevent them from realizing many of their dreams.

At this time, SPARC / Stepping Stone is asking for assistance from the community as seen in this newsletter on page 8. We are specifically requesting donations to achieve expanded employment opportunities for people with disabilities. The expansion of the book store will allow for jobs for an increased number of people with disabilities; the same is true regarding the purchase of a crew cab for landscape maintenance. We have taken great care of our vehicles, but currently we have 9 vehicles running with over 150,000 miles. As able, we are replacing vehicles, but clearly we have an aging fleet. A new vehicle at Landscape Maintenance will improve safety and increase opportunities for employment.

We understand that the community has also been hard hit. If you are unable to assist with financial contributions, but are drawn to the idea that people with disabilities benefit from involvement with the community, please consider a donation of equipment or small household items. If you are drawn toward volunteerism we are recruiting volunteers in a number of areas. For more information regarding targeted giving please call: Marie Hill 541-237-3006, or Gayle Daniel 541-237-3032.

Thank You Grantors!

Recognizing the importance of community partnerships, SPARC / Stepping Stone thank the following:

- **West Family Foundation:** For providing a $5,000 grant toward the purchase of a Landscape Maintenance pickup.
- **Cow Creek:** For providing a $7,500 grant toward the purchase of a Landscape Maintenance pickup.
- **Four Way:** For providing a grant to purchase emergency backpacks for supported living residents to use in case of an emergency or disaster.

- **Leightman Maxey Foundation:** For providing us with a grant to assist in the marketing of our organizations.
Good Works & Good Things

Book Lore staff contacted a local nurse to give her the $144.67 they had collected for the efforts in Haiti. Here is the response Book Lore received:

Greetings:

I just wanted to take a moment to tell you how much we appreciate what you have done to help Nansi Myers and the people of Haiti. We were totally overwhelmed by the need following the earthquake in Haiti and the response of people like you reaffirmed to me the great people we are in this nation. What you have done has touched my heart and I know will be of great benefit to the Haitian people. Thank you so much for caring and your effort at raising this money.

Sincerely, Dr. Allen Solheim, Project Helping Hands

Grants Pass Guerilla Gardeners STRIKE AGAIN! The victim this time was Rogue River Valley Grange, located at “G” Street and Lincoln. The mysterious members chopped down weeds, removed dead growth, and mowed the grass. The results were impressive!

Here is just one of many examples of how your support can—and does—dramatically change someone’s life. A young man by the name of Danny Rhodes grew up in a logging family and had the opportunity to be outside and work with machinery. His lifelong dream was to buy a house on a big piece of property with trees so that he could start his own logging business. Due to unfortunate circumstances, there came a time when he could no longer work with his family. He moved into one of our residential programs, and eventually began working at our Landscape program. He loves what he’s doing—he gets to work outside again, and has learned to operate new equipment. He is thrilled with his job and understands and loves the fact that his efforts result in a paycheck. Now Danny can once again dream of owning a home of his own.

I first met this young lady when she came to Stepping Stone, about 3 years ago. She told me that she wanted a bicycle. There were so many barriers for her to overcome: people were concerned and afraid she would hurt herself, she really couldn’t afford one, and we just couldn’t see a way that we would manage it. I took her to camp for two years and she joyously rode a bike there. Seeing her happiness, staff became resolved to make it happen for her. This young woman kept working and saving up money—her determination was implacable. Then she tried riding a three wheeler loaned to her by another resident. She loved the three wheeled bike and decided she wanted one, so staff Turner and Judy went shopping like demons for a bike she could afford. Judy found one on Craig’s list for $150.00! It was so exciting. Ooooh it was a bit scary. She was very unstable, not braking when she should, and turning was almost impossible. Now as I write this, I am watching her ride down the road with her baby doll in the basket, going like a pro, with so much confidence and a huge smile on her face. Anne was running and laughing to keep up with her. These are the moments I wait for in this job.

-Lori Briggs
Homeless for three months, Robert realized that the “friends” who were willing to do drugs and drink with him in the past provided little benefit or encouragement to him as he tried to piece his life back together. Sometimes he was able to stay on someone’s couch and he even spent a month at the mission. There he got a rude awakening of where his life was headed if he didn’t do something to change course in that many of the men at the mission struggled with alcoholism and drug use and were hardened by stints in prison or jail. He says the difference for him was that he had people who cared about him and he had his faith in God.

Robert decided he wanted to do something to get out of the rut he was in. He knew what he wanted. It was what everyone wants: independence, dignity, a place of his own, a good job. He knew about Stepping Stone’s Midstep residential program and he decided that would be a good start. Robert approached Gail Church, his case manager at Community Living Case Management, and told her what he wanted. They discussed what he would need to do to get residential services and find a job.

Robert did not get to move into an apartment at Midstep right away. However, he was able to get residential services started and his caseworker helped him find a room in an adult foster home. As most people in adult foster homes are elderly, Robert, at 24, was the youngest by decades. Robert lived at the foster home four years. An apartment eventually came open at Midstep and Robert was able to move in on April 16, 2010. He now shares a two-bedroom apartment with his roommate, Joe.

He started working for SPARC again, this time in the recycling unit. He still wasn’t sure SPARC was where he wanted to be but he was encouraged by his friends and his new bosses to give it a try and stick it out. He soon began flourishing in his job, quickly mastering each job position in recycling, and often working with other consumers to show them how to perform their jobs more effectively.

Robert’s life is very different than when he found himself homeless a few years ago. He has now been living at Midstep for over a year and he has a girlfriend, Sheila, his best friend, Elvin, and many other friends who support and encourage him. He was recently promoted to one of two positions in SPARC’s new e-cycling program and he is thriving in that position. To top it off, he is healthy, happy and active.

Robert will readily say that SPARC and Stepping Stone saved him from a life of homelessness, drug use, and despair. He is quick to thank his mother, his friends, and his supervisors at SPARC for continuing to believe in him and for encouraging him to stick with it.

It is really Robert’s determination that got him to this point. He is the one who made things happen for himself. He stepped up and took responsibility for his future. Robert says he knows Midstep is a temporary stop for him. His goals are to get his drivers’ license, move out of the program into a more independent situation and eventually buy his own home. Anyone who knows Robert, knows that he has what it takes to do just that and he’ll likely continue to inspire and help others to achieve their own goals as he goes after his own. Thank you, Robert, for all you give to SPARC and Stepping Stone—and for inspiring all of us to take charge of our lives and make things happen.

-Kathi Holmbeck
Stepping Stone Board President
SPARC’s Board of Directors

Vern Frol is the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Fire Mountain Gems and Beads, the national market leader in jewelry and beading supplies headquartered in Grants Pass, Oregon. Formerly CEO of direct marketing gardening supply leader Charley’s Greenhouse & Gardens in Washington as well as past President of Desert Grove, a gourmet confections company based in New Mexico, Mr. Frol specializes in direct marketing. Mr. Frol has a Baccalaureate in Economics from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and a Masters in Business Administration from Arizona State University. In addition to being the President of the SPARC Board of Directors, he also is a member of the Direct Marketing Association, and former Board President of the Interior Ambulance Rescue as well as other associations. He is married to Bonnie Frol and they reside in Ashland, Oregon with their two teen-aged children.

-Vern Frol, SPARC Board President

Denise Tauriainen has been a member of the SPARC Board since August 2004, becoming involved because she is a parent of a child with special needs. Kevin was in a work experience program thru Grants Pass High School and currently works at SPARC’s Recycling Center. He loves going to work. She has been in Grants Pass since 1968, graduating from Hidden Valley High School with the first graduating class in 1978. Denise has been in the banking field for 25 years and currently works for Sterling Savings Bank at the Medford Commercial Banking Office. Denise volunteers for Special Olympics of Josephine County as an assistant coach in swimming and track. Her hobbies are reading, gardening, cooking and running. Denise’s favorite family outings are GPHS football games and U of O football games. She and Bob have been married for 26 years and have two wonderful sons. Ryan, 26, teaches 6th grade language arts in Washington DC. Kevin is 21 years old. Denise says, “I am honored to be part of the SPARC/Stepping Stone Organization—it has a Great Caring Staff and Wonderful Capable People who work there.”

-Denise Tauriainen, SPARC Board Vice President

Diana Sheldon, RN BSN has been on the SPARC Board since March 2007. She is currently the Breast Health Coordinator/Nurse Navigator for Three Rivers Community Hospital. Diana moved to Murphy in 1982 with her son and daughter, working in Southern Oregon Medical Center’s ER. From 1986 to 1995 she was the Director of Patient Care Services at So. Ore, Medical Center/Three Rivers Community Hospital. During that time Diana was also the Software Training Coordinator for Southern Oregon Medical Center. Diana was born in Scotia, California and started her nursing career in the San Francisco Bay Area. With her 40+ years as an RN, she worked in various nursing fields Emergency, Critical Care, Pediatrics and as a clinical instructor for two community colleges in California. Diana is a past member of the Rogue Community College Health Advisory Board, the Area Health Education Center (AHEC) and Oregon Organization of Nurse Executives. Diana chose to be on the SPARC board hoping to offer some of her skills as an advocate for wellness. Diana says that SPARC has exceeded her expectations, and that “it is a pleasure to learn and participate in an organization that is respected throughout the state. SPARC has clients and staff that are very skilled and dedicated.”

-Diana Sheldon, SPARC Board Secretary/Treasurer

Janine Wilson joined the SPARC Board in January 2010. She and her husband Andy have been residents of Josephine county for 22 years and have three grown children. While Erin and Katy have gone off to the big cities (Portland and Seattle) to begin their families, Patrick remains in Grants Pass. Pat is a very able young man who maintains his independence in his downtown apartment and he works part-time. From Pat’s identification of autism, the family has truly benefitted in an understanding and appreciation of the social, educational and occupational challenges and how all progress is to be celebrated. Janine is employed as the Director of Josephine County Juvenile Justice.

-Janine Wilson, SPARC Board Member
Stepping Stone's Board of Directors

Kathi Holmbeck has served on the Stepping Stone Board since January 2009. In 2009, she was the Secretary of the Board of Directors. Kathi became President in January 2010. She was born in Grants Pass and graduated from Grants Pass High School. She moved back to the area in 2006 to be closer to her parents and to establish her practice as a lawyer. Kathi’s legal practice consists mostly of what has been termed Elder Law as she focuses on issues affecting seniors such as estate planning, protection from abuse, guardianships, and conservatorships. In addition to serving on the Stepping Stone Board, Kathi volunteers as a judge for traffic and small claims court, serves on the Elder Law Executive Committee for the Oregon State Bar, and is a member of the Rogue Gateway Rotary. Perhaps you have seen her picking up trash along the Parkway some Saturday morning as that is one of Rotary’s many community projects. Kathi is very excited to be a part of the SPARC/Stepping Stone organization and is proud of what we accomplish every day.

Kathi Holmbeck, Stepping Stone Board President

Colene Martin grew up in Grants Pass and is now a recently retired small business owner. Together with her husband, Ron, she owned Photo Den Vision and Sound for twenty-eight years. Colene and Ron have four children and eight grandchildren. Colene is currently serving on the Stepping Stone Board, MRIPA Board of Directors and Mid Rogue Foundation Board. She has been a member of the Grants Pass Zonta Club for 13 years. Colene says “It has been my privilege to sit on the SPARC/Stepping Stone Boards for the past nine years. I am humbled to work with such a wonderful organization as SPARC/Stepping Stone.”

Colene Martin, Stepping Stone Vice President

Doug Ely has been serving on the Stepping Stone Board since May, 2009. Grants Pass is his birthplace, and he has lived here all his life. Sherry, his wife of 31 years, and Doug have three sons who also live in Grants Pass with their families. They have six wonderful grandchildren, and spending time with their grandchildren has become their favorite hobby. Doug has been in the field of education for 24 years as a teacher, principal, and district level administrator. His current position with the Three Rivers School District is Director of Student Services. Doug’s primary responsibility is to oversee the district’s special education programs that include more than 700 students. He is a former member of the Grants Pass Active Club, and is currently an American Powerboat Association Race Referee that serves the Cal-Ore River Racers Club, which are the Boatnik hydroplane racers. Other hobbies include cycling, jet boating, fishing, camping, woodworking, golfing, and going to boat racing and bicycle racing events. Doug says “I enjoy serving on the Stepping Stone Board because the staff and board members who attend the meetings all care so much about the people that both organizations serve.”

Doug Ely, Stepping Stone Secretary/Treasurer

THANK YOU SPARC and Stepping Stone Board Members. Your dedication and commitment to our organization are priceless!!
SPARC Around Town

SPARC/Stepping Stone’s float entry in the Boatnik Parade was amazing and resulted in winning **THIRD PLACE overall** and being awarded the Councilmen’s Trophy! We had amazing participation with 85 people participating during the parade. Many thanks to our staff and consumers who put together an incredible float, spending many hours to make it all come together!

Laurie Saxon and Brent Adams announce our float

James and Gerald enjoy the wagon ride!

**CONNIE’S STORY**

Once upon a time there was a squirrel named BT. He ate a coconut and chased Georgette, the dog, in the house. They chased each other all around. Sometimes he chased Thelma, the dog, around too. The squirrel caught Thelma and Georgette and played checkers.

-Debra “Connie” Smith

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Contact Debbie Baird at 541.472.9300

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Buy One Book, Get One Free
YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

You are part of the reason that the people we support have jobs where they learn how to earn a living. Your dedication to our mission has created phenomenal results.

SPARC Enterprises operates several small businesses that rely upon the revenue they create to continue delivering services by employing people with developmental disabilities who might otherwise never get the opportunity to work. Because we are a non-profit, we struggle to balance putting as many people to work as possible while remaining financially secure.

Which leaves us with the problem of having enough money to purchase the materials and supplies we need to deliver those services.

We are offering you the opportunity to donate items needed for our Landscape and Book Lore programs.

Individuals employed by these programs have the opportunity to learn so many things. The dream for the majority of them is to obtain community jobs. The training and skills they acquire with SPARC are invaluable to reaching that goal. We would love to answer any questions you have about these or any of our vocational programs. Should you have any questions or if you would like more information, please call Brent Adams, Vocational Director, at 541-237-3000. If you would like to donate to Landscape, Book Lore, or any of our programs, please complete the form on the next page and return it to the address located at the bottom of that page.

Stepping Stone is currently opening new group homes and supporting individuals to move into their own residences—for the first time! We are looking for quality new or lightly-used furniture, household items and appliances. If you have any questions or would like more information, call Cathy Calia at 541-237-3003.

Skills trainer provides mower training to Lee Alden.

LANDSCAPE PROGRAM
The Landscape Program employs 15-18 people with developmental disabilities. Crews work 7 days each week fulfilling landscape maintenance contracts with private parties as well as city, county and state entities. The items needed are:
- Blowers
- Lawnmowers
- Weed eaters
- Vehicles—specifically 4-door pickups

BOOK LORE
Book Lore currently employs 15 people with disabilities. Book Lore is expanding and has rented the building next door so more books for sale can be displayed and more people can be employed. The expansion requires the following items:
- Enough indoor/outdoor carpet to cover 4,300 square feet
- 15-20 gallons of interior paint
- Seventy 1x6 boards, each 8 foot in length (to build bookshelves)

“Time and money spent in helping men to do more for themselves is far better than mere giving”

-Henry Ford
“Developing Partnerships To Build A Better Community”

Your Partnership is Vital To Our Workers with Developmental Disabilities

Yes, you can count on me!
Please use my donation of:

___ $25  ___ $50  ___ $100  ___ $500  ___ $1,000  _______ other

FOR THE PURCHASE OF:

___ Gas Lawnmower  ___ Gas Blower  ___ Gas Weed Eater
___ 4 door pickup  ___ Paint  ___ Carpeting
___ Wood  ___ No Preference  ___ ________________

(list specific item)

If you prefer to donate a specific item, call 541-237-3032 and we will make arrangements to pick up the donation. If you do not have an interest in donating to the purchase of a specific item, but are interested in donating to a particular program, please indicate your selection below.

___ Book Lore  ___ Janitorial  ___ Landscape
___ Recycling  ___ No preference  ___ Residential Programs

Important: To ensure proper credit, please return this slip with your gift.

NAME: ______________________________________________________________

ADDRESS: __________________________________________________________

PHONE: ____________________

THANK YOU!

All contributions to SPARC / Stepping Stone are tax deductible as allowable under IRS guidelines.
Mail contributions to: SPARC / Stepping Stone, 1990 NW Washington Blvd., Grants Pass, OR 97526
www.sparc-steppingstone.org
SPARC Enterprises, Inc.
Stepping Stone Residential Services, Inc.
The Community Link
1990 NW Washington Blvd.
Grants Pass, OR 97526

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

Over A Quarter Century of Excellence

SPARC Enterprises was incorporated in 1976 and is a non-profit rehabilitation agency located in Grants Pass. SPARC provides vocational job training, evaluation, employment and job placement services for adults with developmental disabilities. Our mission has been to serve people with disabilities in their most independent work and living environments. Our commitment to “normalization” has resulted in programs aimed at community integration. Through partnerships with community and business, we have established competitive jobs for individuals with developmental disabilities, some for the first time in their lives.

As we head into the next decade, SPARC Enterprises and Stepping Stone Residential Services will be equipped to meet the challenges ahead.

Together as partners we will build a better community!

Call us for more information at 541-476-8241

Visit Our Web Site!
www.sparc-steppingstone.org